

Students' Perception of Difficulty Levels of Senior Secondary School Civic Education Curriculum Content in Osun State, Nigeria

Okunloye Rotimi William*, Olokooba, Issa Nasiru
& Abdulsalam Alliyu Ayodele

Social Sciences Education Department, University of Ilorin, Ilorin

*Corresponding author's email address: *okunloye.rw@unilorin.edu.ng*

Abstract

The learnability of school curriculum has been attributed to students' perception of different school subjects which also determines the level of students' performance and ultimately the achievability of the intended curriculum objectives. Studies had been conducted in other subject areas. However, studies of that type are not common in Civic Education which is relatively new in the Nigerian Secondary School curriculum. This paper examines students' perception of difficulty levels of the Nigerian Senior School Civic Education Syllabus (SSSCES) and the factors associated with their perception. The population for the study comprised all Civic Education students in Osun State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study and a researcher-designed instrument titled Civic Education Syllabus Perception Questionnaire (CESPQ) was administered to 487 students drawn from 25 Senior Secondary Schools in Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. The three research questions raised for the study were answered using percentage, mean and standard deviation statistics. The results showed that the Senior Secondary School Civic Education Syllabus (SSSCES) topics are perceived by students to be of varying difficulty levels ranging from difficult to very simple with an absolute of them being predominantly very simple. The observed difficulty levels were associated with inadequate textbooks, teachers' presentation of lessons and wide content coverage. These imply that Civic Education is learnable and curriculum objectives are achievable. Based on these findings, it was recommended that teachers should enhance the learnability of the few perceived difficult topics by students through the use of predominantly learner-centred strategies and more learner-friendly strategies to teach the subject.

Key words: Civic Education, Students' perception, Difficulty levels, Curriculum contents.

Introduction

The introduction of Civic Education into Nigeria's Secondary School curriculum education in 2007 was as a result of the numerous problems that led to the decline in effective citizenship education and deterioration of cultural values among Nigerian citizens (Ali, Hayatu & Badau 2015). Among these problems are the anti-social activities, poor democratic behaviour, and lack of patriotic behaviour among Nigerian youth (Fan, Ekpo & Ita, 2008). Civic Education is therefore a problem solving curriculum in the Nigeria educational system in order to cultivate national values and democratic culture, arrest apathy, promote effective citizenship, national security and fight youth involvement in terrorism and violence in Nigerian society (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008; Okunloye, 2014a & Okunloye & Omolekan, 2016). Its introduction has been traced to the inherent weaknesses in the Social Studies curriculum implementation which hindered it from adequately achieving the objectives of civic-cultural re-orientation, democratic participation, the cultivation of basic values and development of skills for effective and responsible Nigerian citizenship (Ajibade, 2011, Okunloye 2016b). Finkel (2000) posited that, Civic Education primary objectives are to provide learners with adequate and relevant information on their rights, duties, responsibilities and conditions for political engagement with the aim of encouraging the citizens to engage themselves in meaningful contribution to the political system.

Its introduction has been adjudged as a step in the right direction to actualise the five major thrusts of the Nigerian educational system which are sine qua non for nation building and problem-solving. These include the building of: a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a great and dynamic economy; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; and a land of full and bright opportunities for all citizens (FGN, 2014). Ali, Hayatu and Badau (2015) reported that, for effective implementation of any curriculum, teachers with requisite qualification or formative experience are key to curriculum transaction with the targeted learners. Given the nonexistence of Civic Education specialist teachers in Nigeria, Social Studies teachers have been saddled with the responsibility of teaching Civic Education at all basic and senior secondary levels. This is due to the close affinity between Social Studies and Civic Education as a specialized school subjects that focused on citizenship education. Indeed, Civic Education

was a product of curriculum reform in Citizenship Education which evolved from the ‘womb’ of Social Studies curriculum (Okunloye, 2014a). Therefore, ascertaining students’ perceived difficulties in learning Civic Education in lessons taught by Social Studies teachers and others without formative experience in Citizenship Education becomes imperative. Indeed, as observed by Okonkwo (2002), the subject teacher is the most important facilitator of learning who is equipped as a problem-solver in learning difficulties through the use of simplified, interest sustaining and learning motivating strategies.

In curriculum development, the learners are as important as the teachers for determining the realisation of the curriculum objectives. More importantly, for a subject that is relatively new in the school curriculum, it is necessary to ascertain learners’ perceptions of the learnability of the subject in the field of implementation as a follow-up to the initial situation/needs analysis that gave birth to the subject (Okunloye, 2014a & 2014b). Furthermore, the Annual Chief Examiners’ Report by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) had shown that students wrongly attempted some questions and performed woefully in some questions from 2014-2016 (WAEC Chief Examiners’ Report, 2014 – 2016 and Preliminary Team Leaders and Assistant Examiners’ Reports, 2014 – 2016)

Studies on topics covered in the various subject areas at the Secondary School level in Nigeria thus, (Oyedeji, 1992 and Akanni, 2015) in Mathematics; (Adedoyin, 1998) in Geography; (Ibrahim, 1999) in Hausa Language; (Oyedokun, 2002) in Biology; (Adegbite, 2004) in Social Studies; (Jimoh, 2010) in Chemistry; and (Okunloye & Awowale, 2011) in Christian Religious Studies have shown that some topics are not too easy to learn by students due to their demanding and abstract nature. Therefore, since these researches investigated students’ perception of difficulty levels in the aforementioned existing subjects, it becomes necessary to find out students’ perception of difficulty levels in Civic Education for effective curriculum implementation. This current study was conducted on Civic Education Senior Secondary School Curriculum. Examining Students’ perception of difficulty level of the subject is in order to improve on the content, methods, instructional materials evaluation procedures, and students’ achievement in Civic Education. Therefore, this study examined the Students’ perception of difficulty levels of Senior Secondary School Civic Education syllabus in Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What are students' perceived difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?
2. What are students' perceived difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?
3. What are students perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?

Method

This study employed the descriptive survey design. This design was used in order to explain the variables in the study based on information gathered. The research was conducted in selected secondary schools in Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. The population consisted of all Civic Education students in Osun State. However, purposive sampling method was used to sample five hundred Senior Secondary School Civic Education students in Osogbo. A questionnaire titled "Civic Education Students' Perception Questionnaire" (CESPQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A dealt with difficulty levels of SSCE Civic Education topics. It contained 23 items on content of the subject with structured response of a four point Likert-type scale as Very Difficulty (VD) 4, Difficult (D) 3, Not Difficult (ND) 2 and Very Simple (VS) 1. Section B contained structured response of two point scale on items or reasons for difficulty levels of Civic Education topics namely, Most Associated (MA) and Not Associated (NA). The instrument was face and content validated by experts in Social Studies in the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin. Its reliability was established using test-retest technique and a reliability index of 0.83 was obtained. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the three research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: *What are students' perceived difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?*

The data on students' perception of the difficulty levels of the SSCE Civic Education syllabus are shown in the table 1.

Table 1: Students' Perceived Difficulty Levels of the SSSCES Topics (National Ethics Discipline)

N/S	National Ethics Discipline	N	Difficulty levels				DECISION
			VD (%)	D (%)	ND (%)	VS (%)	
1	Rights and Obligations	487	16 (3.3%)	47 (9.7%)	209 (42.9%)	215 (44.1%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
2	Values	487	2 (0.4%)	14 (2.9%)	214 (43.9%)	257 (52.8%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
3	Citizenship	487	04 (0.8%)	19 (3.9%)	204 (41.9%)	260 (53.4%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
4	Nationalism	487	20 (4.1%)	40 (8.2%)	204 (41.9%)	223 (45.8%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
5	Human rights	487	10 (2.1%)	22 (4.5%)	191 (39.2%)	264 (54.2%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
6	Universal Declaration of Human Rights	487	22 (4.5%)	39 (8.0%)	199 (40.9%)	227 (46.6%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
7	Law and Order	487	18 (3.7%)	29 (6.0%)	198 (40.7%)	242 (49.7%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
8	Responsible Parenthood	487	23 (4.7%)	35 (7.2%)	196 (40.2%)	233 (47.8%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
9	Traffic regulations	487	22 (4.5%)	17 (3.5%)	201 (41.3%)	247 (50.7%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>
10	Interpersonal Relationships	487	26 (5.3%)	42 (8.6%)	177 (36.3%)	242 (49.7%)	Predominantly <u>very simple</u>

Where VD, D, ND VS stands for Very Difficult, Difficult, Not Difficult and Very Simple respectively

Table 2: Students' Perceived Difficulty Levels of the SSSCES (Emerging issues in society)

N/S	Emerging Issues in the Society	N	Difficulty levels				Decision
			VD (%)	D (%)	ND (%)	VS (%)	
11	Cultism	487	35 (7.2%)	20 (4.1%)	204 (41.9%)	228 (46.8%)	Predominantly very simple
12	Drug and drug abuse	487	26 (5.3%)	20 (4.1%)	173 (35.5%)	268 (55.0%)	Predominantly very simple
13	Human Trafficking	487	34 (7.0%)	17 (3.5%)	187 (38.4%)	249 (51.1%)	Predominantly very simple
14	HIV/AIDS	487	37 (7.6%)	19 (3.9%)	171 (35.1%)	260 (53.4%)	Predominantly very simple
15	Youth Empowerment	487	39 (8.0%)	46 (9.4%)	182 (37.4%)	220 (45.2%)	Predominantly very simple

Where VD, D, ND VS stands for Very Difficult, Difficult, Not Difficult and Very Simple respectively

Table 3: Students' Perceived Difficulty Levels of the SSSCES (Government system and process)

N/S	Emerging Issues in the Society	N	Difficulty levels				Decision
			VD (%)	D (%)	N/S (%)	VS (%)	
16	Structure and function of Government	487	27 (5.5%)	47 (9.7%)	170 (34.9%)	243 (49.9%)	Predominantly very simple
17	Democracy	487	17 (3.5%)	24 (4.9%)	213 (43.7%)	233 (47.8%)	Predominantly very simple
18	Constitution features	487	18 (3.7%)	39 (8.0%)	217 (44.6%)	213 (43.7%)	ND
19	Rule of law	487	19 (3.9%)	37 (7.6%)	220 (45.2%)	211 (43.3%)	ND
20	Role of democracy	487	40 (8.2%)	38 (7.8%)	216 (44.4%)	193 (39.6%)	ND
21	Political apathy	487	29 (6.0%)	41 (8.4%)	215 (44.1%)	202 (41.5%)	Predominantly very simple
22	Civic societies	487	28 (5.7%)	31 (6.4%)	230 (47.2%)	198 (40.7%)	Predominantly very simple
23	Public service	487	19 (3.9%)	41 (8.4%)	210 (43.1%)	217 (44.6%)	Predominantly very simple

Where VD, D, ND VS stands for Very Difficult, Difficult, Not Difficult and Very Simple respectively

Table 1, 2, and 3 show the percentage distribution of difficulty levels of SSSCES topics. It shows partly difficult and predominantly very simple of difficulty levels. The partly difficult levels are within

the range of 6.6% to 13.0% of the syllabus. While the predominantly very simple levels are from 44.1% to 52.8% on National Ethics and Discipline. The tables also indicate the various percentages of difficulty levels. They show partly difficult and predominantly very simple difficulty levels. The partly difficult range from 9.4% to 17.0%, while the predominantly very simple levels are from 45.2% to 55.0% on Emerging Issues in the society. The partly difficult range from 8.4% to 13.0%, while the predominantly very simple level range from 91.6% to 87.0% on Government system and process.

From the tables, only 3 topics of the SSCE Civic Education syllabus topics were perceived to be not difficult topics of the syllabus, while 20 topics were perceived as predominantly very simple out of the 23 topics in the syllabus using the benchmark of 50% perception score on all items in the syllabus. The implication of this is that the syllabus topics are predominantly very simple.

Research Question 2: *What are students' perceived difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?*

The responses of the students on difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education are as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Students' Perceived Difficulty Levels of the Three Thematic Components of SSSCES Topics

Syllabus Themes	Difficulty levels				Total of Topics	Decision
	VD (%)	D (%)	ND (%)	VS (%)		
National Ethics Discipline	(1.6%)	(1.4%)	(19.3%)	(63.7%)	10	Predominantly very simple
Emerging Issues in the Society	(4.6%)	(14.4%)	(23.0%)	(55.0%)	5	Predominantly very simple
Government System and Process	(0.7%)	(1.3%)	(26.2%)	(63.8%)	8	Predominantly very simple

The results of students perceived difficulty levels of the three major thematic components of the syllabus 23 topics shown in table 4 indicate that the 15 topics under National Ethics Discipline and Emerging Issues in the Society Components on the one hand are very

simple. On the other hand, 3 out of 5 topics under Government System and Process Component of the syllabus are not difficult. On the whole, National Ethics Discipline, Emerging Issues and Government System and Process are perceived as predominantly very simple to learn by Civic Education students.

Research Question 3: *What are students' perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education?*

The responses on students' perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of SSSCES topics are shown in the table 5.

Table 5: Students' Perceived Associated Factors with the observed difficulty levels of the SSSCES Topics

S/N	Reasons for Difficulty levels	N	MA (%)	NA (%)	Decision	Rank
1	Abstract nature of the topics	487	248 (50.1%)	239 (49.1%)	Responsible	14 th
2	Historical nature of the topics	487	241 (49.5%)	246 (50.5%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable
3	Teachers' treatment of topics	487	213 (43.7%)	274 (56.3%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable
4	Teacher's inadequate content coverage	487	267 (54.8%)	220 (45.2%)	Responsible	6 th
5	Teacher created phobia	487	240 (49.3%)	247 (50.7%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable
6	Learners' phobia for Civic education topics	487	255 (52.4%)	232 (47.6%)	Responsible	10 th
7	Senior student-related phobia	487	241 (49.5%)	246 (50.5%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable
8	Senior student-related motivation	487	241 (49.5%)	246 (50.5%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable
9	Perceived career-irrelevance of Civic education	487	253 (52.0%)	234 (48.0%)	Responsible	12 th
10	Disrupted academic calendar	487	260 (53.4%)	227 (46.6%)	Responsible	8 th
11	Irrelevant teachers subject specialization	487	254 (52.2%)	233 (47.8%)	Responsible	11 th
12	Wide content	487	271 (55.6%)	216 (44.4%)	Responsible	3 rd
13	Rush for syllabus coverage	487	225 (46.2%)	262 (53.8%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable
14	Extra-mural coaching	487	268 (55.0%)	219 (45.0%)	Responsible	5 th
15	Learners' loss of interest	487	243 (49.9%)	244 (50.1%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable
16	Future career preference	487	266 (54.6%)	221 (45.4%)	Responsible	7 th
17	Interest in topics	487	250 (51.3%)	237 (48.7%)	Responsible	13 th
18	Insufficient explanation	487	266 (54.6%)	221 (45.4%)	Responsible	7 th
19	Lack of textbooks	487	267 (54.8%)	220 (45.2%)	Responsible	6 th
20	Inadequate textbook	487	281 (57.7%)	206 (42.3%)	Responsible	1 st
21	Large class size	487	257 (52.8%)	230 (47.2%)	Responsible	9 th
22	Inadequate preparation for examination	487	269 (55.2%)	218 (44.8%)	Responsible	4 th
23	Insufficient topic treatment	487	254 (52.2%)	233 (47.8%)	Responsible	11 th
24	Teachers' use of abstract terms/concepts	487	276 (56.7%)	211 (43.3%)	Responsible	2 nd
25	Textbook use of Abstract words	487	228 (46.8%)	259 (53.2%)	Not Responsible	Not Applicable

Where MR stand for Most Responsible and NR stands for Not Responsible

Table 5 showed that 8 out of 25 perceived associated factors with the observed difficulty levels of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination syllabus topics of Civic Education are not associated with the observed difficulty levels of SSSCES topics on the one hand. On the other hand, 17 out of the 25 students' perceived associated factors are responsible for the observed difficulty levels of the topics. These indicate that students' perception of Civic Education as predominantly simple and not difficult subject are traceable to the 17 factors. Inadequate textbooks, teachers' use of abstract concepts or terminologies and wide syllabus content of the SSSCES are the three highest perceived factors among the 17 associated factors. Results shown in Table 6 indicate that the 17 factors with which students perceived to be associated with the observed difficult levels are classified into 6 categories. Out of the 6, teacher-related, subject-related and instructional material-related factors ranked highest among them.

Table 6: Mean Rating of Students' Perceived Associated Factors with the Observed Difficulty Levels of the SSSCES Topics

S/N	Associated factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rating
1	subject-matter related factor	487	4.5606	1.19150	4 th
2	teacher-related factor	487	10.6509	2.51524	1 st
3	student-related factor	487	7.5791	1.84631	2 nd
4	student career-related factor	487	3.0657	.80367	5 th
5	School-related factor	487	3.0616	.80655	6 th
6	instructional material-related factor	487	6.1150	1.48349	3 rd

Table 6 shows six associated factors which students' perceived to be associated with the observed difficulty levels of the SSSCES topics. Teachers-related factor was rated first as the foremost associated factor while the school related factor was perceived as the least associated factor with the observed difficulty levels of the SSSCES topics. Among the six factors, teacher-related, student-related and instructional material-related factors were perceived to more associate with their perception of Civic Education as predominant simple and not difficult topics.

Discussion of Findings

From the data analyses, it is evident that most of the Civic Education syllabus topics were perceived by Senior Secondary Students to be predominantly simple, while a smaller proportion is either very difficult or difficult. Also, topics under the National Ethics Discipline and Emerging Issues in the Society were perceived as predominantly very simple. Only 3 topics under Government system and process were perceived as not difficult. In addition, 17 reasons were associated with the students' perceived difficulty levels of the 23 topics in the syllabus, out of which inadequate textbook, teachers' use of abstract concepts or terminologies in Civic Education lessons and wide content scope of the syllabus ranked highest in their perception. In the same vein, teacher-related, subject-related and academic subject-related factors were accordingly identified as the most significant factors for the observed difficulty level of SSSCES topics.

The finding on the perceived predominantly simple difficulty level of the subject is however at variance with the observed difficulty level of the West African Examination Council's Chief Examiners Report (2014 – 2016) which identified that students misinterpreted, wrongly answered and scored very low marks in some Essay paper 2 items that were related to some topics in the SSSCES. The practical reality among Senior Secondary School Students of Civic Education, therefore, has been the existence of some difficult topics. Preliminary Team Leaders and Assistant Examiners Reports actually observed national value, nationalism, pillars of democracy and political apathy-related essay items as difficult and wrongly answered by a sizeable number of candidates (Okunloye, 2016c).

In the same vein, Okunloye (2016c) observed that the violation of instructions on the choice of questions to be answered by students and observed trend of decline in the proportion of students who passed at A1 – B3 grade levels lend credence to students' learning difficulties in Civic Education. It is therefore valid to reckon with the practical significance of the observed reality when statistical significance contradicts practical realities observed with respondents in equivalent sample locale with respondents of similar characteristics. Therefore, it is valid to observe that Civic Education Senior Secondary students have some learning difficulties in some topics which had prevented a greater majority of them from scoring A1 – B3. Indeed, the fact that a

small but significant proportion of candidates that scored D7 – F9 in the Civic Education Examinations in WAEC conducted SSCE from 2014 – 2016 are clear indications that some SSSCES topics are difficult. The observed failure rate is also consistent with experts' views on mastery learning who recognized the possibility of a set of topics of whatever magnitude in a schematized frameworks to constitute a serious problem to learners in learning the holistic component of given scheme of work (Hyman & Cohen, 1979).

The highest perception of teacher-related, instructional material-related (Civic Education Textbooks) and Civic Education syllabus related factors among the 17 associated factors with the observed difficulty level of the SSSCES topics is in agreement with similar trends identified by Oyedokun (2002) in SSCE Chemistry and Okunloye and Awowale (2011) in SSCE Christian Religious Studies. Although, a greater proportion of SSCE candidate writing the WAEC May/June Examinations in Civic Education recorded higher pass rate at A1 – C6 grade levels, the smaller proportion of failure recorded is still a cause for concern, given the potency of Civic Education for democratic culture re-orientation, national value cultivation and tackling of national insecurity and terrorist tendencies among adolescents and young adults citizens.

In the same vein, findings of the study revealed that there is partly difficulty level of Civic Education indicated by minority of the respondents while the majority showed that the subject is very simple as similarly observed by Okunloye (2009) in Government. The small proportion of students' perceived difficult topics in Government seems to have accounted for the observed failure rate in SSCE Government. It should be noted that the attribution of students' perceived difficult level in Civic Education to wide content coverage may not be solely as Civic Education syllabus-related factor, it may in reality be due to school administration/proprietorship factor which often manifest in disrupted school academic calendar occasioned by strikes caused by non-payment of salary arrears, sometimes ranging from 6 to 15 months as experienced in many states in Nigeria (including Osun) since 2015. More importantly, the use of non-specialist teachers to teach Civic Education could have accounted for ineffective content coverage of the syllabus even when it is not as wide as Geography and Government syllabi.

The high ranking of the associated factor of difficulty levels of topics Civic Education as first and second order associated factors with student's perceived difficult topics also agreed with Awowale (2004) on the observed subject-related and student-related causes of learning difficulties in junior school CRS. The prominence of teacher-related and student-related factors as causes of the perceived difficulty levels agreed with Olusola and Falaye (2011) who observed the significance of student's socio-personal factors, including self-efficacy as predictors of academic performance. Although the instructional materials related factor is moderately associated to be influencing the learner ability of Civic Education topics, the fact that the teacher is most important human resource that determines what, when and how to use other instructional resources implicitly point to the teacher factor as a major determinants of teaching-learning effectiveness. Therefore, the perception of teacher-related factor as 1st and student-related factor as 2nd order factors do not in any way undermine the potency of the teacher factor in teaching-learning effectiveness and academic achievement.

Conclusions

An absolute majority of the 25 topics in the SSSCES are very simple to learn. The very few topics that students perceived as being difficult could pose a challenge to teaching and learning effectiveness in Civic Education classroom.

Implications

Although, topics in the Civic Education syllabus are generally perceived to be predominantly very simple, students still perceived a few as challenging. This implies they may encounter some learning difficulties in very few topics which could hinder mastery learning and academic achievement of students in the subject.

Recommendations

In order to address issues raised in this study regarding the difficulty level of the SSCE Civic Education syllabus topics and associated factors, the following measures are suggested:

1. Teachers should enhance learnability of the study through the use of simple concepts, glossary of Civic Education

terminologies or dictionary of politics and predominantly learner-centred strategies.

2. Teachers of Civic Education should pay special attention to the student's perceived area of difficulties in the syllabus and use enquiry or problem-solving strategies that will make them simple to learn in activity centred classroom situations; and
3. Appropriate career counselling should be given to the Civic Education students to sensitize them on the practical utilitarian values and functional learning of the subject and specific topics they found difficult.

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