

The Power and Purpose of Instructional Objectives in Social Studies Education

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Abstract

Argument on the need for objectives in education is on the rise with divergent views of teachers over the matter. Some see objectives as vital to teaching learning process and should be clearly stated and made known to students prior to instruction while others see objectives as not necessary; yet many are undecided. The importance of objectives in the entire educative process cannot be overemphasized. This paper explores the power and purpose of instructional objectives in social studies instruction.

Keywords: Social studies, general objectives, specific objectives, teacher, student and academic achievement.

Introduction

Instructional objectives describe the skills or learning that a learner should acquire while participating in learning. No matter the age or level of the learner, making objectives clear from the start of the lesson is a great way to give learner the direction he needs to succeed. This is true especially as the good knowledge of the target provides the initial stimulus for learner preparation. This paper examines critically the power, purpose and philosophy of instructional objectives to social studies instruction.

What are Instructional Objectives?

Instructional objectives are statements that describe what a learner should be able to do after completing a unit of instruction (Inyang-Abia & Esu, 2009). They describe the skills or learning or proposed changes in the learner while participating in a class or exercise.

Instructional objectives express the new capabilities that the learner should possess after instruction, stating specific and measurable task that learner will be able to perform upon completion of a lesson. Because instructional objectives specify exactly what is supposed to be learned, they are helpful to both learner and teacher throughout the learning process as they help to clarify instruction and assessment of work. It is therefore expedient that teachers be specific when writing objectives, since they will guide both instruction and student's learning.

Inyang-Abia (2004), cautions that instructional objectives should always measure skills and performance goals, in addition to describing the conditions of each assignment. He is of the view that expressions such as "encourage discussion", help them to see the relationship, "setting the target" among others are not instructional objectives. These according to him are "vaguely expressed instructors objective". To this end, instructional objectives must always include an action word that highlights performance, such as "conduct", "demonstrate", "identify" or "compare". These action verbs describe learners expected post-instructional behavior. From the foregoing it is clear that instructional objectives spell out behaviour expected of the learner following successful interaction with a variety of learning experiences.

Sources of Instructional Objectives in social studies education

In any education system, whether formal or non-formal, decisions are taken on what and how children will learn in the institutionalized education in which they take part. The basis of these decisions produced goals which aid the children's learning. Such decisions are bound by several constraints and their originators do not act in a social vacuum (Postlethwaite, 1977). In Nigeria, educational aims are formally stated by government or legislative act implicit in the value system of the society and in its educational tradition. These form the basis of educational goals which are mere statements of differing degrees of capabilities of human activities – those activities that should bring about desirable societal and or personal needs.

These are usually stated in broad terms so that they secure the consensus of the great majority of the society. Although, they serve as basis for making decisions on how school life should be organized and on what should be taught in school, they themselves do not constitute or directly determine the practical detail of school life. The services of curriculum developers in consultation with many other groups within the society are needed to translate the general goals of the system into specific curriculum objectives of what should be taught and for the production of the materials for such learning. Such content when operationalized as learning experiences can be stated as learning expectations at different levels and for varying purposes. When fully realized, they are learning outcomes. The immediate achievable level of such desirable statements and outcomes constitute behavioural objectives.

From this exposition, it is clear that the major sources of instructional objectives include:-

- Educational goals
- Educational philosophy
- Contemporary societal demand
- The learner
- The subject experts
- The curriculum
- Syllabus
- Scheme of work
- Text materials
- Major contemporary global events
- Professional associations and examining bodies.

Kinds of Instructional Objectives

Two main kinds of instructional objectives as identified by Esu & Inyang-Abia (2009) are;

Non-behavioural or general objectives:

These are expressions of instructional goals written in vague expectations. They express the desire for instructional activities that may cover an entire education programme, course, year, term, semester or a subject area which are not measurable, observable, action-oriented nor achieved. According to Esu & Inyang-Abia (2009:p44) 'they are so general that measurability of achievement becomes difficult'.

Statement indicating these objectives is usually ambiguous and employs vague verbs such as "know", "appreciate", "master", "understand" or "develop" in their expressions. For example, in a social studies lesson on "Reasons for the introduction of social studies in Nigeria schools", non-behavioural/general objectives could be stated thus. *Upon completion of the lesson, the student should be able to master the reasons for introduction of social studies in Nigeria schools.* The general verb "master" as used in expressing the statement makes the objectives non-behavioural or general as it is non-measurable, unobservable and not easily achieved. Note that non-behavioural or general objectives expresses teacher behaviours or intents listing areas to be covered (by the teacher) in a lesson.

Behavioural or Specific objectives

These are statement that describes specific behaviour expected of a learner during or after successful completion of a lesson or a unit of instruction. The behaviours are expected to be demonstrated by the learner hence, the name behavioural objective or performance objectives when referred to skill-oriented learning. This demonstration could be in the domain of cognitive, affective or psychomotor.

Cognitive objectives call for outcomes of mental activity such as memorizing, reading, problem solving, analyzing, synthesizing, and drawing conclusions. Affective objectives focus on emotion e.g. attitude; while the psychomotor objectives focus on the control or manipulation of muscular skeletal system or some part of it e.g., writing, drawing (Anderson, et al, 2000). The affective and psychomotor domains have relevance and significance only in the context of the cognitive domain. This is because whenever a person seeks to learn or react in an appropriate way emotionally (affective), there is some thinking going on; and to learn a motor skill (psychomotor) require some cognition. However, the ultimate goal is not the cognitive aspects of the attitude or skills but the product of an affect (e.g. an attitude) and the control of muscles or muscle groups (skill).

Technically speaking, behavioural objectives are observable, action-oriented, measurable, time-limited and easily achieved (Inyang Abia, 2004). To this end, action verbs such as "mention", "state", "write", "read", "draw and "measure" are always used in expressing these statements to show clearly what the learner should be able to do during or at the end of the instruction. Consider our previous example on the reason for the introduction of social studies in Nigerian schools, a behavioural or specific objectives could be stated thus: *Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to;*

Cognitive domain

- i. *Define social studies*
- ii. *State 5 reasons for its introduction in Nigeria*
- iii. *Analyze 3 problems of teaching social studies in Nigerian schools.*

Affective domain

Agree or disagree that social studies is of great importance to the unity and peace of Nigerian.

Psychomotor domain

Draw map of Nigeria showing location of the three major tribes.

It can be observed therefore, that the singular difference between behavioural objectives and the non-behavioural objectives is the use of action verbs in expressing their intents as opposed to the vague general verbs used in the non-behavioural objectives.

How to write an instructional objectives in social studies

Thinking in term of instructional objectives will help the teacher clarify in his mind, what he want to teach and it will also help learners to be clear in their own minds what they should be able to do upon completion of a unit of the instruction. Working from objective also allows the teacher to create and administer evaluation test that flow seamlessly from his classroom activities.

The following procedures or steps are hints in instructional objectives preparation:

1. Determine what you want the student to know. For instance teaching a list of several characteristics of social studies education to a particular set of students.
2. Plan for specific goal. In this case, assume that the teacher want the student to know 20 specific point of characteristics of social studies education.
3. The next step is the teacher choosing the element that he/she wants to test. The teacher has to be clear on exactly which points he/she is interested in.
4. Write a goal-specific statement using active, measurable verbs. Stay away from verbs like “know” and “understand” as these concepts are not measurable in any quantifiable way. The statement must indicate clearly what the students should be able to do at the end of the instructional period and how the student will be assessed. For example. “After studying the 20 characteristics of social studies education, the student will be asked all 20 of them”.
5. Decide on what the “mastery level” will be. This explains the level that the teacher will consider the student knowledgeable enough to proceed to the next instructional unit. A typical mastery level is 80%. For example, “To show mastery, the student will correctly state and explain at least 16-20 points”.
6. Design testing or assessment tools around instructional objectives based on what is stated the student should be able to do following the instruction. Make the test as simple as a repeat of the instructional objectives or expand the objective to include several objectives. The testing instructions then could be “the student will be required to write in the time given, 20 characteristics of social studies education”. Mastery is achieved when you have answered 16 correctly.
7. Check for wrong elements and determine how to re-teach any needed material. For example, it is possible that students will have missed several points in one topic field. These points would then be retaught, a review of all points would be advisable, then a new test given, similar to the first. Again the teacher is looking for students to meet his/her instructional objectives by gaining mastery at the level he/she determines.

Characteristics of a well-written objectives in social studies

A well-written objective should meet the following criteria:

1. Be learner-oriented: A student/learner-oriented objectives focuses on learner, not the teacher. It is student-centric and not teacher-centric in nature. It describes what the learner will be expected to be able to do and not describe a teacher activity. Though, teacher activity may be helpful to both the teacher and the student to know what the teacher is going to do, it should not be focused on the teacher.
2. Describe a learning outcome: It should not describe a learning activity but describe a learning outcome e.g. “provide correct answers to the questions on page... and not practice that words on page...by writing each one ten times”. Although learning activities are important in planning and guiding instruction, they are not in themselves instructional objectives.
3. Be observable (or describe an observable product). An instructional objectives should be observable (or describe an observable product) otherwise it leads to unclear expectations and it will be difficult to determine whether or not it had been reached. The key to writing observable objectives is to use verbs that are observable and lead to a well-defined product of the action implied by that verb. Verbs such as “to understand”, “to enjoy”, “to appreciate”, “to realize”, and “to value” are vague and not observable. Verbs such as “to identify”, “to list”, “to select”, “to compute”, “to predict” and “to analyze” are explicit and describe observable actions or actions that lead to observable products.

Purpose and importance of objective in social studies instruction

Esu and Inyang-Abia (2004: p48) outlined the following points as the purpose and importance of objectives in social studies instruction.

1. Objectives enable the teacher to recognize behaviour that is to be expected from students.
2. Objectives help the teacher to confine or limit lesson content to some specific knowledge area.
3. Objectives delimit what is to be taught guiding teacher not to go beyond the stated objectives or approach instruction haphazardly.
4. Objectives enable teacher to draw out content in such a way as to achieve what is stated. Put succinctly, objectives guide teacher’s activities.
5. It helps to specify the measurement for the learning that has been taken.

6. It helps in evaluating outcome of learning experiences and content.
7. Objectives help to define reinforcement situation of the learner
8. It enables the teacher to modify methods to suit the process of eliciting those behaviours that the objectives specify.
9. It helps the teacher to know how well the students have covered the content.
10. Objectives give direction to both teacher and students in the selection and use of materials, methods, activities and evaluation.
11. It provide guide for evaluation of achievement.
12. It provide the criteria for judging performance; and
13. It makes evaluation more valid, reliable and devoid of subjectivity.

Summary

This paper has taken pain to examine the definition, sources and kinds of instructional objectives. This is followed by the steps involved in the preparation of instructional objectives, the characteristics of a well-written objectives and purpose/importance of objectives. The discourse reveals the indispensability of instructional objective as a welcome innovation in the teaching learning process. Without this innovation teaching and learning would be a mirage.

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