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Relevance of Symbol Systems Theory to Instructional Media for the Enhancement of Social Studies Learning Outcome

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Abstract

The application of instructional media resources for Social Studies instructions can offer a clear departure from traditional mode of teaching resources, methods and strategies. Hence this study looked at how the symbol system theory can be used as a basis for the application of instructional media to enhance social studies students' learning outcome. The research design for the study was quasi experimental. Random sampling technique was applied in selecting 30 Junior Secondary school students from a population of 150 in Covenant school Eku in Delta State of Nigeria. Researchers developed test titled "Instructional Media Performance Test (IMPT)", was the instrument of data collection. The reliability of the instrument using Cronbach alpha was 0.79, t-test was used to test the two hypotheses of the study. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the pre-tests given to the students in both treatment and control groups as calculated value of 4.04 was lesser than table value of 5.09; also there is a positive and significant influence of instructional media (television) on the learning outcome of Junior Secondary Students in social studies as calculated value of 5.68 is higher than table value of 4.09. To this end, the study suggested that social studies teachers should incorporate instructional media (television) where necessary to achieve optimum learning objective, goals and heighten the learning outcome of Junior Secondary School students in social studies.

Keywords: Symbol system theory; Instructional media; Social studies; Learning outcome

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INTRODUCTION

The challenges of teaching social studies are enormous, the benefits, aims and objectives of the subject in the junior secondary school curriculum is not being achieved. This has cause hindrance to the achievement of its learning goals in Nigeria, as the performance of students in the subject is below average. Many scholars (O. F. Atubi & Dania, 2020; Ercan, 2015; Ross, 2019) has attributed the causes to the poor and boring methods applied by the teachers such as the convectional lecture teaching method. Hence there is a need to explore possible best methods, strategies, techniques and resources for making the subject relevant in a world that is ever changing. Looking at the problem from another angle, the use of instructional media can be seen as an innovation to social studies instruction. This is because the addition of media to social studies instructional activities will make it interactive and explorative, it will facilitate mastery learning and help prevent rote memorization (Jehle, 2021).

Akinoso (2018) defined instructional media to be any medium of communication such as Television, Radio, Video, Computer, Projector etc. The use of these and other forms of media are in line with the discovery of Gavriel Salomon Symbol systems theory developed in 1977, the theory stated that media affect the acquisition of information in many ways. They help learners to easily decode information, process knowledge and elaborate meanings (Salomon, 2012). According to Salomon, every media has the ability of transmitting knowledge though a system of symbols. The theory suggest that television needs lesser mental coding than reading of a book, however the knowledge extracted by a learner depends on the learners' inherent ability, the media resources is acting as a boost to the learning process. Gavriel Salomon, an educational psychologist spent time in inquiring about the effects of media on learning. According to the theory by Gavriel Salomon, learning is based on coding elements that serve different levels of mental processing. Codes such as pictures, words or graphs provide the learner with different types of information, with some information requiring less mental processing than others. Schema plays a significant role in how information is interpreted (Guo, 2023).

The theory posited that pictures, graphs, maps and words when they are visually displayed and viewed by learners, assist them in the acquisition of knowledge. He named words, graph, maps and pictures as representation codes of information. According to the symbol systems theory, Codes and symbol systems are the communication words used in media to send a message, the major part of the research focussed on a television programme called the "Sesame street", later on the research was expanded to cover computer framework (Salomon et al., 1991). Children that watch Sesame Street with interest and mind to learn were found to acquire knowledge from the programme, on the other hand when they watch the show in a passive manner, knowledge was not obtained (Amalia & Hapsari, 2018).

Basic Principles of Symbol System Theory states that (1) symbolic coded element of a media requires different mental processing; (2) the knowledge and skill of an individual affects how a specific media sequence will have impart on the individual's mental faculty; (3) specific media sequence is affected by the nature of learning task; (4) the message that will be perceived can influence the social context of the media presentations; and (5) reciprocal relationships exit between media and the learner, one has influence on the other. The summary of symbol systems theory affects the attainment of knowledge in many ways. First of all, they bring to the spotlight different elements of a subject/content. Secondly, they are different with assimilation ease. Thirdly, the coding elements have the ability to help the learner in overcoming difficulty in elaborating knowledge. Fourthly, the coding elements are different in respect to how much processing that is needed or allowed and finally they are different because the symbol system defines who and how much knowledge will be gotten from the media and what type of messages can be acquired. Salomon also observed that each medium has the ability of transferring content through specific inbuilt symbol systems. For instance, Salomon opined that visual display of information need less mental reasoning than reading and that visual knowledge tend to be less complicated when compared to abstract knowledge (Salomon, 1980).

Salomon (1981) stressed the mutual nature of instructional media, communications environment and the learner. Salomon argued that an internal representation of the world plays a huge role in the determination of how information are perceived and conveyed, in terms of creating a prevention preconception that

influences the information and its interpretation. Furthermore, visual media create new internal representation that will affect later cognitive understanding. Symbol system theory is explained further below with five points which are (1) the symbolic coding systems of specific media needs, different mental processing and therefore affects the mastery of particular skills; (2) the level of cognition and skill possessed by an individual will determine the impingement of specific media successions.; (3) the nature of task or data to be processed can affect the impingement of specific media successions; (4) the social setting of media demonstration can impact what information is transferred; and (5) there is a mutual relationship between media (information and the learner, media/data can influence the learner and vice versa.

The symbol systems theory of Gavriel Salomon promotes learning contexts that offers social studies visual display (media) of information. The role of the teacher is shifted to media technology, the teacher only helps to facilitate meaningful construction of concepts. This theory does not support the use of traditional method of teaching alone, where the teacher is the only source and transmitter of knowledge, while the students are passive recipient of whatever that is dished out to them. According to the Symbol Systems Theory, learning is based on coded elements just as any social studies instructional media can be based on coded data in form of images, digital maps, tabular and spatial data. The coded elements in the symbol systems theory are pictures (images), videos and words. The symbol system theory provides the social studies learner with different type of media resources and forms of information, so also instructional media provide learners with various forms of information through visual display. Schema plays a significant role in the way information is interpreted in the theory, so also media are internal and integral representation of the world, they help to organise concepts that can present new information. Salomon theory also observed that each system medium has the ability of transferring content through specific inbuilt symbols, images and videos uses a medium known as Data Base Management System (DBMS) to collect and manage data through models, pictures, images and motion pictures (symbols). Salomon (2018) asserted that the Symbol System Theory is an activity based learning, they provide students with opportunities to explore their environment, think constructively and discover nature as it is.

Social Studies was designed to develop the knowledge of its learners about their environment and the use of a monotonous teaching method such as the traditional mode only haven't portend well for the subject. Hence, there is the need to introduce diverse resources like television media as exemplified in the Symbol Systems Theory. This will help critical analysis of concepts through the help of visualization. Therefore, the study was undertaken to investigate the relevance of the symbol systems theory to instructional media in social studies and see how it can enhance students learning outcome in upper basic schools of Delta State.

Review of Related Literature

The application of the Symbol Systems Theory to educational processes assist in shifting from the passive learning mode of conventional classrooms, it also stimulates learning and make it fun (Haleem et al., 2022). Being stimulated to learn will aid better student involvement because students will be enthusiastic to learn the visual materials presented to them (Trust, 2018). Salomon (1997) worked on the relationship between mind, media and how culture is a symbolic form that affects the thinking and

assimilation levels of students. Also, Salomon (1980), used visual media to enrich the mental thought of students. Jehle (2016b) demonstrated how media can be used to show action to learners, while Jehle (2016a) reported the gains of visualization in classroom interactions through the use of videos for instructions. Adams and Biddle (1970) investigated the realities of teaching and learning through exploration with television and video. Janík and Seidel (2009) submitted that the use of videos and television media are powerful teaching, learning and investigating tools for teachers. Ross (2018), the use of instructional media in social studies, are symbol systems of learning and are aimed at helping learners to discover knowledge through the programming of data into images and videos in real life form. From the foregoing, the use of media as depicted by Gavriel Salomon Symbol Systems Theory have been discovered to be rich in investigating social practices in education because they help in conceptualizing, representing and magnifying information. Akinbolola and Afolabi (2010) affirmed that students learn more when they construct meaning from educational tasks on their own with the teacher as a guardian.

Amalia and Hapsari (2018) claimed that in Social Studies teaching and learning, the major objective is not knowledge alone as Social Studies and the Social Sciences are seen as systems with models that distinguish between the ideal worlds and how the way world is presently. According to Ercan (2015) social studies models acquire their validity not from how accurate they describe the ideal world, but from the accuracy of any forecasting which may be based on the models. These systems and models represent the symbols and coding elements stated in the theory. Similarly, Atubi and Dania (2022) explained how media can be used as instructional media for Social Studies learning in developing new insights and connecting students to their previous knowledge. Information in instructional media are presented visually and holistically as broad concepts and then broken down into segments. They are student centred and students can ask the teacher questions, carry out their own analysis, make their own comparisons and arrive at their own conclusions.

The application of instructional media resources for Social Studies instructions can offer a clear departure from traditional teaching resources and strategies (F. Atubi, 2021). The goal is for the students to play active roles, through the use of visual displayed data to absorb knowledge into their mental faculties. The ability of students to gain and apply knowledge from symbol systems in social studies will add more value to their knowledge than just memorizing information and facts (De Sousa et al., 2017). The symbol systems approach requires the teacher to dispense with his/her purpose as sole ownership of knowledge and instead apply his/her knowledge of curriculum planning and instructional methods. Akinoso (2018) opined that the central point here is that in using instructional media, students construct their own knowledge of their world as it is being transmitted into their minds, by these technologies. It is the student who makes sense out of the learning process. Instructional media as symbol system of learning has been scientifically proven to help students construct their own knowledge on complex topics like the earth, culture, population, environmental resources, management and conservation, agriculture, climate and vegetation (Nusantari et al., 2020; Pun et al., 2022). The teacher only assist in explaining areas of conflict or misunderstandings and make social studies concepts easy to understand. When students are given time and chance to examine abstract topics through the use of exploration technological resources like television, video, GIS and Maps greater understanding and retention is the result (Day et al., 2013). The

use of television as instructional resources for teaching Social Studies as depicted by Gavriel Salomon's Symbol System Theory is an innovative alternative to the abstract dominated and non- usage of instructional resources in the teaching of social studies across Nigeria.

METHOD

The research design for the study was quantitative using a quasi-experimental non-randomised pre-test and post-test design (Fraenkel et al., 2012). An experimental study involves a systematic technique of linking cause effect relationships between variables with the sole purpose of establishing the effect of certain independent variable on a dependent variable. It took place at Covenant Schools in Eku, Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 30 Junior Secondary School One students were selected through random sampling technique from a population of 240 Junior Secondary school students in the school. The school was also purposively picked for the study because of its closeness to the researcher's home. The 30 students were placed into two groups of treatment group 15 students and control group 15 students. The instrument for data collection was a well-constructed test by the researcher titled "Instructional Media Performance Test" (IMPT) (see. Appendix 1). The reliability of the instrument using Cronbach alpha was 0.79, t-test this instrument was administered on the participants for both the pre-tests and post-tests.

Table 1. Research Design Table

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Treatment	O_1	X	O_2
Control	O_3		O_4

Note: O_1 - pre-test for treatment group; X - instructional media treatment; O_2 - post-test for treatment group; O_3 – pre-test for control group; O_4 – post-test for control group

Data Collection Procedure

The treatment group in this study was taught with instructional media (television) as a learning medium to illustrate and teach the culture of the Urhobo people in Delta State. The first stage of the study was the planning stage, arrangements were done on how to implement the teaching procedure and gather resources such as electricity generating set, a 50 inches flat screen television, DVD player and a CD containing Urhobo cultural video. After all these resources for the lesson were sought for and put in place, the first lesson started with the teacher (researcher) introducing herself to the class. The teacher explained the objective of the lesson and how instructional media (television) will be used as the medium of instruction therefore the students should be diligent to watch the video with utmost attention. Both groups were first of all pre-test.

During the television session, the teacher explained the video to the class further the lesson content was presented in a visualized form so that the students can see, watch and understand how the culture of the Urhobo people is expressed in real life situations. Meanwhile, the control group of fifteen students were taught same topic "culture" in a conventional classroom with no instructional media (television). At the end of the study, the students were post-tested again and results of both pre-test and post-test were subjected to data analysis using student t-test that was calculated manually to test both hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the pre-tests of both the control and treatment group of students in the study

Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference in the pre-tests given to the treatment and control groups of students because the calculated value of 4.04 was lesser than the table value of t at 5.098. Similarly the mean score of 40.3 for the control group and 41.5 for the experimental group clearly shows an insignificant difference. The result implies that the academic ability of all participants selected for the study were in equilibrium, hence the experiment will determine if there is any significant effect of media on the treatment group. While no form of treatment was given to the control group. The results obtained from the study is an indication that as at the time of carrying out this study there was no significant difference in students' abilities therefore the result of hypothesis 2, will determine the effect of treatment (media) on the participants.

Table 2. T-test table Showing Pre-test Mean Score of Both Groups

Group	N	X	SD	Standard Error	t-calculated	t-critical
Pre-test control	15	40.3	3.06	1.345	4.046	5.098
Pre-test treatment	15	41.5	4.03	1.431		

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the post-tests of both the control and treatment group of students in the study.

Table 3 showed a calculated value of t (5.68>5.00), this value is far higher than the table value of 4.09. The mean difference of 60.3 post-test for control and 68.5 for treatment group, revealed a mean difference of 8.2 which is quite significant, therefore the null hypothesis 2 was rejected and the alternative hypotheses accepted. The alternative hypothesis which states that there is significant difference in the post tests of both the control and experimental groups is therefore accepted. This implies that the learning outcome of students that used instructional media performed significantly higher that the control group of students that were taught without any instructional media.

Table 3. T-test Table Showing Post-test Mean Score of Both Groups

Group	N	X	SD	Standard Error	t-calculated	t-critical
Post-test control	15	60.3	4.12	1.542	5.68	4.09
Post-test treatment	15	68.5	6.02	1.782		

Discussion of Results

The result from hypothesis 1, shows no significant difference in the pre-tests given to the treatment and control groups of students. While hypothesis 2, revealed a positive and significant influence of instructional media (television) on learning outcome of Junior Secondary Students in social studies. Therefore the study is a proof that the use of instructional media is a primary/direct way of enhancing the learning outcome of students in social studies concepts and content. Hence the use of instructional media in social studies should be encouraged. The study corroborates and confirm the Symbol Systems Theory of Salomon (2018); which demonstrated how media aid the acquisition of information (Blikstad-Balas, 2017). Amalia and Hapsari

(2018) reported the positive effect that media has on the academic performance of students and had a positive result and Guo (2023) and Jehle (2021) that also worked on the reasons why educational technology/media as expressed in the symbol systems theory should be adopted in the classroom. These studies established a significant effect of instructional media on social studies learning goals and outcome of Junior Secondary School students in social studies. Furthermore, the study is also in tandem with Ercan (2015) researched on with how 5E learning cycle which also include a visual form of knowledge is good for science students and Atubi (2021) who submitted affirmative results from students and teachers experiences on the influence of multimedia resources, these studies discovered a positive correlation between instructional media and social studies learning.

The study did not find any research nor study that reported a contrary result, therefore the study contributed to extant literature on the positive effect of media instructional resources on learning outcome of students. A major advantage of this study is its promotion of visual knowledge but however a number of limitations were observed. The study was a quasi-experimental with a very small sample, because of limited resources therefore implementing the result on a larger population is a limitation. The small number reduces the statistical power of the study. Therefore, there is a need to conduct the study again using a larger sample. Secondly, the test instrument which was used for the study was developed by the researcher, the items were drawn from previous questions on the topic "culture" used for the Basic Certificate Examinations in Delta State. The researcher thinks that using other sources of evaluation may account for a better performance of the students.

CONCLUSION

This research, revealed that the learning outcome of students improved by learning with instructional media like television and video, because they are symbols of learning when they correspond with lesson content. Instructional media that was presented to learners in the form of images, motion pictures and symbols as depicted by the symbol systems theory are therefore a good way to learn. To this end, social studies teachers should incorporate these instructional media where necessary to achieve optimum learning objective, goals and heighten the academic performance of students in social studies. The teacher should pay serious attention to the students while learning with any instructional media so that the students can derive maximum impact from any instructional media being used.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations (1) Social studies teachers should begin the cooperation of media in any form into the teaching and learning of the subject to improve its learning outcome and boost students' academic performances; (2) School administrators should help in making the resources needed for implementing media education available in their schools e.g. a television room; and (3) Curriculum planners of social studies should include the use of media resources in the teaching materials and resources needed to teach the subject.

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Declaration of interests

The researchers declare no conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX I
RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Title: Instructional Media Performance Test (IMPT).

Instruction: The instrument is a performance test in Social Studies at the Upper Basic secondary school. The instrument will measure the academic performance of students with a twenty (20) objective questions from selected topic "culture" in Social Studies.

Instruction: Please, give the following information as appropriate
Name of school …….

Instruction: Choose the correct options from letter A – D, the one that answers the following questions. Answer all questions

1. Culture is the way of ------- of a group of people.
   (a) Animal
   (b) Water
   (c) Humour
   (d) Life
2. In every society, the culture consists of ------- components
   (a) Three
   (b) Two
   (c) Six
   (d) Ten
3. The cultural food for the urhobos is known as …….?
   (a) Fried rice
   (b) Jollof rice
   (c) Banga soup and starch
   (d) Eba and egusi soup
4. The growing of _____ crops is a major part of urhobo culture.
   (a) Cassava
   (b) Beans
   (c) Rice
   (d) Apple
5. Root crops are mostly grown by the urhobos in the ……. part of Nigeria?
   (a) Southern
   (b) Eastern
   (c) Western
   (d) Northern
6. The cultural aspect of culture that can be seen, feel and touched is called ------ culture
   (a) Education
   (b) Transportation
   (c) Material
   (d) Hospitals
7. The importance of culture includes all except one of the following
   (a) Identity
   (b) Provision a way of life

(c) Language preservation
(d) Misbehaviour

8. Which of the following is a non- material aspect of culture?
(a) Music
(b) Farming implements
(c) Buildings
(d) Dressing

9. The practice of ……. Agriculture is common among all the cultural groups in Nigeria?
(a) Group
(b) Subsistence
(c) Commercial
(d) Mixed

10. Which among the following is not a way of preserving culture in Nigeria?
(a) Local construction of houses
(b) Talking in proverbs
(c) Learning from television
(d) Cooking our local delicacies

11. The embodiments of traditions, customs and belief of a people is known as ----
(a) Planning
(b) Culture
(c) Entertainment
(d) Achievement

12. Culture can be passed from one generation to another…….?
(a) Community
(b) State
(c) Society
(d) Generation

13. Which among the following is not an area of a non- material culture?
(a) Songs
(b) Language
(c) Food
(d) Folktales

14. Culture is ----------
(a) Dynamic
(b) Conflict
(c) Static
(d) Single

15. There are between 250 to …… ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria?
(a) 500
(b) 400
(c) 1000
(d) 700

16. One major problem that is causing cultural disharmony in Nigeria today is its huge cultural …….?
(a) Unity
(b) Change
(c) Diversity

(d) Poverty

17. Urhobo women dresses with two_____
    (a) Blouses
    (b) head-ties
    (c) wrappers
    (d) jeans
18. The urhobos ------- dance belong to the urhobos of Delta state.
    (a) 'EMA"
    (b) "ukpai"
    (c) "lekeke"
    (d) "bida"
19. Culture is _____?
    (a) Static
    (b) Transit
    (c) Outdated
    (d) Hidden
20. Which of the following is not a material aspect of culture?
    (a) Dressing
    (b) Food
    (c) Dancing
    (d) Folktales