USE OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS IN SOCIAL STUDIES: IMPACT ON STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATIONS IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract: The research investigated how Social Studies is taught with regard to the use of instructional materials and how they impact student’s performance especially during the Botswana Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE). The study contends that the manner in which students are taught in Social Studies eventually negatively impacts on the goal of teaching students to become vibrant and active citizens. The study was carried out in Lobatse South East Inspectoral Area, Lobatse, Botswana, which comprises of primary school teachers who have been trained to specialize in the teaching of one subject and in some instances there are no subject specialists. This qualitative research used interviews, participant-observation and a questionnaire to collect data. The results of the study reveal that there is absolute need for teachers to change their teaching approaches. There is also need for the Social Studies PSLE to be conducted both theoretically and practically so that students can have some hands-on experiences on matters which are directly related to the concept of citizens’ active engagement in the democratic process.

Key words: Social studies, citizenship education, democracy, instructional materials

INTRODUCTION

The conception of Citizenship Education in Botswana is driven by Social Studies which is a subject taught from primary and secondary school all the way to tertiary education. The Social Studies content focuses on topics which are central to the development of a citizen to participate actively in the democratic process. However, over the years there has been evidence that some of the students in certain regions do not do well in Social Studies during the PSLE.
The report of the summary of 2007 PSLE results by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development shows that students did not perform well in Social Studies as compared to previous years which raised some alarm amongst the educators. The report states:

Overall there is deterioration in performance at grade A-C compared to 2005 and 2006 (79.6, 77.2 and 72.9% respectively). The percentages of A and B grades have also gone down compared to the last two years, they are 39.9, 42.5 and 33.9 respectively (p.3).

There is a disturbing decline in categories A-C and A-B. The report further revealed that schools located in town/city councils performed better than those in district councils. Out of all towns in Botswana, Lobatse had the lowest performance. Lobatse Inspectoral Area is made up of eighteen schools, seven in town and eleven in rural areas surrounding Lobatse. The inspectoral area has no record of celebrating national PSLE prize winner’s award and the contention has been that subjects such as Social Studies do negatively impact on the overall performance of the region. The table which follows shows a comparison of Social Studies and Setswana PSLE results in Lobatse Inspectoral Area schools for the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 and the decline on Social Studies performance becomes evident.

Table 1: Analysis of PSLE results for years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
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<td>Peleng West</td>
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S/STUD= Social Studies  SETSW=Setswana


The table above shows an overall disturbing decline of performance in most schools in Social Studies every year. The Principal Education Officer (PEO) of the Inspectoral Area met School Heads on several occasions to discuss issues related to poor performance in Social Studies. Standard seven results for Term two of 2008 indicated that from a total of more than seven hundred (700) students who sat for their Social Studies tests only four (4) obtained A grade, 247 obtained B, while 138 obtained C, 296 D, and 38 obtained an E grade (Minutes-Lobatse Inspectoral Area School Heads’ meeting, 06/08/08). The statistics clearly indicates that indeed there is a problem on students’
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performance, hence the need for this study. The study is very essential since it will help the stakeholders to understand the root cause of the problem and work towards finding a remedy.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Botswana is one of the first African countries to join the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) and adopt Social Studies in her curriculum (Salia-Bao, 2000). According to Merryfield & Mutebu (1991), upon its inception in Mombassa, Kenya, Social Studies was purported to enable every school-going child in Africa to:

- Understand people's interaction with culture, social, and physical environment
- Appreciate home and heritage
- Develop skills and attitudes expected of citizens
- Learn to express ideas in many ways.

According to Mautle in Adeyemi (2000), to achieve the stated purposes, the main focus was on integration of the concepts and orientations of all social science subjects and humanities in the content, making the child the centre of the education process by placing more emphasis on the development of skills and attitudes focusing on the environment so as to connect the child with their communities and countries.

The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (1994) recommended that Social Studies be treated as a core subject in Junior Secondary Schools so as to give every child an opportunity to learn aspects of citizenship participation and nation building; social responsibility; dedication to one’s work and developing empathy to others (Curriculum Development & Evaluation, 1996). The aim of Social Studies is to prepare our students to contribute positively towards the construction of a just society. In this case, as Martorella (1994) observes, teachers should select the subject matter that would enable students to construct knowledge that will be useful in their roles as functional citizens in our society whose morality is in line with citizenship in as far as displaying values which respect the rule of law.

As such, in order to make Social Studies teaching and learning meaningful and interesting, teachers need to employ a variety of instructional materials and teaching methods which Adeyemi (2000) charge that they are indispensable for the study of Social Studies. He believes that the most appropriate learning takes place when the learner is in control and dominating sessions in the teaching-learning process. In a sense, in the process of teaching Social Studies, the educator is supposed to use some democratic child-centered educational practices which will enable them to autonomously redefine themselves as well as their own world.

Contrary to the objectives of citizenship education and pragmatic learner-centered pedagogies, a study by Motsewakgosi (1996) reveals that Social Studies teaching in Botswana is characterized by activities where pupils are rarely given a chance to explore, discover, investigate, interview or even discuss issues critically. This is not surprising since most of the Social Studies teachers did not receive training in teaching Social Studies. Such teachers often encounter problems in teaching Social Studies because they do not have the pedagogic exposure to facilitating Social Studies classes from a pragmatic dimension.

Statement of the Problem

The major goal of Social Studies is Citizenship Education which is about educating citizens to be able to confront problematic situations in life with confidence. In other words, Social Studies is supposed to teach students to become functional problem-solving citizens. Its primary purpose is to help young learners to develop the ability to
make reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse democratic society in an independent world (Garcia & Michaelis, 2001). Important as Social Studies is, students continue to perform very poorly in Social Studies as evidenced by the annual PSLE results from 2004-2008. If students fail Social Studies at primary school level, the implication is that they will lack the foundation for Citizenship Education as citizens of Botswana. This will negatively impact on the students’ individual self-realization which would make them fail to utilize their unique talents and potentials in contributing towards the construction of a sustainable democracy.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to find out how the use of instructional materials in Social Studies affects students’ performance. The study investigated how the teachers’ use of instructional materials impacts on the learners’ understanding and performance in Social Studies in PSLE.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What Instructional Materials are used in the teaching of Social Studies?
2. How do the Instructional Materials used in Social Studies affect Students Performance?
3. What are the teacher’s attitudes towards the use of Instructional Materials in the teaching of Social Studies?
4. 

**Significance of the Study**

The study will serve as feedback to the education sector especially the departments of Teacher Training and Development and Curriculum and Evaluation. The study will influence policy formulation pertaining to the training of Social Studies teachers in future. Teachers will also be aided on the efficient use of instructional materials to reach across diverse learners in the teaching-learning process.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Instructional Materials in Social Studies**

A resourceful instruction needs to give all students the opportunity to grasp the content taught at a time. The production of well-informed citizens who will be useful to their respective local communities and nations is the ultimate goal of Social Studies. For instance, Barr et. al. (1999) considers Social Studies to be the integration of experience and knowledge concerning human relations for the purpose of Citizenship Education. Savage & Armstrong (2004) also contend that citizenship is a key element and a major justification for Social Studies education, so it is expected that a good Citizenship Education programme will produce young people who will leave school with a disposition to become actively involved in public affairs and contribute fundamentally to social progress.

Howe & Marshall (1999) believe that Social Studies is the only subject area which has Citizenship Education as its primary concern. Their main argument is that Social Studies is one of the few subject areas which has an explicit objective and focus on the development of interpersonal skills needed by a citizen in a democratic society.

Parker (2000) notes that the Social Studies teacher has a responsibility to include controversial issues and current events in the curriculum. Parker believes that students need to study issues on which there are some disagreements so as to practice analyzing problems; gathering and organizing facts; discriminating between facts and opinions; discussing differing viewpoints and drawing tentative conclusions. Dube (2009) says exposing students to
controversial issues in their studies enables them to develop the capacity for ethical and moral reasoning so that they become critically reflective thinkers. The Social Studies classroom should therefore focus on using instructional materials which will help mold students into developing a democratic character.

Servey (1981) reveals that teachers do not use instructional materials that cater for different learning abilities of learners. Servey followed and observed a single school for a period of a year to find out if they used productive instructional materials for teaching Social Studies. The findings show that instructional materials used by teachers did not meet learners’ needs in terms of their level of skills. No two individuals learn exactly the same way; the most appropriate means to learning appears to be highly individualistic and is directly related to the type of learning desired. Moreover, Jarolimek (1982) found that teachers, more especially at elementary level, continue to struggle with the problem of providing adequately for the diverse interests, talents, and abilities known to exist between and among members of the class groups.

Homana, Barber, & Torney-Purta (2006) have identified several pedagogies which offer possibilities for teaching Citizenship Education. They include:

*The Discovery-Inquiry Approach:* It is prevalent in traditional humanities programs like history. The discovery-inquiry approach insists upon a sequence of problem solving: the identification and understanding of the problem; the formulation of hypotheses; the collection of data; the classification and analysis of data; synthesis and conclusion. In Botswana, the situation is the direct opposite. A study by Motsewakgosi (1996) shows that the most common method of teaching Social Studies is the transmission approach where students are fed with facts and figures which make them passive recipients of information.

*Deliberative Approaches to Democratic Citizenship Education:* It is about political decision-making that relies on popular consultation in policy making. Its theorists argue that legitimate lawmaking can arise only through public deliberation. It adopts elements of direct and representative democracy. Many scholars in the area of citizenship education take deliberative approaches to democracy. The approach emphasizes democracy in the classroom; the democratization of campuses; debating societies; legal and human rights education; and mock parliaments (Arthur & Wright, 2004). Therefore Social Studies should be seen to be education for social reform—whereby learners learn through experimental problem-solving which enables them to learn from their mistakes.

*Critical Thinking Approach:* Critical thinking is the basis for a democratic society and it is an important goal of Citizenship Education. Few studies have demonstrated that Social Studies students taught by reflective approach performed better in achievement tests than those taught using the lecture approach. In a study to investigate the relative effectiveness of the reflective and the lecture approaches, Adeyemi (1992) in Adeyemi (2000) found that the scores of the students in the reflective approach are statistically different from those of the students of the lecture approach method after the post-test. So in the process of teaching, educators should use approaches which promote problem-solving skills.

*Producing Critical Thinkers through Critical Pedagogy*

In a reflective activist pedagogy of freedom, Freire (1997) favors the autonomy of the student, responsibility for one's action in the world, and a universal human ethic that is lived in pedagogical practice. Teachers need to develop critical thinking in pupils by placing emphasis on pupils seeing the correctness of ideas and concepts.

Mautle in Adeyemi (2000) states that skills cannot be taught through telling learners about skills that are appropriate in given situations without learners being placed in situations where they can practice those skills. Further, Mautle suggests that Botswana Social Studies teachers need to break from the teacher exposition mode and appreciate that theirs is not a subject that can achieve its curriculum goals through transmission of facts. They should employ methods that are learner-centered.

*Teaching Citizenship in Social Studies*

One way in which Social Studies can achieve the goal of Citizenship Education is by helping students acquire the skills (thinking, study, political, and social) necessary for functioning in today’s increasingly complex and global environment. According to Jotia (2006), every government has to take initiatives to inculcate democratic values in
its citizens from an early age. He opines that, for African governments to develop strong democracies that are going
to support sustainable development, food production and employment, they need to implement democratic curricular
so that the civil society can be exposed to democratic participation at an early stage. Through Social Studies,
children are expected to learn and understand the meaning of democracy and the importance of decision-making and
participation.

**Poor Performance at Primary School Leaving Examinations**

The Botswana Examination Council (BEC) released the 2008 PSLE results on November 2008 which showed a
drastic drop compared to 2007 (*Botswana Daily News*, November, 2008). It also notes that schools under city/town
councils performed better than those in district councils except for Lobatse Town Council, which dropped from
position five to seven while South East District rose to position five. Furthermore, it highlights that the proportion of
candidates at Grade C also dropped from the previous year's 39% to 36.1% in 2008. In addition, the release
explained that Lobatse Town Council had the highest decline by 7.5%. The statistics therefore attests to the fact that
there is a problem in the manner in which Social Studies is taught and in order for change to take place, there is
absolute need for a pedagogic paradigm shift.

**METHODOLOGY**

The nature of this study necessitated the use of the qualitative approach. Qualitative research methodology seeks
answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings (Berg,
2004). Jotia (2008) indicates that qualitative research enables the researcher to explore, examine and analyze his or
her environment so as to get answers pertaining to the study. Further, Huberman & Miles (1994) charge that because
qualitative research focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, it gives researchers the
opportunity to have strong handle on what real life is like. The research involved the use of semi-structured
interviews, participant-observation as well as a questionnaire as means of data collection.

**PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

**Teachers and the Social Studies Teaching Philosophy**

When asked about their teaching philosophy, teachers who did not receive special training on Social Studies
indicated that they were not aware of any special ways of teaching Social Studies. One teacher in Peleng West said:

> I don't think there is need to take time to prepare for Social Studies, I just follow the norm of lecture
> and notes. After all the new syllabus came with textbooks which furnished us with all the information we
> need. We are very fortunate.

A teacher at Bothakga said:

> I don't have a teaching philosophy. Social Studies, is taught just like any other subject. Besides,
> I teach it because it is part of my work load and I know I will soon take another subject and leave it.

This is not surprising because teachers in primary schools take turns to teach subjects whether they are specialists in
the area or not. One concerned teacher from Digawana indicated that she was trained twenty-seven years ago and
had never been revived on teaching methods. The teacher further expressed ignorance on subjects having differing
teaching methods. To her teaching is just teaching and subjects are the same, it is only that some deal with numbers
while others deal with texts. She noted; “to me Social Studies is just like Mathematics, I have never thought it has an
important goal to achieve. I just follow the norm of talk and chalk which to me is the easiest and simplest way of
teaching Social Studies.”

According to Zevin (2007), good teachers have aims for teaching, they lead and guide their students and do not do the work for them. A teacher from Maitlamo who had a pronounced teaching philosophy said:

Social Studies is not easy to teach as people think. I use child-centered methods and lots of instructional materials to help students understand the content better. This helps them retain information learnt and be able to recall during tests and examinations.

It is very important for students to be aware of the fact that the teacher is not the sole provider of information. Searching for information makes students curious to learn about issues, more especially current and controversial events emerging in their societies. A different philosophy which spelt out the methods used was given by another Maitlamo teacher who said:

I have been teaching Social Studies for the past twelve years. I always give my students the opportunity to experience the world through field trips. I also give them problem solving activities to help them become rational thinkers. I also give them small projects to help them become good communicators. They write reports on the projects they do. To me doing so helps empower them.

The effectiveness of the teacher is reflected in the students’ outcomes from an assessment given to them and in most cases having a teaching philosophy does make a big difference when it comes to strategizing for teaching. Grawley & Stephens (1994) believe that teachers with a teaching philosophy can be very effective as they know their subject; they are able to teach it, run an orderly learning environment, and assess and record their students’ progress.

Improper use of methodologies for teaching Social Studies as expressed by teachers during the interviews can seriously deter the achievement of the goals of citizenship education. According to White (2000), the methods selected by teachers in the classroom should be part of what is expected of them as part of the society. White contends:

For students to be participating members of a society, they need to be participants in the classroom. This is not a goal easily reached in traditional teacher-centered, authoritarian classroom ... we cannot teach participation through passivity. Part of the solution is in the teaching methods (p.216).

Teaching methods, as main determinants of a good teaching environment can either enhance or impair the intended teaching objective achievement. Passivity can lead students to becoming very lazy dependents who always look out to the teacher to provide all the knowledge.

Problems and challenges facing the effective teaching of Social Studies

Social Studies seem to be clouded with problems and challenges which deter its effective teaching and learning. During the interviews with teachers, generally four problems emerged. These include; shortage of instructional materials, congested syllabus, lack of funds for educational excursions, and shortage of specialists.

- Shortage of materials

When asked to comment on the adequacy of instructional materials, teachers reported acute shortage of teaching resources. A teacher from Peleng West indicated that there was general shortage of teaching resources such as maps and books. A comment from a teacher at Digawana indicated that even if the materials could be availed, they are not enough to cover the syllabus. A teacher in Lejwana complained that they do not have enough materials although resources such as radio are provided but with no source of power to operate them since there is no electricity or even batteries in the school. According to her, students suffer as they end up falling into victims of such negligence and consequently perform poorly.

Killen (2006) has made the same observation on the shortage of instructional materials in schools by indicating that; “the issue of resources may not be easy to resolve, but the important thing is that teachers should not use lack of resources as an excuse for not teaching well (p.276).” The implication here is that alternatives are out there and teachers should refrain from being solely dependent on the local council for ready-made materials, they should reach out for local materials and improvise whenever need arises.
• **Congested syllabus**

Teachers expressed concern that the upper primary school Social Studies syllabus is so congested such that they are not able to complete the objectives before the students can sit for PSLE. As an attempt to make a balance between the congested syllabus and limited time, a teacher from Bothakga explained:

This leaves us rushing through the objectives and end up giving notes to save time. This implies that we compromise the use of instructional materials under the pretext that we are saving time. This leaves us with no choice but to complete the syllabus with too many objectives in a short period of time.

One teacher in Peleng West further complained that despite having the congested syllabus, the final year is very short. He further indicated that “in order to catch up with time for examinations, we skip most of the objectives that we think might waste our time. Since we are always alone in our classrooms, the administrators will never notice that.” The congested syllabus leads to the use of teacher-centered methods of teaching which compromises active participation by the learner.

• **Funds for educational excursions**

Educational excursions help bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world and provide students with real life situations. School Heads and teachers equally mentioned lack of funds for educational trips as one of the major challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of Social Studies. This also contributes to poor performance.

• **Shortage of Social Studies specialists**

The Social Studies teachers interviewed revealed that they are teaching the subject because they do not have any choices. Only three teachers from the whole sample are Social Studies specialists which mean that some schools do not have a single specialist which ultimately affects students since they are taught by unqualified Social Studies educators.

**School Heads on the use of Instructional Materials in Teaching Social Studies**

Generally, School Heads expressed concern over the degree at which instructional materials were used in their schools. Almost all School Heads expressed uneasiness on the harm caused by shortage of instructional materials which was mentioned as one of the challenges facing the effectiveness of Social Studies. A solid example given by the School Heads was that they are asked to make a requisition which includes all materials which the school regard as best for teaching and learning and yet they are never supplied with them.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The problem of low performance in Lobatse Inspectoral Area has a long history. It is even evidenced by the analysis of annual PSLE especially those for the period 2006, 2007 and 2008. The analysis of 2008 PSLE results indicate that Lobatse region schools’ performance has drastically dropped with the highest decline of 7.5%. The decline of performance in Social Studies indicates that more has to be done to help Social Studies produce desired citizens in our society. Different teaching philosophies provided by teachers revealed that they do not use instructional materials which could help equip students with critical thinking skills. Teachers reported that since they did not receive any special training in teaching Social Studies, they remain clinched to the talk and chalk method which denies students the opportunity to think critically.

Observations made on several teaching sessions further revealed that students were fed with information and the methodologies used did not give them the opportunity to gather information outside the classroom. So basically the teaching-learning process is dominated by the teacher which negatively affects students’ involvement in the learning process which affects their performance in the final examinations.

A teacher at Peleng West indicated that lack of teaching resources was a cause for concern:
The inadequacy of instructional materials and lack of educational excursions leaves us with no choice but to use instructional materials some of which do not suit the intellectual level of the students. For instance, instead of visiting a dam, we usually show students two dimensional pictures which most students never conceptualize.

Lack of use of appropriate materials for the intellectual level of the students denies them active participation in their learning. Jotia (2006) has observed this and posits that, “lack of student involvement in the teaching process makes teachers the subjects of the learning process while students are dissolved to the level of objects that are just receiving deposits and their critical awareness is compromised” (p.92). Teachers should bear in mind that the effective teaching of Social Studies which can help them achieve the goals of Citizenship Education is learnt through participating, doing, and experiencing.

It was also declared during the site observations that some instructional materials were not used because of lack of power to operate them. During the interviews, one concerned Lejwana teacher relayed:

Radio lessons are part of the day-to-day Social Studies teaching but students never receive such programmes. We have long been supplied with radios and were supplied with batteries only once. We cannot even play the recorded cassettes. These programmes are very important as they were made in accordance with the syllabus objectives.

Some teachers articulated that they have computers but none of them have skills to use them to benefit Social Studies students. In most cases such materials are distributed to schools but consequently become white elephants.

In summary, the key issues which could be directly linked to students’ poor performance in Social Studies include among others, improper use of instructional materials; lack of specialization in the teaching of Social Studies; lack of funds for educational excursions which produces negative attitude or reluctance towards teaching the subject. There is also a problem of congested Social Studies syllabus which leaves teachers with no choice but to drill students for the examinations. Teaching to the test is the main impediment to training empowered and active citizens.

CONCLUSION

Successful Citizenship Education in Botswana lies within the parameters of an effective Social Studies instruction. Botswana needs active citizens who are able to participate in her democratic process. In order for Social Studies teachers to succeed in achieving the goals of Citizenship Education, there is need to use instructional materials and methodologies which encourage students’ active participation in learning. The study reveals that the use of instructional materials for teaching primary school students in Botswana is very insufficient. Eventually teachers use shortage of teaching resources as an excuse for low performance of students in Social Studies. Social Studies is effectively learnt through pragmatic experiences and it should also be tested through some practical work. All in all, the findings of this study indicate that teachers, whether specialists or not, need to be trained on best methodologies for teaching Social Studies which can accommodate the diversity of their learners. Failure to revisit the manner in which Social Studies is being taught, as well as the failure to ameliorate the problem of shortage of instructional materials, could perpetually affect the PSLE results in Social Studies hence negatively affecting the aims and goals of Citizenship Education.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX A**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS**

1. Could you generally speak to me regarding your philosophy in the teaching of Social Studies?
2. To what extent do you see your philosophy aligned to the concept of Citizenship Education in Social Studies?
3. What instructional materials do you use in the teaching of Social Studies?
4. What role do you see those instructional materials playing in as far as helping the learners to understand content? Explain
5. Please, speak to me about learners’ performance given the instructional materials you use.
6. Do you think you have enough instructional materials for teaching Social Studies? Please Explain
7. Under what circumstances in the teaching of Social Studies can you say your learners learn better or show excitement in the learning of Social Studies?
8. Do you think Social Studies is achieving its goals of Citizenship Education?

**APPENDIX B**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCHOOL HEADS**

*Tick the appropriate answer*

SCHOOL:

SEX: [M] [F]

AGE in years: 30-35[ ] 36-40[ ] 41-45[ ] 46-50[ ] 51-55[ ] 56 and above [ ]

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION: Primary Teaching Certificate PTC [ ]

Diploma in Primary Education DPE [ ]
Bachelor of Education     BED [  ]
Masters Degree in Education     MED [  ]

OTHER (Specify)______________

EXPERIENCE AS SCHOOL HEAD (in years): 0-5[  ] 6-10[  ] 11-15[ ] 16-20[ ] 21-25[ ] 26 and above[ ]

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as a major hurdle or problem to the effective teaching of Social Studies in your school?
2. Generally, how is the use of instructional materials in the teaching of Social Studies in your school?
3. What is your opinion regarding the attitudes of teachers towards the use of instructional materials?
4. Speak to me regarding the Social Studies results in your school between the years 2004-2008. What do these results mean to you or what message do you think they are relaying?
5. Do you think Social Studies is achieving its major goal of Citizenship Education? Explain.
6. What are some of the challenges teachers face regarding the effective teaching of Social Studies?