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Teachers' Perceptions of the New History Curriculum at the Basic Schools in the Cape Coast, Ghana

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Abstract:

Perception is the importance attached to something based on one's feelings and experiences. The study explored teachers' perceptions of the new History curriculum at the basic school level in the Cape Coast Metropolis. A quantitative approach with a descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A systematic sampling procedure was used to select 35 schools from 70 public schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Purposive sampling was used to select 225 teachers comprising 49 males and 176 females from selected 35 basic schools. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Data were analysed with descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages, means, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (One-Way-Analysis of Variance). Findings showed that teachers positively perceived the new history curriculum at the basic school level. The study recommended that teachers should make a conscious effort to instil in pupils the values of the new history curriculum since they had a positive perception of the curriculum.

Keywords: *New history curriculum, teachers, perception, basic school*

1. Introduction

The study of history has been reintroduced as a compulsory subject in pre-tertiary education in Ghana. However, in the 1987 educational reform, history was merged with other subjects to form social studies at the JSS level, while it became an elective subject at the SSS level (Adjepong & Kwarteng, 2017). The new curriculum has also reintroduced history as a subject of study in both the lower primary and upper primary levels at the basic school. History is part of the integrated themes that form the new subject termed Our World and Our People at the KG level. Although history was an elective subject of study at the senior high school level, it was initially not a subject of study in the existing curriculum at the basic school. History was integrated with other disciplines to form a single subject which was known as Citizenship Education at the upper primary school in 2002 and also termed Social Studies at the Junior High School level.

It can be argued that basic education has now become a basic human right in most countries, both developed and developing, and a necessity for survival in the modern era. As such, over the years, basic education has become an important function and policy area of states and their government institutions at national and local levels. Thus, under the direction of the state, education has undergone several changes through official policy to increase its quality and accessibility to achieve equity and the well-being of the citizens (Boakye, 2019). However, it is worth noting that teachers are the key implementers in every educational reform pertaining to the basic school curriculum. As such, they facilitate the attainment of the desired goals of any reform made in the educational curriculum. The key roles teachers play as implementers of the curriculum have necessitated the need to conduct research on teachers' perceptions of the new history curriculum at the basic school, which has resulted from an educational reform. As such, Bekoe, Quashigah, Kankam, Eshun, and Bordoh (2014) argued that teachers show commitment and a good attitude if they have a positive perception which yields better performance and aid in the success of their effort. As such, it necessitates research to be conducted on teachers who are responsible for facilitating pupils in the learning of history. Hence, this study explored teachers' perceptions of the new history curriculum at the basic school in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

1.1. Research Objective

The study explored teachers' perceptions of the new history curriculum at the basic school in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana.

1.2. Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

- What are teachers' perceptions of the new history curriculum at the basic school in the Cape Coast Metropolis?

2. Literature Review

Essentially, teachers are recognised as organisers in the education system. This is because they are very important to the development of education. Hence, their task as organisers is to function efficiently for the attainment of a common goal. According to Boadu (2013), perception is an attribute that aids in the formation of individuals' world view and attitudes. Therefore, the way we perceive something or information has an influence on our attitude and character. It can be said that perception deals with receiving, seizing, and accepting information or an idea with one's senses or mind. Perception is an important phenomenon in education. Research has discovered that teachers' perceptions can influence the quality of education. Teachers' negative perceptions and attitudes they depict have an adverse effect on pupils' achievements and may render the efforts of the government meaningless (Omah, 2002; Olaleye, 2011). It becomes of utmost importance to ascertain the perceptions teachers have about the new history curriculum if the intended goals can be achieved, as Adu and Olatundun (2007) found in a study that the perception of teachers has an impact on the performance of pupils. A study conducted in Ghana by Oppong (2009) revealed that teachers possess a positive perception of the teaching of history at secondary schools in Ghana. Thus, 16 (53.3%) teachers strongly agreed that they enjoy teaching history, while 10 (33.3%) teachers agreed that they enjoy teaching history, and 4 (13.3%) teachers disagreed, while none of the teachers used for the study strongly disagreed with the teaching of history. Also, Helyer (2016) [6], in a study conducted in elementary schools in Arkansas, Texas, and Kansas, concluded that teachers' perception regarding the teaching of history was positive. This is because most of the teachers used for the study agreed on the significance of teaching history. Her findings revealed that 62.75% of teachers agreed and 31.37% strongly agreed on the importance of teaching history at the elementary school, while 5.8% disagreed, but none of the teachers strongly disagreed on the importance of teaching history at the elementary school. Furthermore, a qualitative study conducted by Namamba and Rao (2017) was in line with the importance of teaching history. The findings of their study revealed that teachers have a positive perception of teaching history in secondary schools in Tanzania since they view history as an important subject.

Helyer (2016) found that most teachers, representing 94.2%, saw the teaching of history as important in elementary classrooms. Similarly, the findings of Namamba and Rao (2017) in a qualitative study they conducted revealed that teachers greatly perceived the teaching of history as a relevant subject in secondary schools in Tanzania. Therefore, it can be argued that research indicates that the perception of teachers regarding the teaching of history is positive in several countries and at different levels of education, too (Oppong, 2009; Helyer, 2016; Namamba & Rao, 2017). The positive perception of teachers might have a favourable influence on pupils' academic achievement in history. Therefore, the above findings indicate that teachers have a positive perception of the history curriculum.

3. Methodology

The study employed a quantitative approach, specifically, a descriptive survey research design. This is because the study aimed at describing the situation about a phenomenon (that is, teachers' perceptions of the history curriculum at the basic school). The study adopted a quantitative approach because it aimed at investigating and describing the study using statistical tools and measuring variables in quantifiable terms. Systematic random sampling was used to select 35 primary schools from the six circuits in the Cape Coast Metropolis. A purposive sampling procedure was adopted to select a sample size of 225 (49 males and 176 females) from selected lower and upper-primary-level teachers. The sample size was attained with the use of Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula for determining sample size was used to obtain sample size. Teachers were purposively selected on the criteria that they were previously teaching at the primary school before the new history curriculum was introduced. They also attended the workshop provided before the implementation started.

Closed-ended item questionnaire was the instrument employed to obtain data for the study. The closed-ended items on the questionnaire employed the four Likert-type scale, that is, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire was pre-tested at Etsiapa Memorial Methodist Primary and Akobinsin Methodist Primary in KEEA Municipality, Central Region of Ghana, since they possess similar characteristics to the participants used for the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.735 was obtained after pre-testing. Data were collected in three stages after obtaining ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board, University of Cape Coast. First, the initial visit focused on giving out a letter of introduction which was sent to the head teachers of each of the 35 schools selected. Also, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and how they were expected to participate in the study, and convenient days and times were scheduled for the instrument to be administered. Secondly, the selected schools were visited to distribute the questionnaires on the scheduled date. The participants were given a minimum of four days to answer the questionnaire. Follow-up was made by contacting the participants on the phone to address any mishaps that might have been encountered, such as replacing questionnaires that were misplaced. On the last visit, all the questionnaires distributed were collected. The return rate of the questionnaire was 100%. The data obtained were analysed with descriptive statistics, that is, frequency counts and percentages, Means, and Standard Deviation. A pie chart was used to represent the demographic data of respondents who engaged in the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Data of Respondents

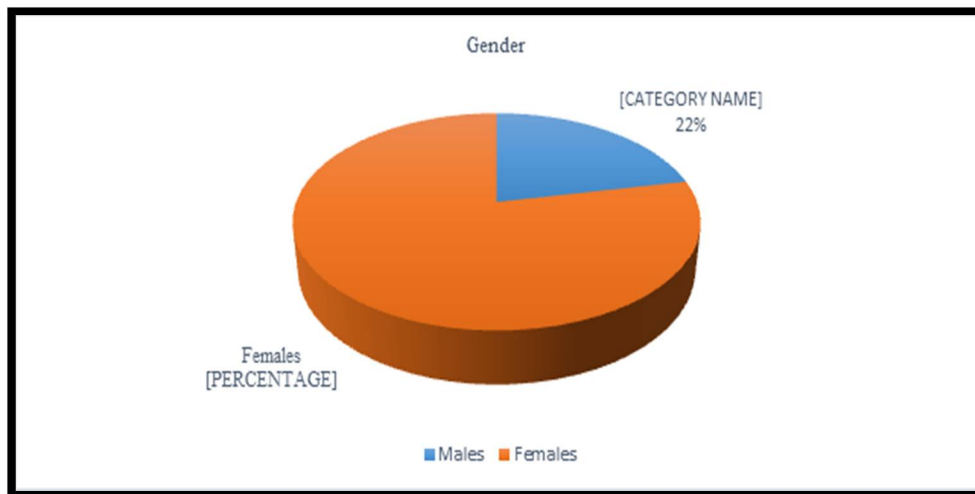


Figure 1: Pie Chart Showing the Gender of Teachers
Source: Field Work (2021)

From figure 1, out of 225 participants involved in the study, males were 49 (21.8%), while females were 176 (78.2%). It shows that females represent the majority of participants used for the study, and males constitute the minority group in terms of respondents used for the study.

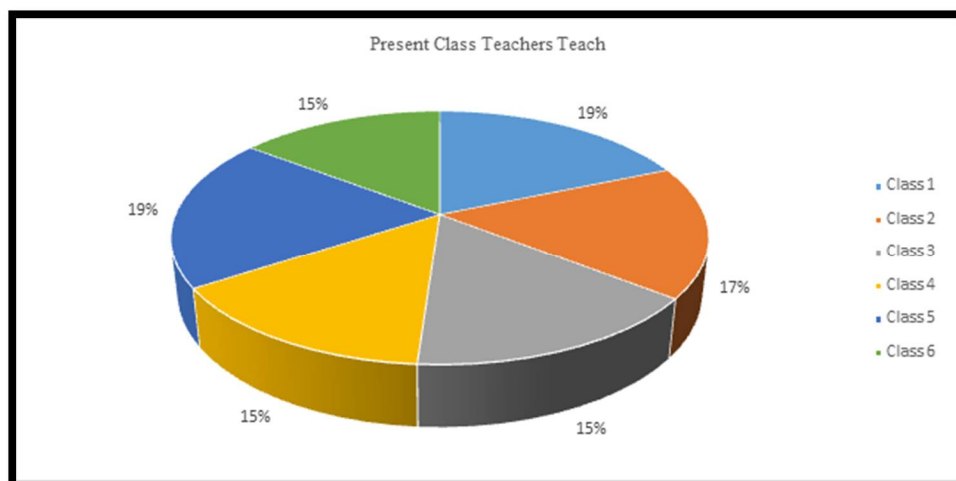


Figure 2: Pie Chart Showing the Present Class Teachers Teach
Source: Field Work (2021)

It is shown from figure 2 that 44 (19.6%) teachers taught in class five, 42 (18.7%) teachers were from class one, 38 (16.9%) teachers taught in class two, 35 (15.6%) taught in class three and the other 66 (29.2%) teachers taught in class four and class six.

4.2. Results

In order to ascertain teachers' perceptions of the new history curriculum at the Basic School, five items were formulated to elicit teachers' responses. The research question results are presented in table 1.

Item	SD (f)%	D (f)%	A (f)%	SA (f)%	Mean	Standard Deviation
History is an important subject	7 (3.1)	2 (.9)	116 (51.6)	100 (44.4)	3.37	.664
The teaching and learning of history are essential at the basic school	7 (3.1)	19 (8.4)	141 (62.7)	58 (25.8)	3.11	.676
The teaching of history will have a positive impact on the lives of pupils at the basic school	8 (3.6)	13 (5.8)	128 (56.9)	76 (33.8)	3.21	.705
Pupils at the basic school are mature enough to learn the history of Ghana	12 (5.3)	42 (18.7)	151 (67.1)	20 (8.9)	2.80	.670
History should have been introduced earlier at the basic school	17 (7.6)	17 (7.6)	151 (67.1)	40 (17.8)	3.00	.745
Mean of Means/ Standard Deviation					3.10	.692

Table 1: Teachers' Perceptions of the New History Curriculum at the Basic School

Source: Field Work (2021)

Mean of means (3.10), Standard mean (2.50)

Table 1 shows that most teachers have a positive perception of the new history curriculum at the basic school since the mean of the mean score (3.10) is greater than the standard mean score (2.50). That is:

- Teachers viewed history as an essential subject ($M=3.37 > 2.50$),
- The teaching and learning of history were deemed essential at the basic school ($M=3.11 > 2.50$),
- The teaching of history was believed to have a positive impact on the lives of pupils at the basic school ($M=3.21 > 2.50$),
- Pupils at the basic school were considered mature enough to learn the history of Ghana ($M=2.80 > 2.50$), and
- They confirmed that history should have been introduced earlier at the basic school ($M=3.0 > 2.50$)

The responses given by the respondents indicated that the responses were homogeneous, with a standard deviation of .692.

4.3. Discussion

The study results indicated that teachers had a positive perception of the new history curriculum at the basic school in the Cape Coast Metropolis. This finding is in line with a previous study conducted in Ghana by Oppong (2009) that showed that teachers had a positive perception of history at the secondary school level. Consistent with this, Helyer (2016) reported that teachers had a positive perception of the teaching of history in elementary schools in the United States of America. The results also showed that teachers perceived that teaching the new history curriculum will positively influence the lives of the pupils at the basic school. In line with the finding, Durkheim (1990) views that teaching and learning worthwhile subjects, such as history, will enable the school to function in society. Amidst, teachers recognized history as an important subject. The importance which was attached to the new history curriculum by teachers may likely be associated with the positive perception they have about the curriculum. Moreover, they believed that pupils at the basic school were mature enough to learn the history of Ghana. Hence, history should have been introduced earlier at the basic school. According to the finding, research has indicated that it is essential to nurture young one's historical thinking in their early years of schooling (Bickford, 2013).

The positive perception of teachers about the newly introduced history curriculum will set a good pace in contributing to the realisation of the intended aim of the new history curriculum. Durkheim (1990) attested to it by recognising the crucial role of the teachers as the main agents of change that need to appreciate, embrace and understand any changes in the educational curriculum for its goal to be achieved. Hence, there will be a significant influence of teachers' perception on pupils' academic achievement in the new history curriculum. As affirmed by Adu and Olatundun (2007), the perceptions of teachers have an influence on the performance of pupils.

5. Conclusion

A conclusion can be drawn based on the findings that teachers perceived the acquisition of historical knowledge as a vital component of pupils' education in the early years of their education.

6. Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn from the study, it was recommended that teachers should make a conscious and deliberate effort to instil the values of the new history curriculum into pupils in the early years since they possess a positive perception of the curriculum.

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