



The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Teaching Social Studies as Integrated Curriculum

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Authors' contributions

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the impacts of COVID-19 and its implications for teaching Social Studies as integrated curriculum. This was done through review of a number of articles relating to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as Social Studies as integrated discipline. Historical background and the effects of the pandemic specifically in Ghana have been outlined in the paper. Being integrated curriculum, the author argues that the pandemic offers unique opportunity for Social Studies educators and teachers of the subject to demonstrate their understanding of the concept of integration with respect to the impacts of the pandemic. There is no denying the fact that the pandemic had tremendous impacts on all facets of human life including economic, social, psychological, political, religious, and health. Based on the literature review, it is recommended that educators and teachers in the field of Social Studies should draw connection between the COVID-19 and the Social Science subjects. In so doing, it would promote wholistic understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Coronavirus; curriculum; implication; integration; pandemic; social studies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is believed to have originated in Hubei Province in the PRC. The disease was recorded in late December 2019 by scientists after sick people were reported to have pneumonia of unknown origin [1]. The disease has two strains namely Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)-CoV and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)-CoV. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the disease a pandemic on March 11, 2020 and it has since affected all the continents except Antarctica. In all, 169 countries have recorded case(s) with total death worldwide hitting 117, 021 in the second week of April, 2020 [2]. However in Africa, the pandemic was first recorded in Egypt. Since the first reported case, African countries responded immediately by putting in place measures including travel bans and quarantine to stop the virus from spreading across the continent (World Bank, 2020b) [3]. Rwanda was one of the first countries to have responded timely by implementing localised lockdown in the second week of March [4]. The infection and the death rate of the virus appear comparatively low on the African continent [5]. This many attribute to the comparative young population in Africa. Other school of thought has it that the infection rate is low because of the low-to-absent testing capacity, poor reporting system, and insufficient number of medical staff which is believed to pose great threat across most African countries [6]. In the light of this, WHO warned that there could be mass casualties resulting from overwhelmed health systems over a longer period of time if countries fail to take a proactive approach against the virus [7].

Ghana on the other hand, recorded its first COVID-19 case through nationals from Turkey and Norway on the March 12th 2020 [8]. This was declared in a televised press briefing by the Minister of health Mr. Kwaku Agyemang-Manu. A total of 408 confirmed cases and 8 deaths were recorded as of second week in April, 2020 [9]. The government's initial response was to ban all public gatherings including conferences, workshops, funerals, festivals, political rallies, church programmes and other related outdoor public events to curtail the spread of the novel virus. Educational institutions including basic schools, senior high schools and universities, both public and private were all closed [10]. Other initial measures government put in place to deal with the pandemic was to discourage travel into the country by non-nationals from countries

that recorded 200 and above cases of the virus [8]. Moreover, closure of our land, sea, and air borders was also implemented. It should be acknowledged that all these measures were put in place to contain and control spread of the deadly virus. The virus undeniably has so far had great impacts on all spheres of lives globally and therefore the need to assess its impact particularly in Ghana.

The study was guided by the following objective.

1. Determine the impacts of Covid-19 and its implications for teaching Social Studies as an integrated curriculum

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused havoc across the globe. Despite its devastating impacts, the pandemic can be turned into valuable resource as far as teaching and learning in Social Studies is concerned. This portion examines the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic with respect to economic, social, political, educational, psychological, religious, and health.

In the first place, the global economy is not spared by the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to the pandemic, governments worldwide have instituted lockdown measures to contain the outbreak of the disease. This affected production and distribution of goods and services in the lockdown areas. Specifically, [11] outline the effects of the global pandemic including the slow-down in the manufacturing of essential goods, supply chain disruption of products, losses in local and international trade, and poor cash flow in the market. The effects are also witnessed in slow-down in revenue growth while the social consequences including cancellation or indefinite postponement of sporting events and tournaments, disruption in cultural festivals, religious and festive events. Ghana's response to the disease was to initially lockdown Greater Accra and Kumasi Regions to contain the spread. As a consequence, movement of goods and services slowed and the demand supply chain disrupted. Notwithstanding, some commodities were in high demand during the period including hand sanitizer and face masks. There was therefore economic boom in this area where a number of companies engaged in the production of these products which are most needed for the fight against the virus.

Our social life has never been the same since the deadly pandemic hit the world. During the outbreak, some of the safety measures put in place are the social distancing and lockdowns. Report indicates that the lockdowns have likely increased domestic violence, physical, emotional and sexual abuse [12]. Similarly, the negative aspect of the virus is where lots of social gathering events such as funeral, wedding and parties have been postponed indefinitely or cancelled. However, the lockdown has seen an increase in internet usage where people engage in activities such as video gaming to keep active during the period. This results in revenue boost for gaming companies including YouTube Gaming and Twitch [13]. As part of its social responsibility to the citizenry, the government of Ghana announced a 3-month utility free bill for water and electricity in order to alleviate the burden brought by the pandemic.

Major political events including elections, rallies, congresses across the world had been cancelled or postponed indefinitely in an attempt reduce the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2020) [14] indicates that elections have been postponed indefinitely or to later date in the wake of the outbreak. For instance in UK, local government by-elections in Scotland postponed indefinitely while in Ethiopia, parliamentary elections had also been called off indefinitely. Locally, one of the major political events such as parliamentary candidate elections by the ruling NPP government was postponed till later date in June, 2020. The other negative part of the pandemic was the claims of perceived political opportunism. For example in response to the president's promise to build 88 hospitals across the country during his eighth televised update on Ghana's COVID-19 situation was heavily criticised especially by the opposition National Democratic Party (NDC). The party claimed the statement contain statements that should be on a campaign platform [15]. The positive side of the pandemic for politicians in Ghana however, was that many aspiring candidates have seized the opportunity to reach out to electorates by donating various items ranging from food, veronica buckets, hand sanitizer, and face masks. Some health establishments, institutions and organisations both public and private are also benefiting from these aspiring candidates.

The disease has had grave effect on the education system globally forcing governments to introduce measures, policies and guidelines

including closures to protect learners. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation indicated that, over 900 million learners worldwide have been affected due to closure of educational institutions [16]. A study by [17] in Ghana showed that COVID-19 pandemic has significant impact on education in Ghana. To address the impact of the closure of schools, other avenues such as remote and distance teaching and learning materials have been developed particularly for radio and television broadcast taking into consideration children with special needs in the development of the materials [18]. Apart from the radio and TV broadcasts, individual schools both private and public, have incorporated social media platforms particularly Zoom and WhatsApp to send reading materials to learners in their homes. This was to fill the vacuum created by the pandemic with its resultant closure of the schools.

Within health domain, Covid-19 has had serious impact on healthcare system around the world and Ghana, no exception. The disease since its inception has affected the global health system with rippling consequence on human life in general. The risk of health staff vulnerability became a concern as lots of them in line of their duty have died or asked to isolate having been exposed to the disease. In connection with this, the Ghana government offered health staff tax-free incentives and a 50% allowance on their basic salary for three months. The good news however is that, there emerges an avenue for drug manufacturing companies where a search for the disease is simultaneously taking place with the first trial of the vaccine underway and are being tested on healthy volunteers [19]. In the domestic context, there is boom in the production of covid-19 related personal protective equipment (PPEs) more especially for health personnel and allied staff.

Religious activities were not spared either by the Covid-19 outbreak. Several religious events were banned as part of the ways to curb the spread of the disease. Congregants were advised to stay away from the chapel, mosques and shrines for the purpose of public worship. This brought strains on religious worship and administration because very few people honour their religious obligations such as tithing, offering, and appreciations. However, the pandemic has presented another opportunity where some endowed churches, mosques, and shrines hold live virtual worship services on radios and televisions to reach out to their congregants.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram were also heavily employed to send the gospel to worshippers. To keep these activities ongoing, various payment platforms especially mobile money transfer popularly referred to as MoMo in telecommunication parlance in Ghana was used so that members could send their tithe or Sunday offertory.

The psychological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on people lives cannot be underestimated. The infected people are isolated from the rest of the population to avoid further spread. Even those who are not infected have had to live in fears of contracting the virus. Additionally, health experts advised that people stay home or avoid crowded areas so they do not contract the disease. Study shows that self-isolation, social-distancing, social disconnectedness, and loneliness are found to positively link to depression and anxiety [20]. The most serious psychological effect associated with the virus is the stigmatization of people infected. To the extent that even those who recover from the virus are stigmatized for the fear of contracting the disease from them. Recognizing the psychological effects [21] advised that the neurological and psychological aspects of the viral attack must, therefore, be taken into account in planning the therapeutic strategies and for recuperation model aimed at victims of COVID-19.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper uses the framework to help explained the concept of integration as the underpinnings of the teaching of Social Studies and how the framework can assist teachers in teaching effectively the impact of COVID-19.

From the figure, the single arrow signifies what should be integrated and the double arrow indicate the desired result after the content is delivered to learners. The diagram indicates that in teaching the Social Studies content (economic, history, geography, sociology etc.) it demands we integrate the content using various methods, approaches, skills, and values. If the integration is appropriately carried out, it results in better understanding, enhanced performance all-round citizens, and various skills are developed.

This paper was underpinned by Gestalt Theory, a psychological construct attributed to the work of Max Wertheimer, a German psychologist. The basic tenet of gestalt theory in teaching and learning situation is that experiencing the whole is better than the sum of its parts. In other words, the whole (a picture, a car, an idea) carries a different and altogether greater meaning than its individual components such as the various colours of a car or picture. What this implies is that when teaching concepts in Social Studies for

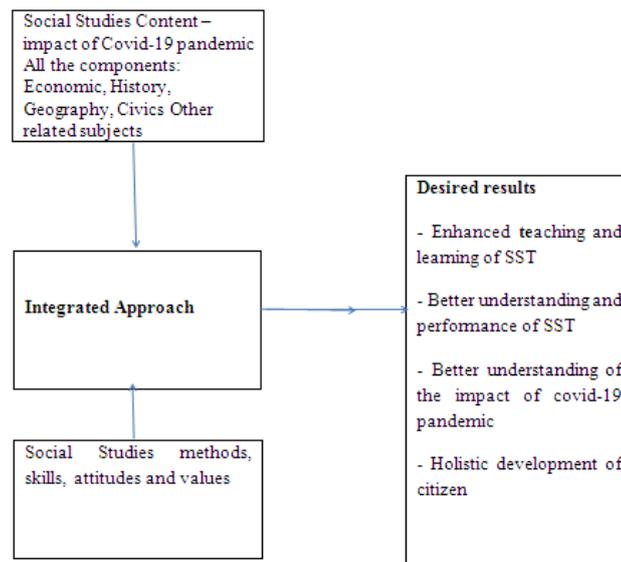


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework
Source: Adapted from Bamusiime (2010)

instance, it should be approached in a wholistic manner to promote learners understanding. This therefore “engages students as active learners who make the most of the decisions about what they study” [22: 123]. So, to facilitate learners understanding of the impacts of Covid-19, various concepts from the field of social sciences and humanities could be drawn upon to teach.

4. METHODS

In order to provide the right perspectives to the paper, literature was reviewed through the use of both the free, online literature databases as well as those available through my institution’s library. The free database search used effectively was Google Scholar through entering of key words and phrases such as corona virus, pandemic and Social Studies as integrated curriculum. It afforded a way to broadly search for literature across many disciplines and sources, including peer-reviewed papers, books, abstracts and articles from academic publishers that related to Covid-19 and Social Studies in general. Through this the researcher was able to locate articles that are close to the topic under review. To reduce the amount of time searching for copies of articles that related to the topic, I used databases that provided access to full-text copies.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Integration literally means combining two or more things to make a new whole. In this case, integrated curriculum indicates that two or more subjects put together and given a new name. Shoemaker (as cited in Akib, et al. [22] define integrated curriculum as education that is organized in such a way that it crosses subject boundaries, combining various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful relationships which focuses on wider study area. This implies that teaching integrated Social Studies contents or lesson should cut across disciplines more especially the social sciences and humanities.

Integrated Social Studies curriculum fundamentally borrows concepts, ideas, principles from other subjects from social sciences and humanities including economics, sociology, history, geography, anthropology, civics, politics, and psychology. In the light of this, [23] suggests that Social Studies teachers need to appreciate that effective integration demands linking and utilizing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values from different learning

experiences enhanced by various techniques, instructional materials and time schedules in the teaching-learning situation. When this is done, it makes understanding of topics and lessons easy because of the relationship between what the learners learn and their daily life experiences. This explains why in teaching a particular topic, the main ideas and concepts should be related to learners outside life experiences. In choosing content for Social Studies as an integrated subject, Bamusiime advised teachers to first, use various teaching approaches, methods and strategies; second, use relevant and suitable ideas, facts and opinions from other disciplines to explain their arguments; third, use different teaching aids to stimulate learners interest; four, use local environment and resource persons; and finally, engage children in practical activities to create interest necessary to develop the necessary behaviours, attitudes, skills and values among learners.

Teaching Social Studies as an integrated subject within the context of Covid-19, offers a unique opportunity for teachers handling the subject to demonstrate their understanding of the concept of integration in relation to the pandemic. In teaching the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic as a topic, the teacher can approach it from different angles so that learners appreciate the pandemic in its entirety and not only an aspect of it. This implies therefore that when discussing the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, various dimensions of the disease should be explored so that by the end, the learners would comprehensively grasp the impact in holistic manner. For instance, the impact of the pandemic can be explained in relation to geography, history, economy, social, politics, psychology, health, and religion. It is worthy to note that in discussing the impact of the pandemic, both positive and negative aspects should be highlighted. The subsequent paragraphs provide in practical terms few examples.

Teaching the impact of Covid-19 pandemic as Social Studies topic, the teacher should provide holistic information about the pandemic by borrowing concepts, ideas, and knowledge from other social science disciplines and humanities. Historically, the teacher can discuss about the time the disease started and how it spreads across the globe. Social control, another historical concept was in full force to whip people in line with the new normal in order to contain the spread of the virus. Enactments were made as measure to control people’s behaviour and deter

them from breaching the safety protocols against the Covid-19. In terms of where the pandemic originated, concepts such as site and situation in geography should be used to explain it. The site shows where exactly the pandemic originated and the impact it has on the people. While situation can be discussed as the location of the place in relation to other cities, regions or provinces. With the help of globe, the students could be guided to identify the site and the situation so that students appreciate how the disease travelled from site to its surrounding towns, cities, and regions then to other parts of the globe. The concept of circulation comes to play when we are explaining how the virus spread across the continents in the world. The virus does not move on its own, it is human beings that carry it along. The virus does not move, it is people who carry it around.

Again, the Social Studies teacher can employ socialization concepts to discuss the impact of the disease on people's social life. For example discussion can centre on how the disease affects families, churches, schools, mosques, and shrines which are principal agents of socialization. Our norms and values have been altered resulting from the outbreak of the Covid-19. In Africa and Ghana for that matter, we cherish hugging and handshaking very much. If someone offers his/her hand and you reject it, it is considered as gross disrespect. Meanwhile, a teacher can also make use of sanction as sociological concept in explaining the social impact of the virus. People who flouted the lockdown rules and safety protocols instituted were whipped in line by sanctioning. Sanctions are applied to ensure that people obey rules and regulations so that order is maintained in society.

Moreover, a teacher can also look at another dimension of the Covi-19 impact by borrowing economic concepts such as scarcity, goods and services, production, demand and supply of certain products. In the wake of the pandemic, lockdowns were instituted and movement of people restricted. So, people had to make choices of what they needed most and can afford, applying the principle of scarcity; an economic concept. The pandemic has led to increase in the price especially foreign products due to the fact that borders were closed and as result, those products cannot be imported into the country. This most likely, could result in another concept, inflation where prices of exotic products fluctuate. The positive side of the pandemic was that there is high demand in

certain products such as hand sanitizers and face masks.

6. CONCLUSION

It is clear without doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has had significant effects on every aspect of our lives to the extent that our social realities have been altered. Social realities such as funerals, weddings, parties, rallies, sporting events, teaching and learning environment and many others have largely been modified. Authorities and health experts have told us to learn to live with the disease since there appears to be no end in sight. Despite its adverse effects on our life, it creates some window of opportunities for the industry players to engage in the production of Covid-19 related materials. On educational fronts, however, the pandemic has offered a unique opportunity for Social Studies teachers to demonstrate their knowledge of integration to effectively teach the impact of Covid-19 in order to enhance students' understanding of the concept.

7. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the literature review, it is recommended that educators and teachers in the field of Social Studies should draw connection between the Covid-19 and the Social Science subjects. In so doing, it would promote wholistic understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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