



Religious and Linguistic Diversity as Predictors of Students' Educational Outcome in Social Studies in Junior Secondary Schools in Takum Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria

¹Fyentirimam Dan-Asabe

Email: danasabef@yahoo.com

PHONE NUMBER: ¹09137337194, 08138747546

¹Department of Physical and Health Education Federal University Wukari, Nigeria.

Abstract

Social diversities encompassing religious, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and lifestyle differences among learners constitute a significant but under examined dimension of students' educational outcome in Social Studies. In Takum Education Zone of Taraba State, Nigeria, persistent below-50% pass rates in Social Studies from 2018 to 2021 signal a systemic educational challenge whose social diversity dimensions require empirical investigation. This article examines the influence of two social diversity variables religious diversity and linguistic diversity on the educational outcome of Junior Secondary School III (JSS III) students in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone. It further establishes the level of students' educational outcome as the dependent variable baseline. A survey research design was employed. The population comprised 3,581 JSS III students from 42 public secondary schools in Takum Education Zone. Using stratified random sampling and the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, a sample of 400 students was drawn from 13 schools across five Local Government Areas (Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari). Two instruments were used: the Social and Cultural Diversities Questionnaire (SCDQ, Cronbach $\alpha = 0.82-0.86$) and a 60-item Social Studies Achievement Test (SST, KR-20 = 0.81). Simple linear regression was employed to test each hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings: The mean score of students in Social Studies was 53.08 (SD = 7.84), indicating moderate performance. Religious diversity significantly influenced students' educational outcome ($F = 3.497$, $p = .003$, Adj. $R^2 = .097$), accounting for 9.7% of the variance. Linguistic diversity significantly influenced students' educational outcome ($F = 12.646$, $p = .000$, Adj. $R^2 = .206$), accounting for 20.6% of the variance the strongest predictor in the study. Conclusion: Both religious and linguistic diversity are statistically significant predictors of JSS III students' educational outcome in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone. Linguistic diversity exerts a stronger predictive influence than religious diversity. Policy attention must address

language-of-instruction mismatches and religious-diversity-informed pedagogy to improve educational outcomes in this culturally heterogeneous zone.

Keywords: *Religious diversity; linguistic diversity; educational outcome; Social Studies; junior secondary school; Takum Education Zone; Taraba State; Nigeria; social diversities*

1. Introduction

Social Studies, as an integrated subject area, is designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required for responsible citizenship in a diverse, democratic society (Coe, 2014). It occupies a central position in the Junior Secondary School curriculum in Nigeria, providing the social, civic, and environmental knowledge base that underpins students' capacity to understand and navigate their society. Its effective delivery is therefore not merely an academic concern but a civic imperative the failure to produce competent Social Studies outcomes is, ultimately, a failure to produce informed and functional citizens.

Data from the Taraba State Universal Basic Education Board (2021) reveals a persistent pattern of student failure in Social Studies within the state. In 2018, only 46.6% of 1,028,009 enrolled students passed; in 2019, 42.3% of 943,349 passed; in 2020, 45.6% of 781,093 passed; and in 2021, 46.8% of 997,881 passed meaning that in every year across this period, more than half of all enrolled students failed to achieve a passing standard in the subject. In Takum Education Zone specifically, this pattern of persistent below-50% pass rates is equally evident, yet the social and contextual factors driving this outcome have not been systematically investigated (Odey, 2019).

Takum Education Zone is characterised by marked social diversity. Taraba State encompasses over 80 distinct ethnic groups (Taraba State Government, 2021), with the zone's five constituent Local Government Areas Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Wukari reflecting significant diversity in religious affiliation (primarily Islam and Christianity), linguistic background (Hausa, Jukun, Kuteb, Chamba, and other indigenous languages alongside English as the medium of instruction), and cultural practice. These social diversity dimensions constitute the lived educational context within which Social Studies is taught and learned, and their influence on educational outcome is both theoretically established and empirically under-examined in this specific geographic and institutional context. This article examines religious diversity and linguistic diversity as predictors of JSS III students' educational outcome in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone.

2.1 Objectives

- 1: To examine the extent to which religious diversity influences students' educational outcome in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone.
- 2: To examine the extent to which linguistic diversity influences students' educational outcome in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone.

3: To establish the level of educational outcome of students in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone.

2.2 Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent does religious diversity influence students' educational outcome in Social Studies?

RQ2: To what extent does linguistic diversity influence students' educational outcome in Social Studies?

RQ3 (DV): What is the level of students' educational outcome in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone?

2.3 Null Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant influence of religious diversity on students' educational outcome in Social Studies.

H0₂: Linguistic diversity has no significant influence on students' educational outcome in Social Studies.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of cognitive development provides the primary theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between social diversity and educational outcome. The theory argues that cognitive growth occurs within a social context that shapes its form and content that many of a child's most significant cognitive skills emerge from social interactions with parents, teachers, and more knowledgeable peers. Crucially, Vygotsky proposes that each culture provides children with tools of intellectual adaptation culturally specific methods of thinking and problem-solving that children internalise through interactions with more competent members of their society.

Applied to the Social Studies classroom in Takum Education Zone, this theory predicts that students' diverse religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds constitute different intellectual and social tools that interact with formal curriculum delivery. Students whose cultural and linguistic tools align with the medium of instruction and the implicit cultural assumptions of the curriculum will be advantaged; those whose tools diverge will face cognitive and communicative barriers that directly suppress educational outcome. The theory thus establishes that social diversity is not merely a demographic descriptor but an active causal factor in students' learning trajectories.

Durkheim's (1956) functionalist theory of education complements Vygotsky's cognitive framework by situating the school as the primary institutional vehicle for social integration and collective conscience formation. For Durkheim, education's central function is the methodical socialisation of the younger generation the transmission of the shared beliefs, values, and norms of the collective to each new cohort of students. This function requires, however, that the school's normative framework be

accessible to all students regardless of their social origins. Where social diversity in religion, language, or ethnicity creates barriers to this socialisation process, educational outcome suffers.

3.2 Religious Diversity and Educational Outcome

The relationship between religious diversity and educational outcome has been the subject of substantial empirical inquiry. Jeynes (2018) reported that religious schooling and religious commitment each have a positive effect on educational outcome and school-related behaviour, finding that university students with high religiosity achieved higher performances on standardised academic measures. Regenes and Elder (2010) reported that students with high religiosity attained higher scores on standardised academic examinations than students with no religious commitment, while Loury (2018) found that more religiously committed students performed better on most academic measures than less religious counterparts.

In the Nigerian context, the relationship between religious affiliation and academic engagement is mediated by the specific institutional structures of religious communities. Churches and mosques provide students with resources, community, and mentorship through Pastors and Imams (Mooney, 2019), while religiously affiliated schools 'inherently promote educational outcome more than their public school counterparts' (Jeynes, 2018). Holdcroft (2017) found that positive effects of religious practice help students to internalise values and norms that support educational outcome, foster personal expectations, internal locus of control, and avoidance of socially deviant behaviour all of which are directly relevant to academic engagement and achievement.

However, the relationship is not uniformly positive. Ning and William (2018) found a positive significant correlation between religiosity and educational outcome among Christian students ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.001$) but a negative correlation among Muslim students ($r = -0.33$, $p = 0.013$) in their study of 740 university students across five religions, suggesting that the direction and strength of the religious diversity-educational outcome relationship depends on the specific religious identity and institutional context involved. Umaru and Olalekan (2016) found no significant correlation between religiosity and educational outcome among accounting students at the International Islamic University Malaysia ($r = -.004$, $p = .943$), cautioning against overgeneralisation of positive religious diversity-outcome findings.

3.3 Linguistic Diversity and Educational Outcome

The influence of linguistic diversity on educational outcome is among the most extensively documented relationships in educational research. Howie, Venter, and Van Staden (2008) attributed low achievement among South African primary school learners to language-related factors, particularly the mismatch between multilingualism policy and practical implementation. Their findings established that when the language of instruction differs from the learner's home language, the resulting communicative barrier directly suppresses academic performance across subjects including Social Studies, whose content is communicated primarily through extended written and spoken language.

In the Nigerian context, David (2018) demonstrated that mother tongue significantly influences students' poor performance in English Language in Junior Secondary Certificate Examinations, identifying language background as among the most consequential factors alongside poor teaching methods, lack of textbooks, and inadequate teacher professional development. Kamau (2014) found that when the language of instruction differs from the home language, it has a significant impact on educational outcome, with 60% of respondents confirming language mismatch as a significant predictor of performance. Prinsloo, Rogers, and Harvey (2018) concluded succinctly that 'language facilitates communication, communication facilitates learning, and effective learning results in superior educational outcome' a causal chain that positions linguistic diversity as among the most direct structural determinants of academic performance.

Piaget's (1977) concept of disequilibrium further explains the mechanism through which linguistic diversity affects learning: in diverse linguistic environments, students encounter contradictions between what they know and what they are encountering, producing cognitive conflict. For students whose home language is not the language of instruction, this disequilibrium is chronic and profound, extending beyond the manageable challenge of novel content to encompass the basic communicative challenge of understanding instruction itself.

4. Methodology

A survey research design was employed, appropriate for obtaining and analysing data from a representative sample with the intention of generalising findings to the study population (Creswell, 2014). The design is justified by the study's objective: to establish the direction and magnitude of the relationship between social diversity variables and educational outcome in a naturalistic educational setting, without experimental manipulation of the independent variables.

The population comprised 3,581 JSS III students from 42 public secondary schools across five Local Government Areas in Takum Education Zone (Taraba State Universal Basic Education Board, 2021). Table 1 presents the population distribution and sample allocation.

Table 1: Population distribution and sample allocation by Local Government Area, Takum Education Zone (N = 3,581; n = 400)

| S/N | Local Government Area | No. of Public Schools | No. of JSS III Students |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Donga | 10 (3 sampled) | 786 (88 sampled) |
| 2 | Ibi | 3 (1 sampled) | 345 (39 sampled) |
| 3 | Takum | 10 (3 sampled) | 891 (100 sampled) |
| 4 | Ussa | 6 (2 sampled) | 567 (63 sampled) |

| | | | |
|---|--------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 5 | Wukari | 13 (4 sampled) | 992 (110 sampled) |
| | Total | 42 (13 sampled) | 3,581 (400 sampled) |

Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula [$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$, where $e = 0.05$], a sample of 400 students was determined. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation from each LGA stratum, followed by simple random sampling for school and student selection within each stratum. Thirteen schools were sampled across the five LGAs.

Social and Cultural Diversities Questionnaire (SCDQ): A 10-item instrument structured into five five-item subscales measuring religious diversity, and linguistic diversity on a four-point Likert scale (SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1). Cronbach Alpha reliability estimates: Religious diversity ($\alpha = 0.86$), Linguistic diversity ($\alpha = 0.82$).

Social Studies Achievement Test (SST): A 60-item multiple-choice achievement test developed from the 2021 Upper Basic Examination, covering six content areas using a table of specification. Each correct response scored 1 mark, incorrect 0. Reliability was established using Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20 = 0.81).

Content and face validity of both instruments were established through expert review by the researcher's supervisor and two specialists in Test and Measurement in the Faculty of Educational Foundations.

Data were collected personally by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Questionnaires and achievement tests were administered and retrieved on the spot. All hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance using SPSS Version 23. The dependent variable students' educational outcome was measured by scores on the Social Studies Achievement Test (SST).

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (RQ3 Educational Outcome Level)

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of all study variables, establishing the level of students' educational outcome in Social Studies as the dependent variable baseline.

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviations of study variables (N = 400)

| Variable | N | Mean (\bar{X}) | SD |
|----------------------|-----|--------------------|------|
| Religious Diversity | 400 | 9.49 | 2.75 |
| Linguistic Diversity | 400 | 8.91 | 2.39 |

| | | | |
|--|-----|-------|------|
| Students' Educational Outcome (SST scores) | 400 | 53.08 | 7.84 |
|--|-----|-------|------|

Table 2 reveals that students' educational outcome in Social Studies measured by the 60-item SST had a mean score of 53.08 (SD = 7.84) out of a maximum of 60 marks, translating to approximately 88.5%. This indicates a moderate-to-high overall achievement level among the sampled population. However, this must be contextualised against the state-wide data presented in Table 1 of the source study, which showed consistent below-50% pass rates from 2018 to 2021, suggesting that the SST-measured outcome in this sample may reflect exposure effects from the research context. The descriptive profile of the independent variables indicates that linguistic diversity had the lowest mean score (8.91) relative to its scale maximum, suggesting that students experience its constraints most acutely among the five diversity dimensions.

5.2 H0₁ Religious Diversity and Students' Educational Outcome

Table 3 presents the simple regression results for the influence of religious diversity on students' educational outcome in Social Studies.

Table 3: Simple regression analysis, Religious Diversity → Educational Outcome (N = 400).

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | R | Adj. R ² |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|------|------|---------------------|
| Regression | 213.567 | 1 | 213.008 | 3.497* | .003 | .314 | .097 |
| Residual | 24,308.711 | 398 | 61.077 | | | | |
| Total | 24,522.277 | 399 | | | | | |

p < .05. Predictor: Religious Diversity. Dependent Variable: Students' Educational Outcome in Social Studies.

Table 3 shows that the simple regression model produced an Adjusted R² = .097, indicating that 9.7% of the variance in students' educational outcome is attributable to religious diversity. The ANOVA test yielded F(1, 399) = 3.497, p = .003. Since p (.003) < .05, Ho₁ is rejected. There is a statistically significant influence of religious diversity on students' educational outcome in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone. This finding confirms that religious affiliation and religious commitment patterns among JSS III students have a measurable, significant predictive relationship with their Social Studies achievement.

5.3 H0₂ Linguistic Diversity and Students' Educational Outcome

Table 4 presents the simple regression results for the influence of linguistic diversity on students' educational outcome.

Table 4: Simple regression analysis, Linguistic Diversity → Educational Outcome (N = 400).

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | R | Adj. R ² |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|------|------|---------------------|
| Regression | 755.181 | 1 | 755.181 | 12.646* | .000 | .456 | .206 |
| Residual | 23,767.097 | 398 | 59.716 | | | | |
| Total | 24,522.278 | 399 | | | | | |

p < .05. Predictor: Linguistic Diversity. Dependent Variable: Students' Educational Outcome in Social Studies.

Table 4 shows that the model produced an Adjusted R² = .206, indicating that 20.6% of the variance in students' educational outcome is attributable to linguistic diversity the largest single predictor among all five diversity variables in the full study. The ANOVA test yielded F(1, 399) = 12.646, p = .000. Since p (.000) < .05, Ho2 is rejected. There is a highly statistically significant influence of linguistic diversity on students' educational outcome in Social Studies. This finding confirms that the multilingual character of the student population the interaction between home languages, mother tongue, and English as the medium of instruction is the most powerful social diversity predictor of Social Studies achievement in the study area.

6. Discussion of Findings

6.1 Religious Diversity and Educational Outcome

The finding that religious diversity significantly influences students' educational outcome in Social Studies (F = 3.497, p = .003, Adj. R² = .097) is consistent with the broader empirical literature on the relationship between religiosity and academic performance. Holdcroft (2017) established that positive effects of religious practice help students internalise values and norms that support educational outcome, foster personal expectations, and maintain an internal locus of control all characteristics of academically engaged learners. In the multi-religious context of Takum Education Zone, where Islam and Christianity coexist alongside traditional religious practices, the specific direction of this influence is contextually complex.

The result aligns with Jeynes (2018), who found that religious commitment has a positive effect on educational outcome and school-related behaviour. However, the relatively modest effect size (Adj. R² = .097) suggests that religious diversity's influence, while statistically significant, is not the dominant

predictor of Social Studies outcome in this context a finding that nuances the simple positive religiosity-achievement relationship in the literature by showing that the diversity of religious backgrounds within the classroom, rather than individual religiosity, is what is being measured here. The presence of multiple religious identities in the same classroom may produce both the positive internalisation effects noted by Holdcroft (2017) and the potential for inter-religious tension that can distract from academic engagement (Ning & William, 2018).

6.2 Linguistic Diversity and Educational Outcome

The finding that linguistic diversity is the strongest predictor of students' educational outcome among all diversity variables examined ($F = 12.646$, $p = .000$, $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .206$) is entirely consistent with the dominant finding in the educational linguistics literature. Prinsloo et al. (2018) concluded that 'language facilitates communication, communication facilitates learning, and effective learning results in superior educational outcome' a causal chain that this study confirms empirically in the specific context of JSS III Social Studies in Takum Education Zone.

The result supports Howie et al. (2008), who attributed low achievement among South African learners primarily to the mismatch between the language of instruction and students' home languages. In Takum Education Zone, with its population speaking Hausa, Jukun, Kuteb, Chamba, and numerous other indigenous languages alongside English as the medium of instruction in Social Studies, this mismatch is structural and pervasive. Students whose home language is not English the majority in this zone face a compounded challenge: they must simultaneously decode the language of instruction and process the conceptual content of Social Studies, a double cognitive load that directly suppresses performance.

The finding also supports David (2018), who demonstrated that mother tongue significantly influences students' performance in English-medium examinations, and Kamau (2014), who found that language-of-instruction mismatch significantly impacts refugee students' educational outcomes. Applied to the Takum Education Zone context, these findings call urgently for pedagogical strategies including the judicious use of indigenous languages as bridges to English-medium instruction that address the linguistic diversity challenge without abandoning the English-language proficiency goals required for national examination success.

7. Conclusion

This study establishes that both religious diversity and linguistic diversity are statistically significant predictors of JSS III students' educational outcome in Social Studies in Takum Education Zone: religious diversity accounts for 9.7% of outcome variance ($F = 3.497$, $p = .003$) and linguistic diversity accounts for 20.6% ($F = 12.646$, $p = .000$). Linguistic diversity is the dominant predictor, confirming the centrality of language-of-instruction alignment in determining Social Studies achievement in this linguistically heterogeneous zone.

8. Recommendations

1: Governments and education authorities should review the language-of-instruction policy for Social Studies at JSS level to accommodate mother-tongue-assisted instruction, particularly for students in the early years of secondary schooling where English proficiency is still developing. This aligns with the recommendations of Howie et al. (2008) and David (2018).

2: Social Studies teachers should be trained in multilingual pedagogical strategies that leverage students' home linguistic resources as bridges to English-medium conceptual learning, reducing the double cognitive load that language mismatch currently imposes.

3: Religious diversity in the Social Studies classroom should be treated as a pedagogical resource rather than a source of division. Teachers should integrate content from diverse religious traditions into Social Studies lessons, validating the religious identities of all students while building the civic tolerance that the subject is designed to promote.

4: Seminars, workshops, and public awareness programmes should be conducted to help parents, students, and teachers understand the impact of language-of-instruction choices on students' educational outcomes in Social Studies.

5: Future research should examine the interactive effects of religious and linguistic diversity on Social Studies outcome using multivariate designs, and should extend the investigation to other education zones in Taraba State and comparable multi-ethnic states to assess the generalisability of the present findings.

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