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## Full Length Research Paper

# PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF BEHAVIOURAL OBJECTIVES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

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### Abstract

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This study investigated the effect of providing students with the behavioural objectives of a lesson before the actual lesson delivery on their achievement and retention in social studies in Obudu, of Cross River State, Nigeria. The quasi-experiment pre-test, post-test control groups design was used for the study. The sample consisted of 600 JSS 3 students and 40 teachers, these were divided into two groups, experimental and control groups. The instrument for data collection was lesson plan on social studies achievement test (SSAT) which was used as pre-test and post-test. All conditions in the two groups were the same except that the behavioural objectives of each of the lessons were provided to the experimental group prior to commencement. A pre-test was given at the beginning of the lessons. Two weeks after the post-test, the same test was administered to measure the students' retention ability. Data so collected was analyzed using the t-test and analysis for variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 alpha levels. The result indicated that the experimental group performed significantly better and had a longer retention level than the control group. Conclusions were drawn and recommendations made for improving the teaching of social studies.

**Keywords:** Behavioural, Objectives, Lessons, Provided, Experimental, Commencement.

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## INTRODUCTION

The search for effective teaching and learning is long standing. Teachers and curriculum experts have been into different ways for planning effective teaching and learning. This is because; the overall effectiveness of the teachers depends largely on the outcome of learning. That is to say that the success or failure of the teacher depends on what the learner is able to achieve at the end of instructions. Quite recently, an increased amount of attention has been given to the statement of education objectives in behavioural terms both to facilitate evaluation of educational programmes and to improve the validity of the measures and scales utilized in the evaluation process. Despite these efforts, many teachers seem not to take educational objectives seriously in the process of teaching. Besides, teachers in Nigeria are perceived not to have done particularly much in terms of utilizing statements of specific behavioural objectives as pre-instructional strategy. Lawal (2004) notes that learning is the goal of instruction and if this instruction is not presented in a planned and systematic manner, students will not learn anything. Some other authorities in curriculum and psychology suggest a number of other strategies that can facilitate learning.

Some of such strategies include providing learners with immediate knowledge of results of his efforts in class work, reinforcement, presenting learners with statements of behavioural objectives and study questions prior to instruction (Ortiz, 1990). The performance of students in Junior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (JSSCE) in Cross River State has remained significantly poor (Ajagun, 2002). In fact, a survey of the performance of students in Cross River State over the years reveals a discernable decline (Ojerinder, 1998). This decline persists inspite of the various improved instructional materials and strategies used. This phenomenon has remained a source of concern to social studies educators and education experts (Nnaka and Anaekwe, 2004). It is possible that these various improved instructional materials and methods have failed to improve on the performance of students in social studies because they are explosive and are therefore not usually implemented. It is also possible that even where these materials and methods are used, they still fail to yield results because students are not usually told before the lesson what they are expected to learn. It is widely believed that informing learners prior to instruction, of the behavioural objectives to be achieved from lessons enhances learning. But despite the vast literature on the effect of this strategy on

students' achievement, the result of the empirical studies done to investigate it is generally inconclusive. This is because; they do not provide enough evidence for conclusions to be made. For example, some researchers (Ajagun, 2002), Ojerinde, 1998; Eneogwe, (1996); & Ogunbesan, (1994) have reported that there was no significant difference between the performance of students informed with behavioural objectives before the lesson and the performance of those not informed. On the other hand, researchers like Regbubir (1999) Guat (2002), Nnaka (2004) and Draper (2001) have established that there is a significant difference in the performance of the two groups. Mkpa (1981) adds that a significant difference in retention did exist between the two groups in favour of the group that had prior knowledge of the behavioural objectives.

The issue of poor academic performance of students in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions is of great concern to parents, school proprietors, educators and the public in general. The performance of students in Junior secondary school (JSS), especially, in social studies has remained consistently poor. In fact, a survey of the performance in social studies in recent times reveals a discernable decline (Kesimba, 2004). This decline persist inspite of improved instructional materials and strategies used. It is possible, that these various improved instructional materials and methods have failed to achieve the desired results in improved performance in social studies.

The general decline in achievement of students in social studies manifests in the learners' failure to comprehend the core subject matter or content learned, and in their inability to read and understand questions asked or instructions given during examinations. This situation has contributed greatly to the frustration of teachers, who complain incessantly that their painstaking instructional efforts are not yielding the expected learning results. The students themselves no longer have confidence in their ability to understand, apply and reproduce what they have studied, resulting to cheating at examination as measures to cover up their academic capabilities. Emphasis has been placed previously on the use of instructional materials and effective methods to reverse this trend, but with little or no positive result. It is in the light of this that the researcher investigated if prior knowledge of behavioural objectives has any effect on students' achievement and performance in social studies.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The broad purpose of this study was to determine the effects of prior knowledge of behavioural objectives on JSS 3 students' achievement in social studies. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out if there existed any significant difference in the achievement of students who had prior knowledge of specific behavioural objectives and those who did not.
2. Also, determine any significant difference in achievement level of male and female students who had prior knowledge of behavioural objectives.
3. Find out if students presented with statements of specific behavioural objectives prior to instruction retain more of the learned materials than those who were not exposed.

4. Determine if within each of the achievement levels (high, medium and low), the presentation of behavioural objectives has effect on students' achievement.

### **Conceptualization**

Statement of behavioural objectives occupies a premier position in the educative process. It is a major factor that determines the success or failure of the teachers and learners in the learning process. The teacher is advised to define objectives in behavioural terms. According to Freeman (2009), an effective way to break longer goals down into smaller units is to define and set behavioural objectives. Behavioural objectives are the smaller, observable, and measurable intermediate goals that build in a stepwise fashion, toward the completion of the broader long-term goal that is often more complicated and comprehensive. Behavioural objectives that are stated in observable and measurable terms help goal setters understand whether the strategies they are using to achieve their goal are resulting in change or whether they need to modify their efforts to improve the likelihood of accomplishing the desired outcome.

Behavioural objectives in classroom setting have to do with goals that a teacher set to ensure that students are learning and experiencing academic success. Teachers and students are therefore more successful when those goals they set are realistic, achievable, are publicly stated rather than private internal commitments, include deadlines and include feedback on progress over time. Teachers use behavioural objectives to guide and improve classroom instruction for groups of students, manage classroom social behaviours, and support individual students in need of more intensive social and academic instruction (Maag, 2004). The development of educational goals and behavioural objectives in a classroom setting in an important element for facilitating behaviour change resulting from instructional process. Therefore, presenting learners with statements of behavioural objectives would direct learners' attention to what is important in the upcoming learning session; highlight relationship among ideas that will be presented and remind learners of relevant information they already have concerning the incoming material (Folk, 2001). By presenting a global representation of the knowledge to be learned, exposure of students to behavioural objectives prior to be instructed, acting as advance organizers, might foster integrative reconciliation of the sub-domains of knowledge. That is, ability to understand interconnections among the basic concept in the domain. This strategy, therefore, help to place some clues and general ideas at the beginning of a lesson and progresses to more structured and detailed information.

A well set behavioural objective should have the following elements, according to Alberto & Troutman (1999):

- Person(s) for whom the objective is written (the learner),
- Behaviour targeted for change
- Conditions under which a behaviour will be performed;
- Criteria for determining when the acceptable performance of behaviour occurs.

The person(s) for whom the objective is written can be an individual person or a group of individuals. It is imperative that the learner be identified. It could be a student, a classroom or a group of individuals. Once this is done, the behaviour targeted for change must clearly be defined in behavioural terms that can be observed and measured. An effective and clear definition of the desired behaviour ensures that an outside observer will be able to confirm that the targeted behaviour has occurred.

The conditions under which a behaviour will be performed or changed is also important. The circumstances identified in the behavioural objectives as important elements in the context in which a behaviour should be performed must be sufficiently detailed to allow a teaching/learning context to be provided. Statements must finally define the minimal performance necessary to consider a behavioural response correct and sets a standard for evaluation purposes. This means that another information necessary in an effective behavioural objective must be statements of the criteria for acceptable performance of the targeted behaviour.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population of this study comprised of all Junior Secondary School (JSS 3) students located in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State of Nigeria. This included, Obudu, Obanliku, Bekwarra, Ogoja and Yala Local Government Areas. The sample of the study was 600 JSS 3 social studies students and forty (40) teachers located in twenty (20) grant-aided secondary schools in the study area. These students were given a pre-test through a standardized teacher made Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT). From their scores, two (2) equivalent groups of three hundred (300) students each were drawn and used as experimental and control groups. In each of the schools selected, thirty (30) students were randomly sampled (using simple random sampling) and assigned into the two (2) groups. Each sampled school represented a group where classes were held. A population of fifteen (15) students per class and a total of thirty (30) students per school were drawn; making it a total of six hundred (600) students.

The main instrument used for the study was the social studies Achievement Test (SSAT) and instructional guide designed by the researchers to determine:

- The pre-learning knowledge of the students on the topics that would be taught during the study;
- The achievement of all the students at the end of the experiment;

The achievement test consisted of a five-option, 50 item question from the lessons taught to test the performance of those who were exposed and those not exposed to specific behavioural objectives. A marking scheme was prepared and each correct option attracted two points. The lessons and achievement tests covered such areas as citizenship education, settlement patterns, culture, marriage, family, concept of status, leadership and transportation.

The test items in these areas were drawn based on Bloom's taxonomy of Educational objectives in the area of knowledge, comprehension and application only for the purpose of this

study. All the students in JSS 3 offering social studies in the sample schools were given a pre-test. Those students, who scored 49 and below were placed in the lower ability level, termed lower achievers. Those that had scores from 50-69 were placed in the medium ability level, termed medium achievers, while those that scored 70 and above were termed high achievers. Adapting the classification on level of achievement by Ohuche and Obioma (1987) and Iheagwam (1988) in Kesimba & Esunra (2004). This categorization was used and was necessary in dividing the students into the two groups of experimental and control groups. This enabled the researchers to have equal number of students from each achievement level in all groups. It also avoided a situation where one group has advantage over the other.

Before the post test was administered, lesson plan was developed and taught from the eight units of topics mentioned. Specific behavioural objectives directly referenced from Bloom's cognitive taxonomy using action verbs were constructed. These specific behavioural objectives were exposed to the experimental groups only, while the control groups were not given the specific objectives prior to the lesson. The experimental groups and control groups both received a total of 16 lessons from the eight topics. These lessons lasted for three (3) terms (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>) of 5 weeks each. At the end of the instructions, the post-test was administered to obtain the achievement scores. The lessons and test were carried out by qualified social studies teachers in their various schools.

The questions in the achievement test served as the retention test. The retention tests were parallel test where the questions and options were restructured to avoid test wise ups. Two (2) weeks after the post-test were administered; the retention test was also administered to both groups. This was done to determine the retention capability of the learners. The data so obtained from all the tests administered were analyzed to establish significant differences. The independent t-test and the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first purpose of the study was to find out if there existed any significant difference in the achievement of students who had prior knowledge of specific behavioural objectives and those who did not have. From the analysis of the results, students who were shown behavioural objectives prior to the lesson performed significantly higher than those who were not shown. This finding is in agreement with Uche and Umoren (1998) who discovered that prior knowledge of learning outcomes enhances students' performance. This finding implies that the students who were presented with behavioural objectives prior to instruction, because they knew what was expected of them to learn, were more focused, organized in their efforts and channeled their energies toward achieving the expected objectives. The control group had no such advantage. They did not have any central points while preparing for the test. No ideas or points to focus on while receiving the lessons. This also is in line with Kesimba's (2004) assertion, that behavioural objectives makes the learner to focus on the issue at hand, the content to be learnt and relevant to the objective. Duel (1994) also expressed the view that performance

improves when students are provided with learning outcomes and how to go about them. He went on to observe that students who receive instruction with prior knowledge of learning outcome have positive correlation with academic achievement. This finding thus reveals that exposing students to behavioural objectives prior to lesson makes the learner alert and attune to be receptive to the new knowledge and to the specific requirements of the subject matter.

The second purpose sought to determine any significant difference in achievement level of male and female students who had prior knowledge of behavioural objectives. It was revealed that there existed a significant difference in achievement level between male and their female counterparts. This finding agrees with that of Abdullahi (2003), which stated that male achievement level was higher than that of female after being subjected to experimental and conventional methods of instruction. Duckworth (1995) also asserts that despite many attempts to liberalize education such that equal opportunities exists for both male and female in a school system, male participation in especially science courses at the terminal secondary school level is generally substantially higher. The findings from the data therefore revealed that male students that were provided with behavioural objectives performed higher than female students who were equally enhanced.

The third purpose of the study sought to find out if students presented with statements of specific behavioural objectives prior to instructions retain more of the learned materials than those who were not exposed. The analysis of the data so collected showed that there is a significant difference between achievement levels of the experimental and control groups on retention. This means that students in the experimental group scored higher in the retention test that was given two (2) weeks after the SSAT. This findings, agreed with that of Enuokoha (1996) and Eneogwe (1996) who asserts that the shorter the time interval between presentation of objective and actual lesson, the higher the performance in achievement and retention test. Kesimba (2004) also stated that if a material is well presented and learned, it will be recalled and remembered easily. The better performance of the experimental group could be due to the prior presentation of behavioural objectives. Therefore, the provision of behavioural objectives prior to instruction has a greater effect on students' retention of what is learnt.

The fourth purpose of this study was to determine, if within each of the achievement levels (high, medium and low), the presentation of behavioural objectives has effect on students' achievement.

The findings revealed that there was a slight difference in the achievement of students within the medium/low ability level and those of the high ability level. The slight difference in achievement levels was too insignificant to be counted. This means that the achievement scores of the experimental group within the higher level and medium/low level was insignificant.

That is, previous ability level of students did not affect students' eventual achievement. Students in high level remained in that level while those in medium/low level remained in those levels even after being presented with

specific behavioural objectives prior to instructions. This finding is in line with Bishop (1990) & Awu (1992)'s assertion, that, although stringent specification of behavioural objectives enhanced and facilitated teaching and learning, those with higher intelligence quotient (IQ) maintained those level of achievement. Whitelegg (1993) & Talabi (1996) are of the view that irrespective of students' ability level, those who are provided with prior knowledge of specific behavioural objectives performed significantly better and retained learned materials longer than those who are not presented.

### Summary

In summary then, the findings revealed that:

- Students provided with behavioural objectives prior to instruction in social studies performed significantly better than those who were not provided with objectives.
- Students who had been provided with behavioural objectives prior to instruction had greater retention ability than those not provided.
- Male students that were provided with behavioural objectives performed higher than female students who were equally enhanced.
- Ability levels of students had no influence on the achievement of students provided with instructional objectives prior to instruction of social studies.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proffered:

- Educational policy makers should instruct authors of various textbooks used in secondary schools to include the specific behavioural objectives of each topic. This would go a long way in helping students focus on the important aspects of each lesson and the texts.
- Principals and school inspectors should insist that teachers make it a point of duty to acquaint the students with behavioural objectives of each lesson a day before the instruction.
- Educational policy makers should from time to time, organize regular refresher courses, professional workshops to keep teachers abreast with current strategies and techniques for effective teaching/learning engagement, as regards the use of specific behavioural objectives and male-female disparity. This would go a long way to improve the capabilities of female students.
- Teachers in social studies should make sure that their behavioural objectives are stated in clear, unambiguous terms. It would help students understand what is expected of them at the end of each instruction.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded therefore, that prior knowledge of specific behavioural objectives has a positive effect on students learning ability and retention of subject matter. This simply means that when students are presented with statement of specific behavioural objectives and it discusses how these objectives should be used, they are placed at an advantage.

In essence, the traditional practice of the use of specific objectives for preparing lesson notes and testing students should be disregarded or seen as incomplete. Students should be shown how to use the specific objectives for private studies, reviews and preparation for examination.

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