

Teacher Efficacy Ratings by Secondary School Students and Academic Performance in Social Studies Summative Evaluation

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Abstract

The classroom as a micro-system is typified by many socio-psychological characteristics. These characteristics are perceived differently by the students. In this research, the link between students' rating of formal teachers' characteristics and their academic performance in social studies summative evaluation typified by the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination result was investigated. The teacher efficacy characteristics being examined vis-à-vis students' academic performance in social studies are: 1) instructional practices, and 2) interpersonal relationships. A sample of 600 Junior Secondary Three (9th grade) students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria was surveyed. Students' academic performance in social studies summative evaluation differed significantly on the basis of their ratings of teachers' instructional practices and interpersonal relationships respectively. Implications for practice and research in the teaching-learning processes are suggested.

Keywords: Teacher efficacy, instructional practices, interpersonal relationships, summative evaluation scores, social studies, Junior Secondary Certificate Examination.

1.0 Introduction

Research in education provides mixed theories and evidence on skills and competencies required for effective classroom teaching (Bennett, 1988, Brophy, 1988). According to the proponents of effective classroom teaching, major teaching functions include instruction, classroom management, student socialization and disciplinary intervention (Brophy, 1988). In addition to the intellectual competencies needed by the teacher, Davis (1973) contended that an effective teacher "is concerned with content of the learning task to be achieved and the social as well as the psychological processes which enable the content to be successfully imparted" (p. 43). Good teachers are caring, supportive, concerned about the welfare of students, knowledgeable about their subject matter, able to get along with parents and are genuinely excited about the work they do (Cruikshank, Jenkins & Metcalf, 2003).

Gage (1968) distinguished between research on learning and research on teaching. He identified the former to deal with all the conditions under which learning or change of behaviour due to experience takes place while research on teaching on the other hand, deals with a subset of the conditions under which learning occurs in one person, through the conditions established by the behaviours of another person called, the teacher. The activities of the learner on assigned classroom task should be seen as crucial mediator in converting teaching behaviours into learning behaviours. An acceptance of this perspective requires a change in the conception of learners from passive recipients of sensory experience who can learn something if provided enough practice, to learners actively making use of cognitive strategies and previous knowledge to process new cognitive input (Berliner & Rosenshine, 1976). In this conception, learners are active, constructivist and interpretative and learning is a covert, intellectual process providing the development and restructuring of conceptual schemes.

Teaching is a very complex activity that is affected by the subject matter, the time available, the teacher's factors, the disposition of the learners and resources. A distinction can be made between the pedagogical, methodological perspective of teaching which includes the selection and organization of teaching materials, methods of instruction and assessment as well as the interpersonal perspective which focuses on the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student (Wubbels & Levy, 1993; Tartwijk, Brekelmans & Wubbels, 1998). There are essential interpersonal relationships between the teacher and the students. Different teachers advocate different levels of control over their students.

Some teachers prefer a disciplined environment for learning, whereas others want to create a pleasant classroom atmosphere where students feel safe to take risks and be creative (Petegem, Creemers, Rosseel & Aelterman, 2006).

Determining effective teaching has been a problem for educational researchers (Dossette & Munoz, 2003). New approaches have been developed in the last two decades, especially in developments which use students' achievement data. The use of students' assessment data in the evaluation of teachers has become a major theme in the educational research community (Millman, 1997). Reliance on such indicators is largely the result of the accountability era in education: a growing demand to hold schools accountable for their performance, defined in terms of outcomes, such as standardized test scores in reading, mathematics, social studies and science, rather than inputs, such as teacher's qualifications, class size or quality of laboratory facilities (Meyers, 2000). It is expected that students' academic performances in any national or sub-regional examinations are to a large extent determined by the teacher's factors such as instructional practices and interpersonal relationships with students among other characteristics.

The main goal of this research study was to detect if there is a link between students' rating of formal teachers' characteristics: the instructional practices and interpersonal relationships and their academic performance in social studies summative evaluation predicated on the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination result.

1.1 Instructional Practices Perspectives on Teaching

Research on teaching has established that the key to a successful instruction is the teacher's ability to maximize the time that students spend actively engaged in worthwhile academic activities (Brophy, 1988). Students expect teachers to teach. They value lucid exposition, the clear statement of problems and guidance to their solution. Personal qualities of kindness, sympathy and patience are secondary, appreciated by students if they make the teacher more effective in carrying out his primary intellectual task (Musgrove & Taylor, 1969). The dominant view of the effective teacher is the teacher who possesses a broad repertoire of techniques and is able to skillfully use these techniques to meet the changing demands of the classroom. This flexible style of teaching is supported, either explicitly or implicitly by teacher educators (Joyce & Weil, 1986; Eggen & Kauchak, 1988), by aptitude-treatment interaction researchers (Glaser, 1977; Corno & Snow, 1986), by learning style advocates (Gregoric, 1979; Dunn & Dunn, 1978), by instructional designers (Gagne, Briggs & Wagner, 1988), by direct instruction critics (Peterson, 1979; Costa, 1984) and probably by teachers and administrators.

Joyce and Weil (1986) believe, for example, that at a minimum, teachers should be able to use at least one teaching technique from each of the four families of techniques or models: information-processing, personal, social and behavioural systems. Another view of the effective teacher is one who possesses and skillfully uses a set of techniques that are ideologically compatible. This stable, theory – guided style of learning is supported by Brown (1986), Gibboney (1987) among others. According to Brown, teachers should know the connection between underlying theory and teaching techniques, be aware of their own philosophical beliefs and use techniques that do not clash ideologically. The result would be a uniform, holistic way of teaching in contrast to the use of a great variety of potentially conflicting techniques. Given the number of students involved in classrooms, and the fact that they differ in general personal adjustment and attitudes toward school as well as specific interest in and readiness to learn particular content, teachers must not only plan and implement activities geared to the central tendency of the group, but also attempt to meet the different needs of individuals.

The research that has been done on whether teachers are stable or flexible in their use of teaching techniques is not extensive. That which has been done falls into two categories: general methods research and interactive decision-making research (Zahorik, 1990). Studies that have yielded data about variability in general methods are those conducted by Goodlad (1984), Cuban (1984) and Stodolsky (1984). Based on the observational data from 1000 classrooms in the Goodlad's study, Sirotnik (1983) concluded that teaching is extremely stable. The findings showed that teachers' lecturing and students' practice dominate teaching. From direct and contextual evidence gathered from about 7000 classrooms in a longitudinal investigation, Cuban (1984) concluded that teaching is mostly a teacher-centred activity. The findings indicated that some teachers were student-centred in their teaching, but this group is comparatively small. Stodolsky (1984) in contrast to Sirotnik (1983) and Cuban (1984) found that teaching is flexible. The study examined fifth-grade teachers teaching mathematics and social studies.

The teachers, most of whom taught both subjects to the same group of students, used different methods in the two subject areas. Recitation, teacher – control, and skill acquisition characterized mathematics teaching, while social studies teaching consisted of varied instructional formats such as group work and students’ reports, students’ involvement in determining pacing and variety in cognitive level. Joof, Mezieobi and Amadi (1994) suggest that teaching process in social studies should be predominantly student-oriented interactive process in which the learners actively participate and acquire significant learning experience under the teacher who serves as a guide and a facilitator. These authors hold that in social studies, the learning tasks must elicit the active participation of the learner in the pre-active (that is, before the teaching-learning process) and interactive learning activities. The interactive teaching-learning situation should enable the learners to perceive themselves as dominant persons involved in instructional process.

Among the well-supported strategies for teaching social studies are cooperative learning group (Johnson & Johnson, 1994), classroom discussion of current events (Dyngesson, 1992) and mini-parliament (Carter, 1993). Problem solving, especially exercises using groups is favoured in the literature as an appropriate strategy for social studies education (Dyngesson, 1992). In each of the examples mentioned above, teachers provide opportunities for students to participate in inquiry processes, engage in collaborative, substantive and reflective discussions, use cooperative learning structures (Kagan & Kagan, 2000) speak their minds, listen respectfully to the contributions of others and engage in problem-solving and decision-making. Such instructional modes prove to increase motivation, develop valuable skills and enhance learning in students of all ability and grade levels (Newby & Higgs, 2004).

Considerable research, particularly from the United States and Canada demonstrates that the traditional expository strategies are frequently ineffective in teaching social studies to a broad range of students (Patrick & Hoge, 1991; Sears 1994). In the same vein the expository strategies are the dominant form of teaching social studies across Nigerian schools (Okoh, 1979, Salawu, 1982; Udoukpong, 1989). Teachers need to reflect upon the relative merits of the comfort obtained by using familiar methods compared with the potential value of using more innovative strategies when teaching social studies.

One way to transform social studies curriculum requires that teachers move away from a traditional mode of teaching towards partnership with their students in which they converse with each other as they create knowledge and share pedagogical stories as democratic citizens as well as helping them to develop their own “learning to learn” skills. Considering the crucial role of the teacher in the formal teaching-learning situation and the need to improve teaching and hence learning, this study examined the instructional practices of teachers as perceived by students since teaching constitutes one of the teacher’s primary classroom tasks. In this study, instructional practices data were students’ observational reports through their responses to the questionnaire on Teacher Efficacy Rating Scale (TERS).

1.2 Interpersonal Relationships Perspectives on Teaching

There is no gainsaying that teachers’ personality traits have something to contribute to students’ learning of any school subject. This observation is corroborated by the findings in a research carried out by Allen in English secondary modern schools. Both boys and girls were found to value most highly the teachers’ competence as an instructor but also wanted their teachers to make lessons interesting, to take jokes and to be friendly and approachable (Allen, 1959). Relationships between students and teachers and the climate in the classroom are positively associated with levels of students’ engagement and academic competence. Similarly, meaningful and challenging learning environments have been linked to both engagement and perceived competence. When students are authentically engaged in meaningful, quality work, the likelihood increases that they will learn something new and remember what they learned (Hancock & Betts, 2002; Willms, 2002). Many correlational and non-experimental studies have shown that students who report caring and supportive interpersonal relationship in school have more positive academic attitudes and values and are more satisfied with school (Baker, 1999; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Such students also are more likely to attend school, learn more (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993) and report that they are more engaged in academic work (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

Research has shown that teachers’ actions in the classrooms have twice the impact on students’ achievement as do school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality and community involvement (Marzano, 2003).

It is a well known fact that one of the classroom teacher's most important jobs is managing the classroom effectively. Teachers have both a direct and an indirect influence on students. As a result they contribute to the learning environment of the students. According to Moos (1979) the relationship between students and teachers is an important dimension of classroom atmosphere: relationships within the classroom, personal development and goal orientation, and maintenance and changes with the system. The concern of this study was on the first dimension. This dimension represents the nature of personal relationships within the classroom, particularly the support a teacher offers his/her students. Involvement and affiliation are also classified under the first dimension. Based on the three dimensions, Maslowski (2001) described classroom climate as the collective perceptions of students with respect to the mutual relationships within the classroom, the organization of the lessons and the learning tasks of the students. Harwood (1992) found that open classroom environments were positively related to political interest, trust, and self-efficacy and negatively related to political cynicism.

Effective teacher – student relationships are characterized by specific teacher's behaviours: exhibiting appropriate levels of dominance, exhibiting appropriate levels of cooperation and being aware of high-needs of students (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). In a study of classroom strategies (Brophy, 1996; Brophy & McCaslin, 1992) researchers examined how effective classroom teachers interacted with specific types of students. The findings of the study showed that most effective classroom managers did not treat all students the same. They tended to employ different strategies with different types of students. In contrast, ineffective classroom managers did not appear sensitive to the diverse needs of students.

Good & Brophy (1972) found that higher teacher's indifference to students was associated with less teacher's use of praise. The finding also indicated that higher teacher's attachment to students is associated with greater teacher's use of praise. Higher teacher's concern for students has also been found to be associated with greater teacher's acceptance of students' ideas (Silberman, 1969). Sansanwal (1985) reported that one of the indices of teacher efficacy is teacher's acceptance of students' ideas and failing may adversely affect learning. It is a motivating factor. Nevertheless, Mezieobi & Domike (1996) have indicated that one of the barriers in social studies classroom communication which may result in withdrawal behaviour by students is the teacher's ridiculing of students' wrong answers, non-tolerance of some of the students' questions and teacher's display of atrophic behaviour toward students' answers. The implication of this is that criticism should be minimized, if students are to be motivated to participate meaningfully in the classroom teaching – learning processes. Studies show that the act of communicating positive events was associated with increased positive effect and well-being (Gable, Reis, Impett & Asher, 2004). The factor most likely to engender students' active participation in teaching-learning process is a classroom environment which signifying features are teacher's respect for students' ideas and teacher's use of democratic leadership behaviour. The beneficial effects of open classroom climate are cited by virtually every researcher and reviewer who looked at the relationship between educational practices and students' results (Angell, 1991; Harwood, 1992; vanSledright & Grant, 1994). It is therefore noteworthy to mention that relationship between students and teachers is closely related to the classroom climate.

The link between teacher's behaviour and students' behaviour (Wubbels & Levy, 1993) suggests that teachers can benefit directly from knowing how their personal behaviour affects students' learning. The complex nature of the classroom environment implies that multiple perceptions are necessary to get a comprehensive image of the education process. Since perceptions are the result of an interaction between the person and his/her environment, they reveal how someone experiences a classroom situation vis-à-vis his/her academic pursuit. Considering the students as the beneficiaries in the interpersonal relationship, this study focused on their perception of the situation in respect of their teachers. The study examined the classroom environment from an interpersonal perspective on teaching which concerned creating and maintaining a positive, warm classroom atmosphere conducive to learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). The focus was on the relationships between students and teachers vis-à-vis academic performance in social studies summative evaluation predicated on the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination result.

1.3 Purpose of the Study and Significance

The study examined Nigeria's final year (9th grade) Basic Education students' rating of teachers' instructional practices and interpersonal relationships vis-à-vis academic performance in social studies summative evaluation typified by the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination result. More specifically the study explored teacher effectiveness in social studies teaching over a three-year period.

In this conceptualization teachers' effectiveness was associated with students' rating of educators' efficacy in instructional practices and interpersonal relationships. The impetus for this research project was a prior effort that identified successful and unsuccessful schools in the area of study based on student characteristics. The goal of the present study was to investigate further than school level by identifying effective and ineffective classrooms. The research questions are as follows: 1) What is the link between students' rating of teachers' instructional practices and the junior secondary three social studies summative evaluation result? 2) What is the link between students' rating of teachers' interpersonal relationships and the junior secondary three social studies summative evaluation result?

It was assumed that understanding the impact of the identified teacher's variables on students' summative academic performance in social studies could lead to a deeper insight on how such variables could be manipulated to improve the achievement in school. The findings of the study would be useful to teachers as they work toward creating classroom climate and selecting instructional strategies that are supportive to students' learning. The findings will contribute to the existing research on teacher's effectiveness using longitudinal approach (Dosset & Munoz, 2003; Sorrells, Schaller & Yang, 2004). They will in addition provide feedback to teachers on the need to modify subsequent instructional practices and provide classroom environment that will help to raise the levels of students' achievement. Furthermore, the findings of this study will enable teachers to consider the learning needs of increasingly diverse student population thus work towards closing the gaps in equity of students' outcomes. Since the assessment of students' summative evaluation generally is predicated on the teachers' preparation, planning, instruction, classroom climate and professionalism (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2009) among others, it is hoped that a better understanding of the needs for teachers' accountability in providing quality education would yield valuable insight for researchers who may wish to explore further the process of teaching and learning in normal classroom settings. School classroom evaluation methods using students' achievement results are currently a significant topic of investigation in the educational accountability arena (Millman, 1997).

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Participants

The sample of the students assessed consisted of 600 Junior Secondary Three (JS-3) (9th graders) who were tested at the end of the academic year. Ninth graders (JS-3) were chosen because grade 9 (JS-3) represents an important stage in Nigeria's 9-Year Basic Education Programme. The students who were in the final year of the first 3-year segment of the 6-3-3-4 system of education being run in Nigeria represented a cadre of prospective holders of the Junior Secondary School Certificate (JSSC). The analysis drew on students' surveys and the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education Examination Unit data collected in the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination results on social studies during the 2009/10 and 2010/11 school years.

Participants ranged in age from 12 to 14 years and the distribution into groups based on their ratings of the teachers' efficacy was as follows: 1) instructional practices (student-teacher collaborative: n=373; teacher-centred: n=227), and 2) interpersonal relationships (supportive to learning: n=466; non-supportive to learning: n=134). The sample included only students who remained in school throughout the study period hence the sample members were not fully representative of all the junior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State where the truancy rate is high.

2.2 Hypotheses

The study tested the following null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the summative evaluation mean scores in social studies among junior secondary three students divided into groups based on their ratings of the teachers' instructional practices.
2. There is no significant difference in the summative evaluation mean scores in social studies among junior secondary three students divided into groups based on their ratings of the teachers' interpersonal relationships.

2.3 Instrumentation

Two research instruments comprising a questionnaire – "Teacher Efficacy Rating Scale" (TERS) and "Student Social Studies Performance Scores" (SSSP) were used in the study

2.3.1 Teacher Efficacy Rating Scale (TERS)

The teacher efficacy rating scale (TERS) questionnaire on instructional practices variable had items modified from Gibson & Dembo's (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) which according to Sorrells, Schallers and Yang (2004) is one of the most widely used instruments in this area of research. The questionnaire on the interpersonal relationships variable was a modified version of the instrument on teacher's interaction designed by Wubbels, Creton, Brekelmans & Hootymayers (1987). The developers of the modified instruments are respectfully acknowledged in the references.

The independent variables explored by the TERS included both the instructional practices and the interpersonal relationships variables. Teacher efficacy was measured using a 25-item instrument that used a 5-point Likert-type rating scale with 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (undecided), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Content validity to ensure internal consistency was established by a panel of experts consisting of the university faculty of education members. Pilot-testing for suitability and reliability was conducted with secondary school students in schools not included in the sample. The alpha coefficients were 0.86 for the instructional practices (15 items) and 0.77 for the interpersonal relationships (10 items) respectively. The 25-item instrument had a factor loading of equal or higher than 0.40.

All the 600 participants in the study completed the TERS. The possible responses to the rating scale ranged from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). However, the rating scores were reversed for negative items. The neutral score was 3 thus, the composite score for the instructional practices (15 items) ranged between 75 (maximum) and 15 (minimum). A favourable direction for the teachers' instructional practices was therefore placed between 46 and 75 while unfavourable perception was between 15 and 45. Sixty-two percent (373) of the sample rated the teachers' instructional practices as being "student-teacher collaborative" while 38% (227) of the sample perceived the instructional practices as "teacher-centred."

The composite score for the interpersonal relationships (10 items) ranged between 50 (maximum) and 10 (minimum). A favourable disposition to the interpersonal relationships was therefore placed between 31 and 50 while negative direction was between 10 and 30. Seventy-eight percent (466) of the participants rated the interpersonal relationships factor as "supportive to learning" while 22% (134) perceived the factor as "non-supportive to learning". All the students who participated in this study offered social studies as one of the core subjects in the junior secondary school curriculum (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004).

2.3.2 Student Social Studies Performance Scores (SSSPS)

The end-of-programme (JS-3) examination results of the participants in social studies in the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination of 2009/10 and 2010/11 academic sessions which were set, standardized and marked by the Examination Unit of the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education provided the summative evaluation scores for the analysis. Hence, scores in the social studies Junior Secondary Certificate Examination served as the measures of students' achievement.

2.4 Data Collection

Data for the study were collected with the assistance of subject masters in the schools involved in the study. A duration of 30 minutes was allowed for the completion of the teacher efficacy rating scale (TERS). Six hundred and twelve copies of the questionnaire were caused to be distributed to the potential subjects. The total number of completed and usable responses was 600 or 98.03% of the total number distributed. Administrative records of the participating schools contained the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination scores data of the participants released to schools by the Examination Unit of the State Ministry of Education.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were described using means and standard deviations. The independent t-tests were performed for significant differences between the two groups in each of the two identified teachers' efficacy variables – instructional practices: student-teacher collaborative vs. teacher-centred and interpersonal relationship: supportive to learning vs. non-supportive to learning.

3.0 Results

3.1 Instructional Practices

Data in Table 1 show that there was a significant difference in the academic performance mean scores of students in social studies based on their ratings of teachers' instructional practices ($t = 7.38, p < 0.05$). Participants who perceived the teachers' instructional practices as student-teacher collaborative scored statistically significantly higher than the participants whose perception of the factor was teacher-centred (57.79 vs. 52.42).

3.2 Interpersonal Relationships

Data reporting students' academic performance in social studies summative evaluation result as differentiated by interpersonal relationships are in Table 2. The t-test analysis shows significant difference in the students' academic performance in social studies based on their ratings of teachers' interpersonal relationships ($t = 3.40, p < 0.05$). The result of the data analysis shows that subjects who rated the teachers interpersonal relationships as supportive to learning scored statistically significantly higher than students whose perception of the teacher-student interpersonal relationships was non-supportive to learning (55.98 vs. 53.13).

4.0 Discussion of Results

4.1 Instructional Practices and Students' Academic Performance in Social Studies

The result of the data analysis indicated that students' rating of teachers' instructional practices plays a role in their academic performance in summative evaluation as typified in this study which was predicated on the junior secondary certificate examination results in social studies. Participants who rated the teachers' instructional practices as "student-teacher collaborative" performed better than those who perceived same as "teacher-centred" suggesting that students viewed their teachers' instructional practices differently on items reflecting lesson presentation.

Many reasons could be advanced for the better performance of the students who rated the teachers' instructional practices as "student-teacher collaborative". Perhaps the most appealing reasons might be explained by the concept of teaching and learning as well as the teachers' role as the facilitators of learning. The concept of learning has it that in most instructional situations, what is learned depends largely on the activities of the student (Rothkeft, 1970). Anderson (1970) also argued that the activities the student engages in when confronted with instructional tasks are of crucial importance in determining what he/she will learn.

In this study, it could be assumed that students who scored statistically significantly higher in the social studies summative evaluation found the instructional practices of their teachers as classroom-based active participatory activities. They might have found their teachers placing them in active learning roles. Researchers and other writers insist that effective citizenship (the ultimate goal of social studies instruction) is an active role and therefore, the preparation for this role must be active as well (Drisko, 1993). Effective teaching of social studies rejects the passive transmission of facts as an appropriate method of teaching and should be modified in favour of active approaches to learning (Mullins 1990). Research on learning shows that, students enjoy learning more and are more likely to participate in school tasks when their teachers employ active pedagogical strategies. Collaboration among peers – students working together in pairs or small groups to help one another learn – also has been associated with increased engagement and learning (Cohen, 1994).

The higher performance mean score of the participants who perceived teachers' instructional practices as "student-teacher collaborative" could further be accounted for as a factor of learning style differences among students. There are learning differences in children's preference for different types of instructional practices which likely interact with subject area to produce performance differences in different subject areas (Eccles, 1989; Kable, 1984) Instructional practices can vary widely in the same content area. Some students appear to respond more positively to school subjects if it is taught in cooperative or individualized manner rather than a competitive manner, if it is taught from an applied/person-centred perspective, if it is taught using a hands-on approach rather than a "book learning" approach and if the teacher avoids sexism in its many subtle forms. (Wigfield, Battle, Keller & Eccles, 2000). These effects might have reflected the fit between the teaching style, the instructional focus and students' value, goals, motivational orientation and learning styles, vis-avis academic performance.

The low performance mean score of the participants who rated the teachers' instructional practices as "teacher-centred" might be attributed to the teachers' failure to understand that learning is facilitated when differences among learners are recognized and attempts are made to teach the students differently (Gardner & Rogers, 1971). It may also be due to the teachers' teaching strategies. Kittel (1957) noted that "furnishing learners with information in the form of underlying principles promotes transfer of learning" (p. 403) and "what is transferred depends upon the teaching method (Cronbach, 1954 p.68). This assumption is corroborated by Hornstein's (1990) study which observed that half of the students in his investigation disliked social studies. The finding was explained to the teaching strategy whereby the instruction relied heavily on textbooks and by implication teaching was teacher-centred or expository. Thus, the same subject taught differently may produce great or little transfer. The low performance of the students in this study by teacher-centred strategy could also be a product of the participants' interest in social studies. Research indicates that students enjoy learning more and learn better when what they are studying is of personal interest and relates to their lives (Mecce, 1991). Students in this subgroup of the instructional practices might have had no interest in social studies hence, their low performance mean score in the summative evaluation of the subject.

4.2 Interpersonal Relationships and Students' Academic Performance in Social Studies

The second hypothesis in this study found that the participants who rated teachers' interpersonal relationships as "supportive to learning" obtained a higher mean score in the social studies summative evaluation than those who rated same a "non-supportive to learning" on the criterion. This finding can be explained in terms of open classroom climate – an environment whose signifying features are teachers' respect for students' ideas, and teachers' use of democratic leadership behaviour. An open classroom climate is also characterized by positive teacher's verbal behaviour, respect for students, participation and cooperation (Angell, 1991). In an open classroom environment teachers fulfill the role of democratic leaders. Teachers' major role is to lead their students in the study of significant problems in the area in which they are teaching. Such situations presuppose interchange of evidence and insights, give and take, and respect for another's ideas. Relationships between students and teachers and the climate in the classroom have been found to be positively associated with levels of students' engagement and academic competence (Hancock & Betts, 2002; Willms, 2002). Students' active participation in teaching-learning processes helps to promote a feeling of self-confidence and assists students to become resilient learners.

In this study it could be concluded that the participants who performed statistically significantly better in the social studies summative evaluation found their teachers to be operating in an open classroom climate with its attendant features while their counterparts with negative rating vis-à-vis low academic mean score might not have experienced same.

The higher performance mean score of the participants who perceived teachers' interpersonal relationships as "supportive to learning" could further be predicated on the psychological mediator of the relationship between students' sense of belonging and caring and academic achievement. Although learning involves individual cognitive and emotional processes, students' motivation is also significantly influenced by supportive network of relationships. The likelihood that students will be motivated and engaged in classroom activities is increased by the extent that they perceived their teachers and peers as supportive (Baker, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Higher students' academic achievement has been found to be associated with greater teacher's use of praise (Good & Brophy, 1972) while dissatisfaction with aspects of school life or poor academic self-concept has been demonstrated to be a key issue for non-completion of secondary school (Batten & Russell, 1995; Holden & Dwyer, 1992).

Students' negative rating of teachers' interpersonal relationships being reflected in the low performance mean score in this study might have been a product of their perception of the status of social studies as a school subject. Hobbs & Moroz (2001) found in their study that students believed social studies was useful (3.29) but did not believe social studies would help them to get a job (2.98). Among the social sciences, people seem to think of social studies as a low status subject (Hobbs & Moroz, 2001) and as a subject meant for the less able children in the middle school (Cannon, 1964). The acceptance of such notions might have impacted students' value of the subject and by extension the negative rating of teachers' interpersonal relationships vis-à-vis low academic performance in this study.

5.0 Implications for Practice and Research

The findings of this study indicate that it does matter what the teachers do in the classroom. In a research study, Gage, (1968) argues that it is all right for a teacher to know about learning, to know his subject matter, to have appropriate instructional materials, and to fit into a given organization for instruction, but what a teacher really wants to know is “what should I do in the classroom?”(p. 119). The cumulative and residual effects of teachers on the academic progress of students are huge. Collectively, the research findings of this study bring to the fore a clear picture of extreme variability of teachers’ effectiveness and effects the variability has on students’ performance. For example, students who rated teachers positively on the variable of instructional practices (student-teacher collaborative) and the variable of interpersonal relationships (supportive to learning) respectively obtained higher mean scores than their counterparts who did otherwise. This finding makes a case that the existing policies for placing students with teachers deserve serious study to ensure that various subpopulations of prior achievement are not being subjected to systematic inequity across grade levels because they are assigned systematically to less effective teachers. Even though schools may be assisting less effective teachers to become more effective, school administrators should make a conscientious effort to avoid assigning students to multiple ineffective teachers in succession.

Another concern of authorities should be to determine what is needed in order to reduce the variability in teachers’ effectiveness vis-à-vis students’ learning outcomes. Decreasing the variability will help to ensure that few learners have an ineffective teacher. Ineffective teachers cause learning consequences for students that are compounded when the frequency of ineffective teaching increases. Policies for decreasing the variability of teacher’s effectiveness must address two areas: 1) identification through evaluation, and 2) professional training. Many teachers do not recognize that they are ineffective until confronted with objective evidence that their students are not making appropriate rates of gain, for example, by summative evaluation results. Once teachers recognize their students’ lack of progress, many tend to self-correct their instructional practices. Irrespective of the form of assessment envisaged, it is relevant to allow students to express their views on the teaching strategies used. These views could be analyzed by experienced teachers of the school which will make appropriate recommendations to the teachers concerned to help them improve upon their teaching skills. Since “no education can rise above the quality of its teachers” (FRN, 2004, p. 39, Section 70^a) the more open teachers are to students’ feedback, the greater their ability to self-monitor their classroom practices. The more able teachers are at self-monitoring of their classroom practices, the more likely they are to bring about fundamental changes in it (Elliot 1976-77). The implication for practice is that the earlier schools begin to involve students in the evaluation of teacher’s effectiveness not only in the assessment of personal competence but also analysis of teaching tasks in specific teaching context and classroom management, the better off instructional practices will be. Future research efforts should include the study of best practices of high performing teachers identified by the finding of the summative evaluation results of students.

Effective teaching, learning and evaluation centre on the quality of interactions between and among educators and learners. High quality interactions involve mix of skills in subject matter, pedagogical expertise and evaluation and humane skills such as patience, humour, flexibility, compassion, and developing a sense of belonging for students. The findings of this study make a case that while the instructional strategies vary across subject areas, the consistent principles for teaching effectiveness should ensure that learners’ needs are diagnosed and addressed, individual motivations, interests and goals are incorporated into the teaching-learning processes. The focus on the individual learners, the shaping of the educational process to obtain information about how well learners are progressing and the engagement of learners in the learning process should go well beyond techniques of “traditional” student evaluation involving paper – and – pencil tests. It should be about the whole approach to shaping teaching and learning.

Students’ engagement with the intellectual work of schools is a primary goal of education, however taking achievement as the main outcome of education is a narrow focus. There is a strong evidence that the Nigerian school system has a much broader view of the central purpose of schooling. For example, the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) documents that among the key outcomes of schooling is “the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society” (p. 8).

Students who develop positive relationships with the school through the classroom or through participation in extracurricular activities are more likely to become lifelong learners, moving in and out of education and training as they find it necessary (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Marks, Fleming, Long & McMillan, 2000). To understand how to assist students to develop this connectedness to school, research needs to focus not just on students' test scores, which put the focus on what is learnt, but on what it takes to develop the learner.

The results of this study as well as the discussion of the findings indicate that more courses and in-service programmes should be provided to teachers so that they acquire and update skills necessary to provide learning environment that can readily accommodate different learning needs of students. Hence, future research should address classroom environments that are manipulated to investigate the changes resulting in student learning. In addition, future research should focus on the longitudinal aspect of this type of study. In sum, improving teacher's quality will help to ensure that more students reach their potential because "no education can rise above the quality of its teachers" (FRN, 2004, p.39).

6.0 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study showed differences among students' academic achievement in social studies summative evaluation typified by the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination result vis-à-vis their rating of teachers' instructional practices and interpersonal relationships. The analysis was restricted to public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. This kind of analysis requires careful consideration before taking any kind of administrative decisions as classroom evaluations will always require policy makers to make best decision based on their particular context.

The sample for the study was drawn from a set of students in public secondary schools. The findings should not generalize to either students in private schools or teachers in such schools. The data used in the analysis were based mainly on students' responses to the TERS instrument (with exception of the academic performance data). They did not include perceptions of the behaviour of the teacher towards the students as a class or direct classroom observation. Without additional data, it is difficult to equate students' personal judgment with the potential teacher's classroom activities using questionnaire. Hence, the validity of the students' responses becomes susceptible.

Finally, the source of data collected and the data analyses used here cannot yield definitive conclusions. While the ex-post facto design allows for testing hypotheses based on the constructs of the independent variables (instructional practices, and interpersonal relationships) which had already occurred and were investigated retrospectively, only with caution should the findings be interpreted as causal.

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Table 1
Mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis of summative evaluation performance scores in social studies by instructional practices

Instructional Practices	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Student-teacher collaborative	373	57.79	7.36	7.38*
Teacher-centred	227	52.42	4.69	

• $P < 0.05$ $df = 598$

Table 2
Mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis of summative evaluation performance scores in social studies by interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Relationships	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Supportive to learning	466	55.98	6.97	3.40*
Non-supportive to learning	134	53.13	5.45	

• $P < 0.05$ $df = 598$