

## Stimulating And Sustaining Pupils' Attention Span In Social Studies Classroom In Lower Basic Schools In Osun State

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### ABSTRACT

*The study identified factors influencing pupils' attention span in social studies classroom of lower basic schools in Osun State. It determined strategies to stimulate and sustain pupils' attention span and examined challenges faced by teachers in doing so with the aim of improving pupils' classroom experience while learning. Descriptive research survey design was employed in the study; the sampled population was 80 lower basic school social studies teachers in Osun State. Findings identified noise, teachers' competence and appearance and students' interest among others as factors influencing pupils' attention span the classrooms. It also showed that, teachers' ability to relate teaching to real life experiences, ensuring pre-knowledge of topics, varying teaching methods, encouraging student participation, and maintaining neat appearance stimulates pupils' attention in social studies classroom. Simplifying lessons into smaller parts, hands-on activities, interactive discussions, and incorporating gaming elements are strategies for stimulating pupils' attention span in the classroom. However, restricted lesson period, pupils' health status, absenteeism, frequent interruptions, and insufficient instructional materials hinders teachers' efforts in sustaining pupils' attention span. The study concludes that teachers do not make conscious effort in sustaining pupils' attention span in the classroom.*

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**Keywords:** Attention Span, Pupils, Social Studies Classroom, Stimulating, Sustaining

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### INTRODUCTION

Attention is crucial to learning, and has been referred to as the basis for cognitive, social and emotional development in human [11]. In fact, attention deficit in human has been associated with a lot of behavioral, cognitive and emotional problems [3]. It has been identified as a complex brain process that enables focus on a specific stimulus or task at hand without distractions. It enables concentration and helps in controlling thoughts and feelings. It can be referred to as the prerequisite for thinking and reasoning. It is an essential tool for learners in the classrooms to follow instructions, maintain interest in the lesson, continue learning tasks or solve problems, adhere to rules and behave appropriately in the classroom environment [14]. In other words, even if all factors of learning are present and are positive, learning will not occur if learners are not paying attention to the activities in the classroom environment, or when attention is shifted to an out-of-purpose stimulus [8, 25]

Attention span on the other hand, has been defined to be the length of time a person can focus on a task before becoming distracted [13]. Attention span of young children is influenced by age, it increases with age ranging between 2-5 minutes per year of age, so young children in primary school attention span on a particular classroom activity is typically between 18-25 minutes which can vary depending on some factors. Environment, noise and other activities around the child's classroom limit the attention span

on the task at hand. Teachers' influence such as engaging the pupils to participate actively in the lesson or making them spectators; interest in the task at hand may extend or reduce pupils' attention span. The shorter the length of time spent on a particular activity, the better for young children so to avoid boredom, fatigue, hunger and sickness; excessive screen time and early media exposure impact pupils' attention span [10, 21].

In order to give the pupils' an interesting classroom learning experience, all the afore mentioned factors must be controlled by the teacher so that learning would take place, but the reality is that even if all factors can be controlled the learners' individual differences may create a fallout from the lot. Pupils' attention span can be stimulated and sustained by both internal and external stimuli. The internal stimulus has to do with the pupils' individual ability which requires a high level of cognitive efforts [28], while the external stimulus has to do with other physical and human environments relating to the pupils within and outside the school. Such environments include the physical structures of the school such as buildings and the location of the school premises in relation to noise and other distractions. It also includes human factors such as the parents, teachers as well as the peers. But of great importance is the role of the teachers in stimulating and sustaining students' attention span in the classroom even when other physical and human factors are not adding up. A teacher's ability to

promote student attention in the classroom is essential to quality education, yet there are many practical questions on how to achieve this [4].

This is the point where teachers' expertise on stimulating and sustaining pupils' attention span comes to play. To stimulate learners' attention span in the classroom on a subject means to excite, provoke or awaken the mind or sense of the learners and get them interested and curious about the subject matter. While learners can be stimulated to pay attention at the initial stage of the learning, it is important to sustain the attention till the end of the lesson every time the subject or subjects are taken. To sustain the attention of the students therefore is to maintain without interruption the stimulated attention for the periods the subject will last [32].

It is no gain saying fact in Nigeria lower basic schools (primary 1-3) that, a period per lesson is averagely 30 minutes; whereas. Attention span for the young children (6-8 years) in such classes is between 18-24 minutes after which they might need to refocus. In order that such learners have full grasp of the content of the lesson therefore, the process of stimulating and sustaining students' attention span has to come into play.

Social Studies is one of the core subjects in the curriculum of lower basic primary school and it is integral to developing students' understanding of their immediate society and the broader world so as to promote peaceful co-existence. It aims to foster critical thinking, citizenship and a sense of global awareness. It also teaches important relational skills like, communication, active participation and engagement in the society, cooperation, cultural value and diversity, civic responsibility and collaboration both at local and international level. It imbibes in learner life skills such as critical thinking, moral ethics, perspective and objective minds which are essential for success in school and in life [2; 23].

Social Studies helps students to become active and engaged citizens, as it provides young children with platforms to explore their identities and learn about the experience of others. So, they can appreciate the diversity of values in the world and develop a sense of social justice as stated in the seventeenth Sustainable Developmental Goals [23]. It helps learners navigate and comprehend issues like climate change, social justice and digital misinformation [6]. Furthermore, social studies is inherently an interdisciplinary subject, integrating insights from history, geography, economics, and political science. This integration enables students to gain a comprehensive understanding of societal dynamics. In teaching social studies therefore, teachers are expected to introduce holistic approach to social studies

education, bridging gaps between disciplines and encouraging a more integrated form of learning [20].

The effective teaching and learning of social studies to imbibe the aforementioned values then depend significantly on teachers' ability to stimulate, engage and sustain learners' attention during classroom instruction so as to develop a holistic learner and this is where a critical challenge emerges. Social Studies curricula are often criticized for being outdated or overly theoretical, which can result in a lack of student interest and engagement. This disengagement can lead to lower academic performance and a superficial understanding of important social concepts [29]. There is also the challenge non adoption of interactive and learners centered approaches, such as project-based learning and discussions which are more effective in helping students grasp complex social issues due to inadequate teacher training and resources, as well as large class sizes, which hinders individualized instruction [16]. In the midst of these is assessment practices in Social Studies which was not particularly designed to evaluate students' understanding of key concepts and their ability to apply this knowledge in real-world contexts [12]. The socio-cultural context within which Social Studies is taught can also be controversial or divisive and can lead to learners' discomfort, disengagement, or even resistance to the subject matter if not adequately addressed [17]. Inadequate access to up-to-date textbooks, technology and supplementary which hinders the ability of teachers to deliver comprehensive and engaging lessons [30].

Over the years, there were particularly no record of mass failure in social studies especially by the external examination body. But, the aspect of relational skill such as communication, active participation and classroom engagement is grossly lacking as observed in the behavior of many of young children drawing inference from learners' moral decadence of lack of respect for authority and participation in examination malpractices. It has also been observed that pupils pay more attention to the intellectual achievement of social studies rather than embracing the character, understanding, awareness and relational aspect. They rather focus more on writing notes rather than paying critical attention to the values been taught. In order to ensure that all the relational and moral aspects are imbibed in young learners, attention has been on pedagogical approaches, curriculum enhancement, upgrade in learning and teaching resources but the record of behavior of pupils from observation has not shown a positive improvement to justified the effort. However, the gap of stimulating and sustaining pupils' attention span in order to make the pupils active participant in their own learning and to provide context-specific strategy in social studies classroom

among pupils in lower basic schools in Osun State has not been explored, this study is therefore conducted to fill this gap.

Based on the attention restoration theory (ART), proposed by psychologist Rachel and Kaplan, 1989 that states that exposure to natural environments can help to restore human's ability to focus and concentrate on task [1]. The theory believes that 'attention fatigue' which refers to the loss of focus and concentration after prolonged periods of mental effort can occur because the capacity of the brain to focus on a specific stimulus or task is limited and results in 'directed attention fatigue'. ART then proposes that exposure to natural environments encourages more effortless brain function, thereby allowing it to recover and replenish its attention capacity. ART hypothesize that nature has the capacity to renew attention after spending sleepless nights studying for exams, or working tirelessly on a project or assignment. Spending time in nature, by watching a sunset, gazing at the ocean or mountains, sitting in parks or just a minute to stare out the window provides us the opportunity to rest, reflect and restore our very selves. This common experience demonstrates nature's valuable role in human lives and hints at another potential role contributing to overcoming mental fatigue and improving the ability to focus and direct attention effectively.

What ART is suggesting therefore is that attention span can be improved upon using external stimuli such as nature. This study corroborates the theory by suggesting that in addition to nature, there are other strategies for stimulating and sustaining attention span especially in the classroom of lower basic school pupils in Social Studies classroom in Osun State to cure 'attention fatigue' as pointed out in ART.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to assess strategies for stimulating and sustaining the attention span of lower basic school pupils in Social Studies classroom in Osun State while specific objectives are to;

- i. identify factors influencing pupils' attention span in social studies classroom of lower basic primary schools in Osun State;
- ii. determine the context-specific strategies to stimulate pupils' attention span during Social Studies classroom in lower basic primary schools in Osun State;
- iii. determine the strategies to sustain pupils' attention span during Social Studies lesson in lower basic primary school in Osun State;
- iv. examine the challenges faced by teachers in stimulating and sustaining the attention span in lower basic primary schools in the study area

These are with the view to ensure that the pupils are actively engaged in learning and to give information to the teachers of young children on creating a productive environment for teaching and learning processes. It is also to provide context-specific strategy and evidence-based information on stimulating and sustaining pupils' attention span in lower basic schools to the curriculum planners and educational policy makers.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed descriptive research survey design. This research design was chosen because of its ability to sample the population objectively without any manipulation. The population for the study comprised teachers of primary school pupils in Osun State. The sample was 80 Social Studies teachers in Osun State. Multistage sampling method was used to select two senatorial districts (Osun East and Osun West) from the three in the state, representing two thirds of the geographical and socio-economic part of the state. From the two senatorial districts, two Local Government Areas (small geographical areas within the state, comprising some towns and neighborhood with its local administration under the state and a specific town serving as administrative headquarters) were randomly selected for the study. From the two LGAs, ten (10) primary schools each were randomly selected for the study. From the selected schools, four (4) social studies teachers in lower basic classes were purposively selected for the study making a total of 80 teachers for the study.

The sample size for the study was selected as such because the scope is on social studies teachers at the lower basic school level. So, the findings of this study can only be applied at the primary school level. A structured questionnaire namely "Stimulating and Sustaining Students' Attention Span" (SSSAS) was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was administered after due permission from the school authority and the consent of the teachers involved. The time and date for the collection of the data were also fixed according to the teachers' schedule. With the aid of research assistants, the data was collected within eight weeks. The first two weeks was to seek the consent of the school managements while the collection and collation of data was done within the remaining six weeks.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Research Question 1: What are the factors influencing pupils' attention span in lower basic school Social Studies classrooms?

**Table 1: Factors Influencing pupils’ attention span in lower basic school Social Studies classrooms?**

S/N	Items	SA		A		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Noise pollution from the surroundings	32	40.0	42	52.5	04	05.0	02	02.5
2	Note writing by dictation	19	23.8	51	63.8	07	08.8	03	03.8
3	Note writing from chalk/tempo board	35	43.8	34	42.5	07	08.8	04	05.0
4	Side talks with classmates during the lesson	31	38.8	40	50.0	07	08.8	02	02.5
5	Sufficient information to the pupils about the subject matter	28	35.0	41	51.3	10	12.5	01	01.3
6	Teachers’ knowledge and mastery of the subject matter	26	32.5	37	46.3	16	20.0	01	01.3
7	Teachers’ appearance	27	33.8	39	48.8	10	12.5	04	05.0
8	Pupils’ interest in the topic	27	33.8	29	36.3	20	25.0	04	05.0
9	Pupils’ physical and mental health	19	23.8	42	52.5	12	15.0	07	08.8
10	Prolonged length of lesson	25	31.3	31	38.8	20	25.0	04	05.0
11	Lesson structure	22	27.5	40	50.0	12	15.0	06	07.5
12	Presence and use of instructional material	19	23.8	48	60.0	09	11.3	04	05.0
13	Sitting arrangement	23	28.8	38	47.5	15	18.8	04	05.0
14	Disruption of lesson by other teachers	21	26.3	43	53.8	08	10.0	08	10.0

Results in Table 1 shows that all the itemized factors influence primary school pupils’ attention span in Social Studies classrooms. This finding corroborates the [7] that external noise, lack of training materials, crowded classrooms, inadequate study, and length of course are factors that affect the attention of learners. This also corroborates that assertion of [9] and ART that classroom noise level, learners’ fatigue, external noise, hunger and students’ interest are factors affecting attention span. Also, [15] categorized these factors into two namely external and internal factors.

He listed students’ interest steaming from the lesson design, and students’ comprehension of the lesson content as internal factors while classroom arrangement, teaching method, teachers’ professional competence, and teachers’ attitude are external factors that influences learners’ attention span.

**Research Question 2:** What strategies are employed by teachers to stimulate pupils’ attention span in Social Studies classrooms?

**Table 2: Strategies Employed by Teachers to Stimulate Pupils’ Attention Span in Social Studies**

S/N	Items	Always		Sometimes		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I relate the content of the lesson to pupils’ real-life experiences	28	35.0	45	56.3	07	08.8
2	I ensure that pupils have a pre-knowledge of the new topics before the lesson	45	56.3	32	40.0	03	03.8
3	I prepare new method of teaching on each topic	36	45.0	39	48.8	05	06.3
4	I use relevant instructional material for the contents taught	56	70.0	22	27.5	02	02.5
5	I ensure that I dress neatly and properly anytime I teach in the classroom	55	68.8	22	27.5	03	03.8
6	I ensure that all pupils in the class contribute verbally during the lesson	42	32.5	33	41.3	05	06.3
7	I give pupils sufficient information about the subject matter	49	61.3	29	36.3	02	02.5

**Classrooms**

Finding from the result above implies that teachers make use of variety of strategies to stimulate pupils’ attention span. This is in line with the submission of [22] that incorporating a variety of instructional methods and providing opportunities for students to interact with the material stimulates learners’ attention in a classroom environment. The finding however shows that teachers seldom make use of the suggestion of [26] that teachers must make the learning process interesting by relating lesson content to the students’ life and local environment and

employing varying lesson presentations. Teachers of the pupils in the study area might want to explore this method as well as the other itemized ones they seldom or never used to stimulate the pupil’s attention span.

**Research Question 3:** What are the strategies employed by teachers to sustain students’ attention in Social Studies classrooms in junior secondary schools?

**Table 3: Strategies employed by Teachers to Sustain Pupils’ Attention Span in Social Studies Classrooms**

S/N	Items	Always		Sometimes		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I introduce music to lessons to sustain pupil’s attention span	30	37.5	45	56.3	05	06.3
2	I ensure that pupils copy notes and drawings from the board to keep them engaged	29	36.3	43	53.8	08	10.0
3	I break down the lesson into smaller units to sustain pupils’ attention span	38	47.5	40	50.0	02	02.5
4	I allow pupils to move around the classroom during lesson breaks	29	36.3	44	55.0	07	08.8
5	I use hands-on activities to sustain students’ attention in classroom	33	41.3	42	52.5	05	06.3
6	I use pictures and videos for teaching to sustain pupils’ attention in the classroom	49	61.3	26	32.5	05	06.3
7	I tell the pupils what they are to learn before the lesson	33	41.3	41	51.3	06	07.5
8	I ensure that no teacher/student disrupts teaching learning process	33	41.3	37	46.3	10	12.5
9	I ensure I do not prolong the lesson time than necessary	31	38.8	38	47.5	11	13.8
10	I design games to teach topics to sustain pupils’ attention	16	20.0	45	56.3	19	23.8
11	I allow pupils to provide answers to questions by themselves	26	32.5	42	52.5	12	15.0

Table 3 shows the strategies employed by teachers to sustain pupils’ attention span in Social Studies classrooms. The table reveals that majority of the respondents hardly employ any strategies to sustain pupils’ attention span in the study area as suggested by [18;19] that the use of active learning strategies and appropriate educational technology can be employed to sustain pupils’ attention span in the classroom. With the exception of some respondents who always use pictures and videos for teaching to in the classroom, all other respondents sometimes or never use the strategies. This implies that many of the

teachers in the study area do not put conscious effort into sustaining pupils’ attention span during the lesson. The indication is that ones the pupils is no longer paying attention to the lesson, the teacher ignores the child and probably focus on the ones that are paying attention. Pupils in such classrooms cannot get the best of learning from such teachers.

**Research Question 4:** What are the challenges faced by teachers in stimulating and sustaining pupils’ attention span in Social Studies classrooms?

**Table 4: Challenges Faced by Teachers in Stimulating and Sustaining pupils’ Attention span in Social Studies Classrooms**

S/N	Items	SA		A		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Inadequate time allotted to lessons	18	22.5	51	63.8	10	12.5	01	01.3
2	Inadequate control over pupils’ challenges such as hunger, stress, and boredom	19	23.8	47	58.8	13	16.3	01	01.3
3	Inadequate control over pupils’ mental and physical health	25	31.3	39	48.8	13	16.3	03	03.8
4	Pupils’ absence/irregularity in the classroom	24	30.0	41	51.3	13	16.3	02	02.5
5	Lesson interruption by the school management/other school activities	28	35.0	36	45.0	14	17.5	02	02.5
6	Noise pollution from the surrounding area	32	40.0	35	43.8	12	15.0	01	01.3
7	Distraction from concurrent task given to the pupils	20	25.0	33	41.3	26	32.5	01	01.3
8	Pupils’ peculiarities e.g attention deficit disorder, lack of interest in the subject	19	23.8	38	47.5	20	25.0	03	03.8
9	Inadequate instructional material to sustain students’ attention span	22	27.5	39	48.8	15	18.8	04	05.0

Table 4 shows the challenges that teachers face in stimulating and sustaining pupils’ attention span covers environmental issues such as noise from the surrounding of the classroom, interruption during lesson and Pupils’ personal issues such as mental and physical state, hunger, stress and boredom have also been identified by [5]; [24] as well as [27] as challenges faced by teachers in stimulating and sustaining pupils’ attention span in the classroom and if not properly addressed, pupils’ attention span required for the lesson may not be adequate.

pupils’ attention span and make efforts to stimulate pupils’ attention span but they do not make conscious effort in sustaining pupils’ attention span in the classroom despite the awareness that it is important to do so. The attitude could be due to the challenges faced by the teachers in stimulating and sustain pupils’ attention span.

The study therefore recommends that, primary schools should be relocated to quiet areas or make the classrooms to be soundproofed to reduce noise and other environmental distractions.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study concludes that, although teachers in the study area were able to identify factors influencing

Teachers should engage in the use of active learning strategies that incorporates diverse learning styles

along with relevant instructional materials in social studies as well as the use of appropriate technology to stimulate and sustain the attention span of pupils in the classroom. The active involvement of the parents in ensuring that pupils are in the right frame of mind, adequately fed and be in good health will also reduce some of the challenges faced by the teachers in stimulating and sustaining pupils' attention span in the classrooms.

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