

# ENHANCING EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF SOCIAL STUDIES CONCEPTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS THROUGH REINFORCEMENT

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## **Abstract**

*Social Studies has the potentials of influencing the intellectual, social development and personal growth of individual. There is therefore the need for reinforcement for effective learning to take place. This paper therefore, explores the concept, phases, factors of learning as well as Hull's Theory of Learning, Thorndike's Theory of Reinforcement and their applications to the classroom for effective teaching and learning of Social Studies. It was observed that the two theories strongly support the use of reinforcement in teaching-learning situation and that punishment is less effective in achieving and maintaining a desired behavior in learners. Hence, it was recommended among others that i) teachers should be considerate of the age and stage of the learners and their individual differences; ii) teachers should provide positive reinforcement immediately after the behavior has occurred; iii) reinforcement should be provided frequently and be paired with a clear verbal description of the behavior.*

## **Introduction**

Learning is a process by which one profits from past experience or practice. It is a process that leads to a relatively permanent change in behaviour resulting from exposure to conditions in the environment and experience or practice (Oladele, 2005). Learning is an important aspect of human life, and it is vital among the human qualities. Human beings ability to learn in different types of situation makes him/her different from animals. This is not to say that the capacity to learn is restricted to human beings alone; animals do learn but human capacity to learn variety of things makes the difference. Learning is a continuous process because learning starts from the womb until one dies.

Learning has been at the very centre of man's existence. This assertion applies regardless of the period we are considering – ancestral or contemporary times. At the beginning of creation, human being was

born biologically and physiologically naked. It is realized that continuous survival is dependent on ability to subdue and take control of the elements and forces in the environment. Learning was initially informal, making up an essential part of the functioning in adult institutions – families and age groups, master-apprentice arrangements and community labor (Gobet and Bilalic, 2011).

With the systematization of writing and the institution of a school structure in education, learning became formalized. Learning is any change in behavior as a result of experience which enables people face later situation differently. Learning entails skills acquisition that makes human beings relate appropriately to their environment. This is made possible by the fact that a developed human being possesses a refined brain which is made up of quite complex and diversified parts, primary among which is the cortex with its 15

thousand million nerve cells (Nwanchukwu, 2000).

It was the contention of Nwanchukwu (2000) that teacher is to serve as a guardian and repository of knowledge, having so much of cultural, scientific, and artistic value to dispense to anybody who desires to become part of human heritage. Students should be equipped with readiness and proper disposition towards learning which parental training had earlier cultivated in them; children experience a more formalized and deliberate process in school. The teacher therefore makes it possible for learners to perform according to expectations by giving a series of reinforcement so as to achieve the stated objectives and goals of the educational system of Nigeria.

Social Studies is one of the core subjects at the Upper Basic level and it is one of the most appropriate tools for achieving the educational goals and objectives of the country. Ojedokun (2001) defined Social Studies as the modern study of an interdisciplinary and interrelated study of a topic, a problem, an issue, a concern or an appreciation. Social Studies is a problem approach through which human beings study and learn about problems of survival in the environment.

Social Studies, by nature and goals, is concerned with the study of social, economic, political, cultural, religious and technological development activities of human beings. It also deals with the interaction of human beings with the environment, not only to raise his/her consciousness for peace and stability of the society but also to improve the quality of life of the citizenry now and in the future (Ogundiran, Adebisi and Tihamiyu, 2014).

Ogundiran (2012) agreed that effective teaching of Social Studies could assist the citizens of Nigeria to make wise and informed decisions that would be useful to them and the society in solving problems of life. According to Federal Republic of

Nigeria (FRN) (2004), being citizens of a developing nation, the expectation is that school should develop several aspects of children's activities such as imagination, thinking, reasoning, perception, positive attitudes, right values, good judgment, etc., as prerequisites for "contributing to the building of an egalitarian society" and "a land full of bright opportunities".

Ajtoni (2005) inferred that one of the cardinal objectives of Social Studies is to improve ethnic and social relationships, self-esteem, produce better attitude towards the subject, the classroom and the school. One of the goals of the Nigerian Education as stated in the National Policy of Education is the development of individuals into sound and effective citizens. Social Studies as a discipline, aimed at achieving the NPE goal because it involves the integration of the individual into the society.

Ezegbe (2000) opined that if Social Studies is effectively taught, it has the potentials to influence the intellectual, social development and personal growth of the youths. Yusuf (2004) explained that the purpose of intellectual dimension of Social Studies is to introduce the students to critical thinking skill involved in decision-making. He added that the purpose of Social Studies education is to prepare citizens who would perpetuate and improve societies while that of personal education is to help the youth to sort out the confusion of the social world.

Omoshin (2004) believed that the teaching of Social Studies in the school curriculum would assist all types of students at all levels to develop the ability to adapt to the ever-changing environment. Based on this background, this paper explored the Hull's Theory of Learning, Thorndike's Theory of Reinforcement, and their applications to classroom teaching in the real sense of teaching learning process (T.L.P.) which can be adopted in teaching Social Studies to produce good citizens towards nation building and development.

### **Concept of Learning**

Learning is any change in behaviour which is as a result of experience and which enables people to face later situation differently. Glassman and Hadad (2013) defined learning as a relatively change in behavioural potential which accompanies experience but which is not the result of simple growth factors or of reversible influences such as fatigue or hunger. Learning entails skills acquisition that makes human beings relate appropriately with their environment. Learning modifies the existing behavioural pattern in such a way that future performance or attitude is affected. It is when this has happened that we can rightly say learning has taken place. Learning is an active process; learning has taken place until there are observable changes in the behaviour of the learners. It should be rightly pointed out that the important part of learning is the experience that follows as a result of the changes in behaviour. According to Goodwin (2005), learning is a process by which an organism, as a result of its interaction in a situation, acquires a new mode of behaviour which tends to persist and affect the general behavior pattern of the organism to some degree.

Education implies that something worthwhile is being or has being intentionally transmitted in a morally accepted manner. This could be geared towards the development of the physical, mental and spiritual potentialities of the individuals in cultivating a complete person.

#### **Phases of Learning**

Twining (2001) opined that before learning can take place, three stages are involved; these include acquisition, storage or retention, and retrieval stages. Acquisition stage refers to the stage where the learner is ready to learn, and prepared to know and acquire what is to be learnt. The learning materials will have to be relevant to the age and level of the learner so that he/she will understand whatever is being taught.

Storage or retention stage is the stage where the learner will be able to put the skills and knowledge learnt into the memory (short and long terms memory). Retrieval stage is the stage where the learner is able to recall and reproduce the stored experiences or information. Ability to do these shows that effective teaching learning process has taken place.

### **Factors Affecting Learning**

Gobet, Chassey and Bilalic (2011) opined that there are many factors affecting learning in a classroom situation. These factors are grouped into three categories: the learner's factor, the teacher's factor and the environmental factor. In the learner's factor, home influence, learner's self-concept, age level, intellectual inheritance (heredity) and locus of control (will power or zeal to succeed) are the contributing factors towards learning. In the teacher's factor, teaching methods, mastery of the subject-matter, acquisition of further knowledge and the teacher's personality (in terms of the totality of his qualities or attributes) are contributory factors affecting learning.

Gobet, Chassey and Bilalic (2011) further stated that environmental factors that could either enhance or retard learning include classroom situation, the school community in terms of relationship between the teachers and learners, then home factors in terms of health (diseases), nutrition, motivation and socio-economic background of the family.

### **Hull's Theory of Learning**

Clark Hull (1884 - 1952) of Yale University and his associates proposed that all behaviour depends upon the needs of the individual and that learning depends on whether the needs of the individual are satisfied and tension is thereby reduced. According to Hull in Banyard and Grayson (2000), if a person's behaviour is such that his needs are not met, the responses associated with that behaviour are not

retained, and the individual does not learn. He also maintains that learning will not take place without reinforcement or reward. This is an analogy to the “trial and error” method of learning, which acknowledges the association between stimulus and response but lays more emphasis on reinforcement.

A hungry cat is put in the cage with food visibly outside the cage. There is a release mechanism inside the cage on which the cat can operate. At first, this hungry cat became restless and started demonstrating random activity so as to escape and get the food. The cat accidentally operated the release mechanism which allowed it to escape and obtain the food. The random activity coupled with the time taken to escape decreased on the subsequent trials. The cat then focused on that part of the release mechanism and operated it whenever it finds itself in the cage.

If a response reduces a need e.g. hunger, then the same stimulus will bring about the same response in future. Therefore, Hull's theory provides an explanation and or a theory on how learning takes place through reinforcement. Hull formulated a number of postulates (or laws) which explained intervening variables essential for learning. According to Hull, learning results from temporal contiguity and reinforcement. Reinforcement is the rewarding state which produces needs reduction or drive reduction. Reinforcements are of two types – primary and secondary. Primary reinforcement reduces the basic physiological needs like hunger and thirst. Secondary reinforcement acquires reinforcement effects through their long association with primary ones.

Hull's fourth postulate is important in explaining learning. He developed the concept of habit strength. The postulate defines the upper limit of the habit strength in terms of relationship between the three variables: the magnitude of need reduction, the time interval between response and reinforcement, and the time interval

between the conditioned stimulus and the response. Hull also suggested inhibitory variables which affect the habit strength. Hull propounded a very rigorous theory of learning.

Relating this theory to the teaching of Social Studies, the main concern of the teacher in one way or the other is learning. The teacher should ensure quick and lasting learning in the learners. The teacher cannot make a learner learn, the learner should be prepared to learn and the teacher should provide appropriate situations for the learner who would learn by reacting in such situations. Such situations, and the group climate of the classroom and the school, help in making learning more effective.

### **Application of Hull's Theory to Classroom Situation**

The application of this theory to classroom situation according to Twining (2001), are as follows:

- (a) The greater the pleasure associated with learning, the more lasting the association or bond formed is.
- (b) Learning should be made meaningful and interesting to learners so that they can form easy “association” between objects and concepts.
- (c) Learning is faster when the learner is motivated. There is a functional interrelationship between motivation and learning. Motivation is the driving force within an organism which brings about a pattern of persistent stimulation for a sustained activity.
- (d) Problem-solving is largely a matter of trying alternatives one after the other until the right response is achieved, and not by use of insight.
- (e) In learning, greater emphasis should be placed on reward than punishment. Punishment is a reduction of the strength of a response by the application of an aversive stimulus.

- (f) Frequency and recency is highly relevant to the classroom practice. Repetition helps to fix learning materials in learners, and revision provides useful aid to recall; the more recent the revision, the more vivid the recall of the materials learnt.

### **Reinforcement**

Reinforcement is any stimulus which increases the likelihood that a response will be repeated. Reinforcement can come in form of food, praise, smile, etc. but the fact still remains that if response is followed by reinforcement, response is more likely to occur again. Primary positive reinforcement are stimuli which when added to a situation, strengthen the probability of an operant response e.g. food, water or money. In other words, things that promote performance are positive reinforcers. On the contrary, negative reinforcement is a stimulus which when withdrawn from a situation strengthens the probability of an operant response e.g. loud noise, extreme heat or cold, electric shock or other unpleasant stimuli.

Different schedules of reinforcement are available to show the strength of learned behaviour. Schedule of reinforcement is how often and how predictably reinforcement occurs. Continuous reinforcement is a schedule where reinforcement is provided after every correct response. Intermittent reinforcement refers to cases where reinforcement is administered at intervals. According to Banyard and Grayson (2000), this can be divided into four (4) types:

- (1) Fixed Ratio: This is when a learner is reliably expecting reinforcement after a fixed number of correct responses, for example when a learner is reinforced, after say 5<sup>th</sup> response; we refer to this as a fixed ratio 5 schedule.
- (2) Variable Ratio: Here the number of correct response will not be regular unlike fixed ratio. In this case,

reinforcement may be given to the learner in two out of five responses. Here the learner cannot reliably predict when he will be reinforced.

- (3) Fixed Interval: In this case, time is the deciding factor and not the number of responses made. If the fixed interval is two minutes, reinforcement will be given for the next correct response after the fixed interval of two minutes. No reinforcement will be given for any number of responses within the time lag of two minutes until new response is made after the time lag.
- (4) Variable Interval: The time lag for which reinforcement is given for correct responses varies from one trial to the next.

The relevance of this review to the teaching and learning of Social Studies is that learning can be ensured through increased reinforcement which may develop needs or make the learner focused. This would generate in the learner a strong and continuous desire to learn from the situation. The teacher will be better to take steps to increase reinforcement, the systematic rewarding of desirable, positive behaviour would increase the frequency of such behaviour while the systematic withholding of reward or issuance of punishment after an undesirable negative behavior decreases or weakens such behaviour.

### **Thorndike Theory of Reinforcement**

Edward Lee Thorndike (1874 – 1949) propounded the stimulus-response bond psychology of learning. He performed well-known experiments with cats; he placed a young, lively and hungry cat in a cage and put a piece of fish outside. He observes plenty of action which the cat performed. It pushed its claws through the bars, bit the bars and touched the button which held the cage door, the door swung open and the cat got out.

Banyard and Grayson (2000) explained that Thorndike repeated the experiment several times to watch the behaviour of the animal over the course of a number of successive trial and error activities until the total time required by the cat to get out of the cage and eat the highly scented fish decreased. Eventually the cat learnt to escape immediately without random activity. From this time, behaviour of the cat inferred that learning was as a result of experience.

Thorndike explained learning here as resulted from movements made at random, movements which are tried as possible ways of getting out of the box, but which are wrong movements for this purpose. Such trial-and-error movements also included one movement which is the successful movement. Each movement involved some kind of connection. When there is no desired effect, the connection is weakened. However, the connection of the movement which is able to bring forth the desired response is strengthened. It is strengthened because it brings about the desired effect. This is learning-strengthening of the connection of the response or set of responses made as trials.

From this experiment, Thorndike identifies three laws which are of practical value to learning. They are law of effect, law of exercise and law of readiness. The law of effect says task or activity that leads to success or satisfaction will strengthen the stimulus response connection while the one that leads to failure and discomfort will weaken the association. From the Thorndike experiments the cat escapes from the cage to eat the food when it operates the release mechanism and then feels satisfied. The feeling of comfort increases the likelihood that subsequent behaviour will occur. In short, behavior which is followed by reward or success will tend to be repeated, whereas, behaviour which is not rewarded will tend to die away.

The second law of exercise states that the establishment of the S-R connection became stronger through repetition. In trial and error learning practices is required so as to become habit when it is automatic. The law of readiness states that the organism must be matured and mentally ready to perform the task before it. Here, Thorndike's cat was motivated through hunger before it could effectively manipulate its environment.

This theory has much to offer to education. Teacher strives to develop significant relational patterns. This can be done through proper planning of lessons, providing significant experiences to learner and integrating theory and practice.

#### **Application of the Thorndike's Theory to Classroom Situation**

The application of this theory to classroom situation according to Twining (2001), are as follows:

- (a) Reinforcement in form of award and encouragement goes a long way to maintain and approve behaviours. In the school situation, secondary reinforcements like praise, nodding of the head in approval of behaviors and award of marks are more suitable than tangible primary awards.
- (b) Again in both institution and national life, approved behaviour can be sustained and inspired through certificates of commendation, certificates of merit, testimonials, and the award of institutional or national honors to the learners or deserving persons.
- (c) It is not every single performance that should be awarded or reinforced as this will lead to monotony and loss of effectiveness. Reward should

therefore be given selectively and intermittently.

### **Conclusion**

The process or mechanism of learning cannot be observed directly. Instead, the evidence that learning had taken place can be inferred from a change in the individual's performance. The change may manifest in behaviour which is seen as gains or having survival or adaptive values to the individual. Learning is a relatively enduring change in behaviour that is a function of prior behaviour (usually called practice). Teaching should be made interesting, so that learner will derive satisfaction from it and wish to learn voluntarily.

The Hull's theory of learning and Thorndike's theory of reinforcement therefore strongly support the use of reinforcement in teaching-learning situation and that punishment is less effective in achieving and maintaining a desired behavior in learners.

### **Recommendations**

Learners need reinforcement, either consciously aware of it or not. Reinforcement is the reason for continuing to do things, even as adults, we look for positive reinforcement to extend our motivation to do things. It was therefore recommended that for effective teaching and learning of Social Studies concepts in secondary schools, teachers should be considerate of the age and stage of the student and individual differences and need i.e. some students are extremely self-conscious and do not want attention drawn to themselves while others are the other way round. Also, reinforcement should be provided immediately after the behavior has occurred, it should be provided frequently and delivered with enthusiasm. Furthermore, reinforcement should be varied enough to maintain interest delivered continuously at first, and then more intermittently later on. Lastly, reinforcement can happen on a fixed schedule (e.g. every time a behavior is observed or every third time a behavior is observed) or on a variable schedule (e.g. randomly given on the first response, then the fourth, then the second, but averaged to a predetermined number).

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