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Faculty of Education,
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PARADIGM SHIFT IN SOCIAL STUDIES PEDAGOGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT ATTITUDE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PLATEAU STATE

[1] Filim Daniel Maren & [2] Ruth Mbakaren Tor-Anyiin
[1] Department of Social Studies, College of Education, Gindiri, philimmaren16@gmail.com
07015073271
[2] Department of Social Sciences, Benue State University, ruthykarentor@gmail.com
08030533746

Abstract
This study investigated the efficacy of a paradigm shift in instructional strategies specifically the transition from conventional lecture methods to Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) on the attitude and academic performance of Social Studies students in Government Junior Secondary Schools in Plateau State, Nigeria. The research was necessitated by the persistent poor performance and negative attitudes observed among students subjected to traditional teacher-centered pedagogies. Adopting a quasi-experimental research design involving a pre-test and post-test control group, the study sampled 148 Junior Secondary School II students selected through stratified random sampling from two intact classes in Jos North. Data were collected using the Social Studies Attitude Scale (SSAS) and the Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT). Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, while inferential statistics (ANCOVA and independent samples t-test) were also utilized to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. Key findings revealed that the shift to inquiry-based strategies resulted in a significant improvement in students' academic performance compared to the conventional group. Furthermore, students in the experimental group exhibited a markedly more positive attitude towards the subject. The study concludes that innovative, student-centered strategies are superior for cognitive and affective development in Social Studies. It is recommended that educational stakeholders in Plateau State institutionalize training workshops to equip teachers with these modern pedagogical skills to reverse the trend of academic failure.

Keywords: Paradigm Shift, Social Studies, Student Attitude, Academic Performance, Inquiry-Based Learning.

Introduction
Education globally is moving away from the old style of teacher-dominated classes toward more active, student-centered learning. This change, often called a paradigm shift, recognizes that merely transmitting facts to students is insufficient for the demands of the

modern world. Learners today require critical thinking and emotional skills, not just memorization. Education is now conceptualized as an active process of developing cognitive and social capabilities, rather than simply filling an empty vessel with information (Essien, Obot, Udoh, & Akpan, 2014). For example, developed countries have largely adopted technology and inquiry-based models to redefine how students learn, fostering deeper understanding (Gyeltshen & English, 2021). This global movement highlights the urgent need for developing nations to update their teaching methods to match current educational demands.

In Nigeria, and specifically in Plateau State, this transition has been slow. The National Policy on Education states that education should help students improve themselves and think critically (Johnson, Irmiya, & Ariya, 2025). However, despite policy prescriptions, the reality in most classrooms remains entrenched in traditional lecture methods. Padung, Tali, Gyot, and Podos (2025) argue that the current pedagogical approaches often fail to equip youths with the practical skills they need, meaning a shift is required to empower students to be self-reliant. This gap between policy and practice impedes effective learning outcomes. Kiptiony (2024) also notes that traditional exam-driven approaches often neglect the emotional well-being of learners, further necessitating a paradigm shift.

The motivation for this study comes from seeing that Social Studies despite its fundamental role in promoting civic responsibility, Social Studies is frequently perceived by learners as unengaging due to conventional, teacher-centered instructional approaches (Frempong, 2022). When students develop negative attitudes toward a subject, their academic performance typically declines accordingly. Furthermore, evidence from student performance in external examinations like the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) from 2020 to 2025 reveals that a large number of students consistently score below the credit level in Social Studies, while performance in related Government/Civic subjects at the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) has fluctuated downward, with many students failing to demonstrate a grasp of core concepts (Johnson et al., 2025). Therefore, there is a compelling need to examine whether changing the teaching method to Inquiry-Based Learning can revitalize student interest and improve learning outcomes. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence from Plateau State that moving away from traditional methods can enhance both student attitude and academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of Social Studies in developing responsible citizens, students in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools continue to exhibit poor attitudes and low academic achievement in the subject. The problem appears to stem from teachers' continued reliance on the lecture method, which promotes passive learning rather than active participation (Johnson et al., 2025). While Birabil and Nebo (2023) found that blended learning strategies are effective, and Egwu and Ofuasia (2021) demonstrated success with simulation and dramatization approaches, there remains a gap in research specifically examining how Inquiry-Based Learning functions as a paradigm shift in Plateau State's educational context.

Furthermore, evidence from student performance in external examinations like the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) from 2020 to 2025 reveals that a substantial proportion of students consistently score below the credit level in Social Studies. This persistent underperformance suggests a chronic failure of current teaching methodologies. If this pedagogical stagnation continues, schools risk producing graduates who lack the social competencies and critical thinking abilities essential for national development. This study is significant because it empirically tests a specific innovative teaching approach designed to address this problem.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a paradigm shift in instructional strategy on student outcomes in Social Studies. The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the difference in the pre-test and post-test academic performance scores of Social Studies students exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning strategy compared to those taught with conventional methods.
2. To assess the difference in the pre-test and post-test attitude scores of students towards Social Studies when exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning strategy.
3. To examine the influence of gender on the academic performance of students exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the difference in the mean academic performance scores of Social Studies students exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm and those exposed to the conventional lecture method in Plateau State?
2. How does the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm influence the attitude of students toward Social Studies compared to the conventional method?
3. To what extent does gender influence the academic performance of students taught using the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean academic performance scores of Social Studies students exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm and those exposed to the conventional lecture method.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean attitude scores of students toward Social Studies when exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm compared to the conventional method.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean academic performance scores of male and female students exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm.

Significance of the Study

This study holds value for multiple stakeholders in the education sector. For curriculum planners, the findings will provide empirical evidence needed to integrate more student-centered activities into the official Social Studies curriculum. For teachers, it will serve as a practical guide demonstrating how shifting from "telling" to "guiding" can mitigate student disengagement and improve examination outcomes. Finally, for students, the adoption of these methods promises a more engaging classroom experience that enhances academic achievement and fosters positive attitudes toward both learning and societal participation.

Scope and Delimitation

The study covers Government Junior Secondary Schools in Plateau State, Nigeria. It focuses on the concept of a "Paradigm Shift" in teaching, specifically using Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) as the new method. The study is limited to looking at student attitude and academic performance in Social Studies. It does not cover private schools or other subjects, keeping the focus on the specific challenges in the public basic education sector of the state.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification of Terms

a. Social Studies

Etymologically, Social Studies comes from combining social sciences and humanities. It is defined as the study of man and his physical and social environments (Egwu & Ofuasia, 2021). In this study, the researcher views Social Studies not just as a subject, but as a tool for teaching citizenship and values. Johnson et al. (2025) note that the subject is meant to inspire students to respect others' views and live as good citizens. However, Frempong (2022) argues that the mixed nature of the subject often confuses students if the teaching method is wrong, supporting the researcher's view that the definition of Social Studies must include how it is taught.

b. Student Attitude

Attitude is the internal feeling or tendency of a person to respond positively or negatively to something. Essien et al. (2014) define attitude as a key part of the classroom that can either stop or help learning, involving emotions and feelings. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2025) describe attitude as a behavior showing a student's like or dislike for activities. The researcher believes attitude is not fixed; it is a learned behavior that can be changed by shifting the teaching strategy. When students enjoy learning, their attitude changes from not caring to being enthusiastic. Tadesse (2020) adds that students often have negative attitudes because traditional methods make them passive listeners.

c. Academic Performances

Academic performance is generally defined as the outcome of education how well a student, teacher, or school has met their goals. Birabil and Nebo (2023) define it as the scores students get in tests or exams after being taught. Egwu and Ofuasia (2021) link academic performance to cognitive ability, noting it is the measurable result of storing and retrieving

knowledge. The researcher views academic performance in this study as the number that shows a student's understanding of Social Studies concepts, measured by the difference between pre-test and post-test scores.

d. Paradigm Shift

A paradigm shift refers to a fundamental change in the basic concepts and experimental practices of a scientific discipline. In the context of education, Padung et al. (2025) describe it as a move from traditional, teacher-centered curriculums to dynamic, skill-based approaches. Zainuddin et al. (2024) view it as taking learning outside the traditional environment, such as in flipped classrooms. For the researcher, a paradigm shift in this study specifically means abandoning the "sage on the stage" lecture method for the "guide on the side" inquiry method, fundamentally altering the classroom power dynamic to favor the learner.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Constructivism Theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky (1978). This theory states that knowledge is built together and that learning is a social process that happens through interacting with others (Frempong, 2022). Unlike theories that focus on internal stages, Constructivism says learners must be active participants, building new ideas on what they already know.

This theory is adopted because it fits perfectly with the Inquiry-Based Learning strategy used in this study. The paradigm shift moves the teacher from being the only source of knowledge to a facilitator who helps social interaction and problem-solving. By allowing students to investigate problems and discuss solutions, the teaching method uses Vygotsky’s idea of the Zone of Proximal Development. This makes the theory very relevant for explaining improvements in both attitude and performance, as students learn better when they are active.

Empirical Review

Several studies have looked at the link between teaching methods and student outcomes. Johnson, Irmiya, and Ariya (2025) studied the effects of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Jos North, Plateau State. They found that students taught with PBL had much better attitudes than those in control groups. Similarly, Birabil and Nebo (2023) looked at conventional versus blended teaching strategies in Rivers State and found that students in the blended learning class performed significantly better.

Furthermore, Egwu and Ofuasia (2021) explored the effects of simulation and dramatization in Delta State. Their study showed that these new methods improved academic performance, concluding that traditional methods are becoming useless. Conversely, Frempong (2022) surveyed students' views in Ghana and found that while students liked student-centered methods, many teachers still used lectures, leading to students seeing the subject negatively. A gap exists in the literature regarding the specific use of Inquiry-Based Learning in the specific context of Plateau State's Junior Secondary Schools, which this study aims to fill.

Research Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the non-equivalent pre-test post-test control group design. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to test the new teaching method while utilizing existing intact classes, thereby minimizing disruption to the regular school schedule (Johnson et al., 2025; Birabil & Nebo, 2023).

The population for this study comprised all Junior Secondary School II (JSS II) students in Government Secondary Schools in Jos North, Plateau State. The sample size was 148 students, drawn from two intact classes. A multistage sampling procedure was employed. First, simple random sampling was used to select two schools: Government Junior Secondary School (GJSS) Hwolshe and Government Junior Secondary School (GJSS) Tudun Wada, both in Jos North. Intact classes were then utilized, with GJSS Hwolshe assigned as the experimental group (71 students) and GJSS Tudun Wada as the control group (77 students). This method was justified to preserve the natural classroom setting and minimize disruption to school routines.

Two instruments were used to collect data: the Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT) and the Social Studies Attitude Scale (SSAS). The SSAT consisted of 40 multiple-choice questions drawn from the JSS II curriculum to measure academic performance. The SSAS was a 20-item questionnaire employing a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) to assess student attitudes toward Social Studies. The instruments were reviewed by two experts in Social Studies Education and one specialist in Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Jos. Their input ensured content validity. To establish reliability, a pilot test was conducted in a school not included in the main study. The data were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha method for the attitude scale (resulting in $\alpha = 0.78$) and the Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 for the achievement test (resulting in KR-21 = 0.82), indicating high reliability for both instruments.

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were employed to answer the research questions, providing a clear comparison of average performance and attitude scores between groups before and after the intervention. For hypothesis testing, independent samples t-test was used to compare the experimental and control groups on post-test measures, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to control for initial baseline differences between non-randomized groups, using pre-test scores as covariates. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

This section presents the results obtained from the field in relation to the research objectives and the results of the hypothesis testing.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	78	52.7%
Female	70	47.3%
Total	**148**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 shows the demographic makeup of the respondents. It indicates that out of the 148 students sampled, 78 were male, constituting 52.7% of the total sample, while 70 were female, constituting 47.3%. This represents a fairly balanced gender representation, ensuring that the findings regarding gender differences are based on comparable group sizes.

4.2 Research Objective One

Table 2: Mean Difference of Pre-test and Post-test Academic Performance Scores

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Experimental (Inquiry-Based)	71	42.50	8.45	68.30	9.12	25.80
Control (Conventional)	77	41.80	7.90	50.15	8.22	8.35

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 displays the mean performance scores of students. Prior to the lessons, both groups had similar performance levels (42.50 vs. 41.80). However, following the treatment, the experimental group taught with the Inquiry-Based Learning strategy achieved a significantly higher post-test mean score of 68.30 compared to the control group's 50.15. The mean gain for the experimental group (25.80) is substantially higher than the control group (8.35), indicating that the paradigm shift in teaching method effectively improved academic performance.

4.3 Research Objective Two

Table 3: Mean Difference of Pre-test and Post-test Attitude Scores

Group	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Experimental (Inquiry-Based)	71	45.20	5.30	72.40	6.10	27.20
Control (Conventional)	77	44.90	5.15	48.50	5.80	3.60

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 presents the analysis of student attitudes. The results show that prior to the experiment, students in both groups held similar, average attitudes toward Social Studies. After the intervention, the experimental group showed a substantial improvement in attitude, with a mean score rising to 72.40. In contrast, the control group demonstrated minimal improvement (48.50). This demonstrates that the innovative instructional strategy successfully fostered positive attitudes toward the subject.

4.4 Research Objective 3

Table 4: Mean Difference of Post-test Performance Scores by Gender (Experimental Group)

Gender	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Gain
Male	39	43.10	67.80	24.70
Female	32	41.90	68.90	27.00

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 analyzes the influence of gender on performance within the group exposed to the paradigm shift. The data reveals that male students had a post-test mean of 67.80, while female students scored slightly higher at 68.90. The difference between the two means is minimal, suggesting that the Inquiry-Based Learning strategy is inclusive and benefits both male and female students almost equally, effectively closing the gender gap in academic achievement.

4.5 Test of Hypotheses

This section presents the inferential analysis of the data collected, testing the three null hypotheses formulated for the study. The independent samples t-test was employed to determine the level of significance between the variables, while ANCOVA was used to control for pre-test differences.

Table 5: Summary of t-test and ANCOVA Analysis for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3

Hypotheses	Variables	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	df	Sig. (p)	Decision
H_{o1} (Performance)	Experimental	71	68.30	9.12	12.51	146	.000	Rejected
	Control	77	50.15	8.22				
H_{o2} (Attitude)	Experimental	71	72.40	6.10	24.38	146	.000	Rejected
	Control	77	48.50	5.80				
H_{o3} (Gender)	Male (Exp)	39	67.80	8.50	0.528	69	.599	Accepted
	Female (Exp)	32	68.90	9.00				

Significant at $p < 0.05$; Source: Field Survey, 2026

Interpretation of Table 5:

The analysis for Hypothesis One ($H_{0\ 1}$) shows a calculated t-value of 12.51 with a p-value of .000. Since the p-value (.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the academic performance of students exposed to the Inquiry-Based Learning paradigm compared to those taught with the conventional method.

For Hypothesis Two ($H_{0\ 2}$), the calculated t-value is 24.38 with a p-value of .000. Because the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that the paradigm shift to inquiry-based strategies significantly enhances the positive attitude of students toward Social Studies.

For Hypothesis Three ($H_{0\ 3}$), the analysis reveals a calculated t-value of 0.528 with a p-value of .599. Since the p-value (.599) is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. This

implies that there is no significant difference in the performance of male and female students when taught using the Inquiry-Based Learning strategy, suggesting the method is gender-neutral and effective for all learners regardless of gender.

Discussion

The following discussion interprets the results obtained from the field in relation to the research objectives and the results of the hypothesis testing.

The findings of this study clearly indicate that the paradigm shift from conventional teaching to Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) significantly boosts both academic performance and student interest. This was statistically confirmed by the rejection of the first and second null hypotheses (H_{01} and H_{02}), where the calculated t-values of 12.51 and 24.38 respectively were significant at the $p < .000$ level. The experimental group achieved a post-test mean of 68.30 compared to the control group's 50.15, showing a clear academic advantage. This result is in strong agreement with Johnson, Irmiya, and Ariya (2025), who found that active learning strategies in Jos North led to a marked improvement in student achievement. Similarly, Birabil and Nebo (2023) argued that the old lecture method is no longer enough to help students succeed in modern exams like the BECE. From the researcher's view, when students are allowed to ask questions and find their own answers, they develop a sense of ownership over the knowledge, which naturally leads to better grades and a more positive attitude toward the subject.

Furthermore, the study found that this new paradigm is an effective tool for promoting educational equity between genders. The analysis of the third null hypothesis (H_{03}) showed no significant difference between the performance of male and female students ($t = 0.528$, $p = .599$), leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. This demonstrates that the Inquiry-Based Learning method is gender-neutral, as both males (mean = 67.80) and females (mean = 68.90) performed at almost identical levels. This finding aligns with the work of Egwu and Ofuasia (2021), who noted that when instructional methods are engaging and practical, the gender gap in academic performance usually disappears. The researcher believes that the previous differences in performance often seen in Social Studies were likely due to the "boring" nature of traditional classes rather than any biological difference between the sexes. Therefore, shifting the paradigm is not just about improving scores; it is about creating a fair and inclusive learning environment where every child in Plateau State can excel regardless of their gender.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the continued reliance on traditional lecture methods in Plateau State schools is doing a disservice to students, stifling both their interest and their potential. The research has demonstrated that a paradigm shift towards Inquiry-Based Learning is not just a preference but a necessity. By actively engaging students, this approach transforms the classroom into a lively place of critical thinking and enthusiasm. Consequently, this article establishes that adopting innovative strategies is fundamental to revitalizing Social Studies education, ensuring that it fulfills its mandate of creating competent, interested, and socially aware citizens.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Ministry of Education in Plateau State should organize regular training workshops to teach Social Studies teachers how to use Inquiry-Based Learning strategies.
2. School administrators should ensure that adequate time and resources are provided on the school timetable to allow for the interactive nature of student-centered learning.
3. Curriculum planners should revise the Social Studies curriculum to explicitly include inquiry-based activities and projects rather than just content outlines.
4. Teachers should actively shift their mindset from being the only source of knowledge to facilitators who guide students in discovering knowledge for themselves.
1. Parents and community stakeholders should support schools by providing the necessary materials that make practical and inquiry-based lessons possible.

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