



# What Should Social Studies Achieve in Ghana? An Introspective Sense-Making of the Reforms in Curriculum Aims and Rationale

Benjamin Takyi <sup>a \*</sup>, Clarke Ebow Yalley <sup>b</sup>, Anthony Bordoh<sup>c</sup>, Isaac Eshun <sup>d</sup>

<sup>ab,c,d</sup> *University of Education, Winneba, Department of Social Studies Education, Winneba, Ghana*

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## Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of the rationale and aims of Social Studies in the Objective-Based Curriculum and Standards-Based Curriculum for Junior High Schools in Ghana. It examines the axiological and pedagogical orientations that shape the envisioned learner and society. A qualitative document analysis was conducted to identify thematic convergences and divergences. The findings on the rationale revealed that both curricula conceptualise Social Studies as a multidisciplinary, problem-solving subject that promotes citizenship and national development. While the Standards-Based Curriculum articulates a competency-oriented rationale, the Objectives-Based Curriculum remains more cognitive and culturally rooted. Regarding the aims, both curricula affirm national identity, civic responsibility, environmental awareness, and peaceful coexistence. Yet the Standards-Based Curriculum repositions these aims through an action-centred and affective lens, prioritising inclusivity, personal identity, and global relevance. The findings conclude that the revised curriculum represents a progressive change in the rationale and aims of teaching Social Studies in Ghana, whose full transformative potential can be realised through deliberate investment in teacher preparation, resource provision, and institutional support. Proactively addressing pedagogical and systemic challenges in Junior High Schools in Ghana will position Social Studies to cultivate empowered, globally competent citizens it envisions.

**Keywords:** Social Studies, Aims, Rationale, Objectives-Based Curriculum, Competency-Based Curriculum

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Introduce the problem

In the Ghana, Social Studies education in Junior High Schools has undergone significant curricular transformation, marked by a shift from the long-standing Objectives-Based Social Studies Curriculum to the more recent Standards-Based Social Studies

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\*Corresponding author. Benjamin Takyi. ORCID ID.: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8148-4581>  
E-mail: 8240430010@st.uew.edu.gh

Curriculum. This shift, introduced as part of a comprehensive national educational reform agenda, seeks to enhance teaching and learning outcomes, foster competency-based learning, and realign education with global and national development priorities.

Under the Objectives-Based Curriculum, the rationale for Social Studies, formulated by the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD, 2007), centred on preparing learners to participate meaningfully in society through a multidisciplinary lens. Drawing on history, geography, civics, and economics, it sought to foster critical thinking, promote national identity, and cultivate a deeper understanding of Ghana's socio-political and environmental landscape. The stated aims of the curriculum emphasised peaceful coexistence, appreciation of Ghana's historical and cultural context, and the capacity to address national development challenges. The standards-based Curriculum, developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA, 2020), rearticulates the rationale and aims of the subject. It presents Social Studies as a vehicle for nurturing active, responsible, and globally aware citizens, equipped with the knowledge and skills to confront personal and societal challenges. The revised aims include cultivating a sense of national belonging, promoting sustainable use of resources, challenging stereotypes, and equipping learners with skills for global competitiveness.

Given the revision in the rationale and aim of teaching Social Studies, there is a need to investigate whether the revision of the rationale and aims represents a substantive redefinition of educational purpose or merely a rhetorical repackaging of existing frameworks. This concern is particularly salient in Social Studies education in Ghana, which has historically faced persistent critiques under the Objectives-Based Curriculum. Empirical studies have consistently revealed a troubling disconnect between the curriculum's intended goals and actual classroom outcomes.

For instance, Opoku-Afriyie et al. (2024) found that while students were exposed to content promoting civic responsibility and problem-solving, they often struggled to apply these competencies in real-life social contexts. Eshun et al. (2024) similarly reported that many Social Studies teachers had lost sight of the subject's broader aims, leading to teaching practices that were misaligned with expected outcomes. Kyei and Liyab (2022) further highlighted a lack of structural and pedagogical coherence, which hindered the cultivation of national cohesion and civic identity among learners. Angyagre and Quainoo (2019) also observed that the content and instructional strategies of the Objectives-Based Social Studies Curriculum fell short in developing critical civic competencies, especially those necessary to address social injustices and globalisation. These empirical findings collectively point to a systematic disjunction between the curriculum's intentions and educational realities, raising compelling doubts about whether the revised Social Studies Curriculum for Junior High Schools can deliver on its promises.

The disjunction has had concrete policy implications. In 2019, proposals to remove Social Studies from the basic school curriculum provoked widespread backlash from key stakeholders. The National Association of Social Studies Students publicly opposed the decision and threatened to stage protests. At the same time, the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) described the proposal as “unthinkable,” warning that such a

move could erode civic consciousness and national identity (3 News, 2019; MyJoyOnline, 2019). These controversies highlight the contested status of Social Studies in Ghana's education system and the urgent need to ascertain whether the recent curriculum reform addresses the axiological and pedagogical deficiencies of the past.

In this regard, a comparative analysis of the Objectives-Based and Standards-Based Social Studies Curricula at the junior high school level is essential. Such an analysis is not merely academic; its findings are necessary to determine whether the revised social studies curriculum continues to fall short of its transformative potential, not only in what is taught but also in the kinds of knowledge prioritised and the conception of the learner it promotes. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does the rationale in the Standards-Based and Objective-Based Curricula differ in guiding Junior High School Social Studies education in Ghana?
2. How do the aims in the Standards-Based and Objective-Based Curricula differ in guiding Junior High School Social Studies education in Ghana?

## *1.2 Review of Literature*

### *1.2.1 Definitional Disputes and the Framing of What Social Studies Seeks to Achieve*

Social Studies is a subject whose definitional ambiguity has significantly influenced its perceived goals, curricular structure, and instructional priorities. From its inception, Social Studies has been characterised by conceptual debate over what it is and what it should achieve, a phenomenon described by Evans and Passe (2007) as a “definitional war” that continues to shape scholarly discourse and curriculum development. This ambiguity reflects deeper ideological and philosophical divisions regarding the subject's goal. As Nelson (2001) opines, defining Social Studies is not simply a semantic exercise but a reflection of enduring tensions over the role of Social Studies in shaping civic life. These contested definitions influence how Social Studies is interpreted, implemented, and justified, especially regarding the type of citizen it aims to produce.

A key attempt to clarify the competing visions within Social Studies was offered by Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977), who proposed three dominant paradigms: citizenship transmission, social science integration, and reflective inquiry. Each of these paradigms carries distinct assumptions about the subject's nature and goal. The citizenship transmission model emphasises the inculcation of civic values and loyalty to the nation-state, framing Social Studies as a vehicle for social cohesion and cultural preservation (Stanley & Nelson, 1994). The social science integration model, in contrast, draws on academic disciplines such as history, geography, and political science to cultivate informed decision-making and analytical thinking. Meanwhile, the reflective inquiry approach promotes critical engagement with societal structures and encourages learners to question dominant narratives and envision alternative futures (Hursh & Ross, 2000). These varying conceptions inform fundamentally different goals for the subject, from promoting stability to enabling transformation.

Despite these divergent perspectives, there appears to be broad agreement that citizenship education is the overarching goal of Social Studies. However, according to Ross (2014), this consensus is more superficial than substantive. As Ross (2014) notes, while most scholars justify the subject on civic grounds, they differ sharply on what constitutes “citizenship.” For some, it means compliance with state norms and patriotic allegiance; for others, it involves critical reasoning, participatory democracy, and social justice. Marker and Mehlinger (1992, as cited in Ross, 2014) caution that behind the shared rhetoric of citizenship lies a “rancorous debate” over the scope and aims of the subject. This ideological divide manifests in curriculum decisions, teaching methods, and assessment practices, complicating efforts to establish a unified or universally accepted goal for Social Studies.

In the Ghanaian context, the global definitional disputes surrounding Social Studies have found distinct expression in what Bekoe and Eshun have described as curriculum feuding (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013). This refers to the persistent divergence in how Social Studies is conceptualised, taught, and understood across different educational institutions in Ghana. The absence of a unified definition has contributed to fragmented curriculum orientations that, in turn, shape differing educational aims and pedagogical approaches. For example, while the University of Cape Coast (UCC) has adopted a disciplinary model emphasising subject-specific knowledge in the traditional social sciences, the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) promotes an integrated, problem-solving approach grounded in thematic and civic competencies (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013; Quashigah et al., 2015). These divergent approaches reflect broader disagreements about the role of Social Studies in promoting national development and the type of citizenship it should cultivate.

This lack of consensus has had notable implications for teacher preparation and classroom instruction. As Paatob and Adam (2011) and Quashigah et al. (2015) observe, the differing philosophies adopted by training institutions result in Social Studies teachers entering the classroom with conflicting understandings of the subject’s goals and scope. Some adopt a content-heavy, examination-focused style of teaching, while others emphasise critical thinking and social engagement. Such discrepancies create inconsistencies in instructional delivery and challenge the subject’s coherence at the national level. As Bekoe and Eshun (2013) argue, this misalignment has weakened the transformative potential of Social Studies, reducing it, in some cases, to rote memorisation rather than a dynamic vehicle for civic empowerment.

### *1.3 Theoretical Perspective: Social Efficiency Theory*

This study was rooted within the Social Efficiency Theory, a foundational perspective in curriculum discourse that conceptualises education as a significant enterprise aimed at preparing individuals to function productively within society. First advanced by Franklin Bobbitt (1918) and later systematised by Ralph Tyler (1949), the theory stresses the importance of defining educational objectives based on social needs, aligning instruction with desired outcomes, and cultivating behaviours, attitudes, and knowledge that serve national priorities and civic cohesion. Education, from this standpoint, is expected to

produce learners who are equipped not only to adapt to society but to contribute meaningfully to its progress. Traditionally associated with outcome-based and rationalist approaches, Social Efficiency Theory has been re-evaluated in recent scholarship as more than a prescriptive model of technical instruction. Cathal de Paor (2021) argues that Bobbitt's advocacy for efficiency was not merely about standardisation or control, but about bringing coherence and responsiveness to educational planning. In this sense, the theory remains relevant in contemporary contexts where curriculum reforms aim to balance national development goals, citizenship formation, and the evolving demands placed on learners. Null (2011) and Kliebard (2004) similarly emphasise that, when interpreted critically, social efficiency offers a valuable lens for examining how educational aims reflect ideological commitments and institutional priorities, especially in times of reform.

Within this theoretical context, Social Efficiency Theory served as a valuable framework for analysing and comparing the rationales and aims of the Objectives-Based and Standards-Based Social Studies curricula. The theory guided attention to how each curriculum defines the purpose of Social Studies, constructs the ideal learner, and emphasises particular social values. It provided a conceptual basis for examining the more contentious differences between the two curricula, especially in how they envisioned the role of Social Studies in developing the kind of citizens Ghana seeks to nurture for national development and social transformation. Through this lens, the researchers conducted a purposeful comparison of the inherent commitments embedded in the rationale and aims, helping to reveal whether these commitments represent continuity, a change, or divergence in the broader trajectory of Social Studies education in the Ghanaian context.

## **2. Method**

The study relied exclusively on curriculum documents as its data sources. These included the Objectives-Based Social Studies Curriculum developed by the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD, 2007), and the Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA, 2020). These documents are the official national blueprints for the teaching and learning of Social Studies at the Junior High School level in Ghana. No additional materials, such as textbooks or empirical data from teachers or students, were used. This ensured a focused, in-depth interpretive analysis of the stated intentions of curriculum developers, as represented in the texts themselves.

The data collection commenced with the retrieval of the Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum from the official website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), and the Objectives-Based Curriculum was accessed via ResearchGate. The researcher conducted a thorough reading of each document, focusing on the sections that clearly stated the rationale and aims of the subject. These sections were extracted and compiled for further analysis. Particular attention was paid to the

language used, the structure of the aims, and the conceptual framing of the role of Social Studies in society.

A thematic content analysis was employed to analyse the selected curriculum texts. The analysis began with repeated readings of each document to develop familiarity and contextual insight. Segments of text from the rationale and aims of the curriculum documents were selected and coded inductively. The codes reflected key educational values such as civic engagement, national development, global citizenship, ethical awareness, and problem-solving. These were then grouped into broader thematic categories that revealed how each curriculum conceptualised the subject's purpose. The final stage involved comparing the themes across the two curricula, focusing on how each document conveyed its educational intentions and constructed the learner's role in national and global contexts.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 How does the Rationale in the Standards-Based and Objective-Based Curricula Differ in Guiding Junior High School Social Studies Education in Ghana?

Table 1: Core Focus Areas in the Standards-Based Social Studies Rationale

Section	Rationale	Thematic Emphasis
1.	“Social Studies is a multi-disciplinary subject that aims to equip learners with knowledge, attitudes, values and skills that will enable them to become active, informed, innovative, and responsible citizens.”	Interdisciplinary nature Competency-Based Learning; Responsible Citizenship
2.	“Social Studies addresses the challenges or problems that confront and threaten the survival of the Ghanaian society. It does so by providing the learner with the opportunity to apply concepts, theories, and generalisations from a variety of relevant disciplines to analyse, investigate, and develop appropriate solutions to personal and societal problems.	Problem-focused. The interdisciplinary nature of social studies.
3.	“It provides an opportunity for learners to further explore their immediate environment and the world at large”.	“Glocal” citizenship
4.	“Therefore, Social Studies focuses explicitly on developing the learners’ curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills and competencies for personal development and leadership. Besides, it seeks to enhance communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, digital literacy, cultural identity and global citizenship.	21st-Century Skill Development Competency-Based Learning
5.	“The inclusion of Social Studies in the Common Core Programme of the Pre-tertiary Education Curriculum is, therefore, intended to enable learners to acquire relevant tools to become effective, active and patriotic citizens”.	Responsible Citizenship

Source: NaCCA (2020, xi)

Table 1: presents a breakdown of the rationale for teaching Social Studies, as outlined in the Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum for Junior High Schools, together with the core themes generated from each section for comparison. For clarity, the rationale has been divided into five sections, each aligned with specific thematic areas. The introductory statement highlights three key themes: the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, its focus on competency-based learning, and its role in fostering responsible citizenship. The second section underscores the subject's concern with addressing challenges that threaten the survival of Ghanaian society, thereby emphasising its problem-solving nature. The third section positions Social Studies as a subject that enables learners to explore both their immediate environment and the wider world, which reflects its contribution to global citizenship education. Section four reinforces this intent by highlighting essential 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy, further strengthening the case for competency-based education. Finally, the concluding section reaffirms the centrality of citizenship education as the overarching purpose of Social Studies.

Table 2: Core Focus Areas in the Objectives-Based Social Studies Rationale

Section	Rationale	Thematic Emphasis
1.	“Social Studies is a study of the problems of society. The subject prepares the individual to fit into society by equipping them with knowledge about the culture and ways of life of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future”.	Problem-Solving Orientation, Cultural Awareness and Value Formation
2.	“The subject is multi-disciplinary and takes its sources from many subjects (Geography, history, sociology, psychology, economics and civic education). Essential elements of the knowledge and principles from these disciplines are integrated into a subject that stands on its own”.	Multi-disciplinary Perspective
3.	“AS a subject, Social Studies helps students to understand their society better; helps them to investigate how their society functions and hence assists them to develop that critical and at the same time developmental kind of mind that transforms societies”.	Citizenship Education, Critical Thinking
4.	“Our society has been a slow-moving society. It is hoped that as students understand the Ghanaian society better, and can examine the society's institutions and ways of life with a critical and constructive mind, the country will surely be on the path to better and faster growth in development”.	Citizenship and National Consciousness

**Source:** CRDD (2007, p.ii)

Table 2 also outlines the rationale for teaching Social Studies in the Objective-Based curriculum and the key themes that emerged from it. The first section shows Social Studies as a study of society's problems, preparing learners to actively engage in their communities by developing their cultural awareness, values, and problem-solving skills. The second section highlights the multi-disciplinary nature of the subject, showing how it draws insights from geography, history, sociology, psychology, economics, and civic

education, and blends them into one coherent field of study. The third section also presents Social Studies as a medium for helping learners make sense of how their society works, encouraging them to think critically and constructively while developing the mindset needed to drive transformation. In the last section, the rationale connects Social Studies to national development, expressing the hope that, as students examine local institutions and ways of life through a critical yet constructive lens, they will contribute to the nation's growth and development.

Table 3: Comparison of Rationales for Teaching Social Studies

Domain	2020 Standards-Based Curriculum	2007 Objectives-Based Curriculum
Nature and Role of Social Studies	Emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of the subject; aims to develop innovators; holistic	Recognises the subject's multi-disciplinary nature, but focuses more on understanding societal structures and societal values; primarily cognitive
Citizenship Orientation	Promotes responsible, patriotic, and active citizenship through critical inquiry and problem-solving, but emphasises action and participation.	Encourages transformative citizenship by fostering critical reflection on societal norms and institutions, but emphasises awareness and adaptation.
Problem-Solving Focus	Strong focus on equipping learners with tools and skills to solve real-world problems using multi-disciplinary knowledge and critical thinking.	Also identifies societal problems but focuses more on understanding them than on generating innovative solutions.
Skill Development	Prioritises 21st-century skills: communication, collaboration, creativity, digital literacy, and critical thinking; promotes competency-based learning.	Emphasises cognitive and analytical skills; skill development is implied and centred on societal understanding, with less focus on modern competencies.
Global vs Local Orientation	Adopts a glocal (global + local) perspective; prepares learners for both national participation and global citizenship.	Strongly oriented toward local and national concerns; emphasises Ghanaian culture, identity, and development.

**Source:** Researchers' Construct (2025)

As presented in Table 3 the unit analysis of the rationale for teaching Social Studies proposed in the 2007 Objectives-Based Social Studies Curriculum and the 2020 Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum revealed that the rationale for teaching Social Studies at the Junior High School level in Ghana has evolved considerably between the two curricula. Both curricula describe Social Studies as a multi-disciplinary and problem-solving subject, but they differ in their scope, educational priorities, and the expected roles of learners in society. These differences reflect broader changes in what the subject seeks to achieve. From the analysis, the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD, 2007) views Social Studies as a means of promoting social

understanding, cultural continuity, and national development. According to CRDD (2007), Social Studies helps youth learn more about their society's culture and ways of life, its problems, its values, and its hopes for the future. This definition reflects a knowledge-oriented and culturally rooted nature of the rationale, highlighting the importance of value formation and cultural awareness. The curriculum's focus on developing learners' understanding of their society and its institutions is further reinforced by the statement:

*“Social Studies helps students to understand their society better; helps them to investigate how their society functions and hence assists them to develop that critical and at the same time developmental kind of mind that transforms societies”* (CRDD, 2007, p.ii).

Here, critical thinking is framed as a tool for gradual societal transformation, rooted in an understanding of national context and history. In contrast, the rationale presented in the 2020 Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment adopts a more holistic, competency-oriented approach. The rationale states that Social Studies aims to equip learners with knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills to become active, informed, innovative, and responsible citizens (NaCCA, 2020). This reflects the action-based, skills-driven nature of the philosophy, in which the learner is viewed as an active agent of change. Moreover, the curriculum's rationale emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of Social Studies, describing it as a subject that provides learners with the opportunity to apply concepts, theories, and generalisations from a variety of relevant disciplines to analyse, investigate, and develop appropriate solutions to personal and societal problems.

Another key area of contrast lies in the conception of citizenship education. The 2007 curriculum aims to promote effective citizenship by helping students examine society's institutions and ways of life with a critical and constructive mind. The focus here is on nurturing reflective citizens who contribute to national development through improved understanding of the Ghanaian society. The 2020 curriculum, through its rationale, however, extends the idea of citizenship by encouraging learners to become not just reflective, but active and patriotic citizens. This redefinition incorporates global engagement, leadership, and digital participation, skills essential for modern civic life. It states:

*“The inclusion of Social Studies in the Common Core Programme of the Pre-tertiary Education Curriculum is, therefore, intended to enable learners to acquire relevant tools to become effective, active and patriotic citizens”* (NaCCA, 2020, p.3)  
*“Therefore, Social Studies specifically focuses on developing the learners' curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills and competencies for personal development and leadership. Besides, it seeks to enhance communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, digital literacy, cultural identity and global citizenship”* (NaCCA, 2020, p.3)

The analysis also revealed that the problem-solving orientation of both curricula differs in scope and depth. While the 2007 curriculum focuses on helping learners understand and examine societal problems and encourages a “critical and developmental kind of

mind,” the 2020 curriculum expands the goal to enhance communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, digital literacy, cultural identity, and global citizenship. These 21st-century competencies represent a significant expansion of the earlier curriculum’s objectives, indicating a stronger emphasis on practical application, innovation, and international relevance. Another notable difference in the rationales is the 2020 curriculum's global orientation. It explicitly states that Social Studies provides an opportunity for learners to further explore their immediate environment and the world at large, indicating a “glocal” perspective. This is absent in the 2007 curriculum, which is primarily centred on the Ghanaian context. The inclusion of global citizenship and digital competencies in the new curriculum aligns with contemporary global educational trends and the need for learners to navigate a rapidly changing, interconnected world. Therefore, both the 2007 and 2020 rationales for teaching Social Studies in Junior High Schools in Ghana recognise the importance of equipping learners with knowledge about society and promoting critical thinking. However, the 2007 Objectives-Based Social Studies Curriculum emphasises cultural awareness, value formation, and national development through societal understanding, while the 2020 Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum focuses on developing active, innovative citizens equipped with problem-solving skills and global competencies.

### *3.2 How Do the Aims in the Standards-Based and Objective-Based Curricula Differ in Guiding Junior High School Social Studies Education in Ghana?*

Table 4: Aims of Teaching Social Studies in Junior High Schools in Ghana

2020 Standards-Based Curriculum	2007 Objective-Based Curriculum
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. explore and protect the environment</li> <li>2. exhibit a sense of belonging to the family and community;</li> <li>3. appreciate themselves as unique individuals; through deepening their awareness of stereotypes associated with their gender, abilities, ethnicity, religion and how to challenge the same</li> <li>4. demonstrate responsible citizenship;</li> <li>5. Develop attitudes for healthy and peaceful co-existence (embracing diversity)</li> <li>6. Ensure sustainable use of resources.</li> <li>7. Develop a sense of patriotism and national pride;</li> <li>8. Make themselves globally competitive”.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand the interrelationships between the social and the physical environment and their impact on the development of Ghana</li> <li>2. Appreciate the impact of history on current and future development efforts of the country.</li> <li>3. Appreciate the various components of the environment and how these could be maintained to ensure sustainable development.</li> <li>4. Recognise the significant challenges facing Ghana and be able to develop basic knowledge and skills for dealing with such challenges.</li> <li>5. Understand the dynamics of development in the world and their impact on growth in Ghana.</li> <li>6. Develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for personal growth, peaceful co-existence, and respect for people of other nations.</li> <li>7. Develop a sense of national consciousness and national identity”.</li> </ol>

**Sources:** NaCCA (2020, xiii); CRDD (2007, p.ii)

Table 4 presents the aims of teaching Social Studies in Junior High Schools as outlined in both the Standards-Based and Objective-Based Curricula. The table is intended to make the points of convergence and divergence clearer, thereby providing an easy reference for understanding the comparison that follows.

Table 5: Similarities Showing Continuity in Aims

Theme	2007 Objective-Based Curriculum	2020 Standards-Based Curriculum
Environmental Awareness and Sustainability	Emphasises understanding and maintaining environmental components (Aim 1 & 3).	Encourages learners to explore, protect the environment, and ensure sustainable resource use (Aims 1 & 6).
National Identity and Patriotism	Develop a sense of national consciousness and identity (Aim 7).	Foster patriotism and national pride (Aim 7).
Global and National Development Awareness	Understand development dynamics and their impact on Ghana (Aims 1, 2, & 5).	Make learners globally competitive and develop responsible citizenship (Aims 4 & 8).
Peaceful Coexistence and Personal Growth	Encourage peaceful co-existence and respect for others (Aim 6).	Promote healthy and peaceful co-existence and self-appreciation (Aims 3 & 5).

**Source:** Researchers' Construct

The results in Table 5 reveal important continuities in educational priorities. Both curricula share a commitment to fostering environmental awareness, national consciousness, and peaceful coexistence. These shared aims reflect an enduring vision of Social Studies as a subject that prepares learners to understand their immediate environment and to participate meaningfully in the development of Ghanaian society. However, the 2020 curriculum reframes and extends this vision by placing greater emphasis on learner identity, global engagement, inclusivity, and the development of transferable skills and values.

Regarding the Objective-Base Social Studies Curriculum, the aims that indicate an understanding of the interrelationship between social and physical environments (Aim 1), appreciation of historical legacies and their impact on national development (Aim 2), and recognition of global influences on Ghana's progress (Aim 5) clearly depict the importance of contextual understanding. These aims suggest an intention to develop learners' civic awareness through grounded knowledge of their socio-environmental and historical realities, reinforcing a transmissivity approach to teaching and learning. While these dimensions are not dominant across the aims in the objective-based curriculum, their inclusion reflects an early recognition of the importance of preparing learners to engage not only intellectually but also ethically and socially with their communities. The 2020 Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum builds upon and significantly extends this orientation. All eight of its aims articulate a coherent,

deliberate focus on developing the learner as a whole, emphasising critical thinking, identity formation, responsible citizenship, cultural competence, and global competitiveness.

Table 6: Differences indicating Changes in Focus

Aspect	2007 Curriculum (Objective-Based)	2020 Curriculum (Standards-Based)	Observed Change
Focus on History and National Development	Strong emphasis on historical awareness and national challenges (Aims 2 & 4).	De-emphasises history; focus shifted toward personal identity and global competitiveness.	Shift from historical/national development to learner-centred identity formation and global relevance.
Personal Identity and Inclusion	Implicit; not a direct focus.	Explicit focus on individual uniqueness, gender, ethnicity, and inclusion (Aim 3).	New and explicit inclusion of diversity, self-awareness, and anti-stereotyping.
Citizenship	Linked broadly to understanding and solving national challenges.	More explicitly focused on responsible and active citizenship (Aim 4).	A more precise and more actionable definition of citizenship.
Global Outlook	Focus on how global development affects Ghana.	Emphasises preparing learners to be globally competitive.	From external awareness to active global participation.
Critical Pedagogy and Social Awareness	Not explicitly emphasised; limited to values of peaceful co-existence (Aim 6).	Promotes critical awareness of social stereotypes and encourages learners to challenge inequality (Aim 3).	Introduction of critical pedagogy, emphasising social critique, agency, and inclusion.

**Source:** Researchers’ Construct (2025)

The key divergence between the two curricula lies not in a total departure from the past, but in the scope of integration and prioritisation of competencies. The 2007 curriculum reflects an initial awareness of the importance of skills and attitudes, but these are presented in an ancillary manner. In contrast, the 2020 curriculum repositions these dimensions as foundational, fully aligning the aims of Social Studies with contemporary competency-based educational expectations. Thus, the evolution from the 2007 Objectives-Based Social Studies Curriculum to the 2020 Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum is marked by both continuity and transformation. Core themes such as environmental stewardship, national identity, and social cohesion remain intact. However, the Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum expands the aims of Social Studies to include personal identity, inclusivity, global readiness, and civic empowerment. Aims 4 and 6 of the 2007 curriculum, while reflective of a more progressive vision, were overshadowed by the curriculum’s predominant emphasis on knowledge acquisition. Their presence, however, foreshadows the broader and more integrated competency-based orientation that defines the 2020 curriculum. This reveals

not a total break from the past, but a deliberate realignment and deepening of educational goals in response to changing societal and global demands.

#### **4. Discussion**

The results of this study demonstrate that the 2020 Standards-Based Social Studies Curriculum (SBC) for Junior High Schools in Ghana constitutes more than a mere surface modification of the Objective-Based Social Studies Curriculum (OBC). It represents a purposeful redefinition of the pedagogical objectives of Social Studies at the Junior High School level. This rearticulation is pertinent when examined through the perspective of Social Efficiency Theory, a traditional curriculum paradigm that emphasises the alignment of educational achievements with society and economic demands. Social Efficiency Theory, proposed by early theorists such as Bobbitt and subsequently interpreted by others, emphasises the necessity of establishing educational objectives rooted in societal needs, ensuring that instruction corresponds with intended outcomes, and fostering the requisite knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours essential for national advancement and civic unity.

The explicit endorsement of a competency-based educational system in the SBC is most apparent in this intentional transition. Eisner (2002) contends that curriculum reform transcends mere content reorganisation; it involves a redefinition of the epistemological, pedagogical, and ideological underpinnings of education. The SBC seeks to emphasise competencies including critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, cooperation, global citizenship, and digital literacy, all in accordance with 21st-century learning objectives. From a Social Efficiency standpoint, this initiative indicates a sophisticated effort by the Ghanaian education system to optimise the utility and efficacy of the Social Studies curriculum in cultivating individuals who are "efficient" workers and proficient contributors in a modernised, globalised economy. The focus on 21st-century skills such as digital literacy and collaboration mirrors the revised demands of the "social machine," redefining efficiency from simple conformity to cultural norms to active innovation and global competitiveness.

Although the SBC and the OBC exhibit notable continuities, particularly in their mutual focus on civic education and problem-solving, a significant difference exists in their interpretations of citizenship. Both curricula emphasise the significance of fostering responsible and engaged citizens; however, the conceptualisation and profundity of citizenship differ markedly, indicating fundamental transformations in the construction of the learner, the conceptualisation of society, and the role of Social Studies in relation to social change.

The OBC embodies a conventional, nation-centric perspective on citizenship, consistent with Westheimer and Ladson-Billings' (2024) characterisation of a "personally responsible citizen" who adheres to laws, engages in charitable acts or service, and

upholds national ideals. The objectives and justification of the OBC underscore societal adaptability, cultural preservation, and the dissemination of civic values integral to national progress. The CRDD (2007) states that the objective is to "prepare the individual to fit into society" by fostering understanding of cultural standards, institutional frameworks, and communal obligations. This notion primarily advocates an adaptable, developmental approach to citizenship education, in which learners are expected to understand and engage with their national contexts without critically interrogating the systems in which they are situated. The OBC aimed to cultivate citizens whose effectiveness was assessed by their compliance and successful assimilation into Ghana's established social and economic frameworks. The efficiency objective primarily concerns cultural transmission and the preservation of the status quo, which are essential for national stability.

In contrast, the 2020 SBC promotes a broader and more proactive conception of citizenship, aligned with critical and transformative frameworks of civic education (Banks, 2020). It perceives the learner not merely as a citizen within a defined national context, but as a globally competent and critically engaged human capable of scrutinising societal disparities and contributing substantively to global discourse. Aim 3 explicitly encourages learners to identify and confront prejudices associated with gender, ability, ethnicity, and religion. This objective diverges from the OBC's passive assimilation paradigm. It is more congruent with critical pedagogy and critical constructivism, both of which promote learners as co-creators of knowledge and agents of social change (Nyamekye et al., 2023; Ross, 2017). Nyamekye et al. (2023) contend that promoting critical pedagogy in Ghanaian classrooms is vital for reorienting school courses, such as Social Studies, towards an emancipatory pedagogy. This method requires teachers to transcend superficial teaching and engage students in dialogic, reflective, and socially contextualised inquiry, empowering learners to analyse their experiences, critically address injustices, and contest prevailing power dynamics.

In line with Social Efficiency Theory, the SBC's emphasis on critical and transformational citizenship, although ostensibly at odds with the conventional objective of social adaptation, may be viewed as a progression in the very concept of efficiency. In a complex, linked, and rapidly evolving global landscape, a citizen who conforms or adapts alone is inadequate to optimise a nation's developmental potential. The "efficient" citizen must be able to innovate, engage in critical analysis, and solve systemic problems. Cathal de Paor (2021) contends that Bobbitt's promotion of efficiency transcended standardisation, aiming instead to enhance coherence and responsiveness in educational planning. The SBC aims to enhance the curriculum's efficacy in tackling contemporary societal challenges - such as structural inequity, environmental degradation, and digital disparities - by fostering people capable of actively transforming society rather than merely conforming to it. The focus on learner agency, critical thinking, and inclusivity

signifies a purposeful transition to a transformative model of citizenship, equipping learners to comprehend and reform society, thereby enhancing the prospects for sustainable national development.

This alteration in the understanding of citizenship mirrors wider worldwide changes in Social Studies curricula, especially the integration of global citizenship education principles advocated by UNESCO and the OECD (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2018). The SBC's clear focus on digital literacy, global awareness, intercultural competency, and innovation positions Ghana's Social Studies curriculum within a global initiative to equip students for interconnected, complex societies. In this context, the SBC progresses towards what Westheimer and Ladson-Billings (2024) describe as the "justice-oriented citizen," an individual endowed with civic awareness and the ability to scrutinise and contest institutional imbalances. This emphasis on global preparedness and innovation reinforces the SBC's adherence to a Social Efficiency mandate as it mandates equipping learners for international competitiveness.

Nevertheless, the complete actualisation of this enhanced and more intricate vision of efficiency is not assured. The reasoning and objectives of the redesigned curriculum reflect a progressive orientation; nonetheless, its revolutionary ambition seems increasingly limited by enduring structural, pedagogical, and contextual problems during the initial phases of implementation. Multiple studies indicate that Junior High School teachers frequently lack adequate training, access to teaching resources, and opportunities for ongoing professional development essential for fulfilling the requirements of the new curriculum (Aboagye & Yawson, 2020; Bakar et al., 2022). Moreover, research indicates that Social Studies teachers persist in utilising conventional, teacher-centric approaches, notwithstanding the curriculum's focus on learner-centred, competency-based pedagogy (Awuah, 2022; Koranteng, 2023).

Viewed from the lens Social Efficiency theory, these implementation deficiencies pose a significant threat to the reform's efficacy. An impeccably crafted curriculum aimed at fostering socially beneficial citizens becomes ineffective if the delivery mechanism, comprising the classroom and the teacher is deficient. The theoretical alignment of objectives with national requirements, a fundamental principle of efficiency, deteriorates in the presence of pedagogical misalignment as didactic instruction fails to cultivate justice-oriented and critically reflecting citizens. This prompts essential enquiries into the feasibility of fostering the active and reflective citizenship proposed by the curriculum within classrooms, given the prevailing influence of exam-oriented systems and didactic teaching methods on its implementation.

To advance civic education beyond mere rhetoric, it must be grounded in systemic coherence, defined by congruent teaching, sufficient infrastructure, adaptive evaluation,

and ongoing teacher development. Kliebard (1988, pp. 21–22) warns that "When a curriculum change is implemented without proper consideration of the context in which it will occur, that innovation is likely to have a brief existence." Likewise, Fullan (2016) cautions that without intentional attempts to transform the culture, environment, and capacities within schools, even well-structured reforms would not succeed. These approaches emphasise that curriculum reform will not work without deliberate, contextually aware modifications within the school environment.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study concludes that the rationale and aims of teaching Social Studies in Junior High Schools in Ghana have evolved. The updated curriculum enhances the core objectives of fostering national identity, peaceful cohabitation, and environmental consciousness, while substantially redefining the educational aim by adopting a competency-based structure. The 2020 curriculum implements a significant transition from a cognitive, nation-centric, and adaptable understanding of citizenship, typical of the prior framework, to a more action-oriented, critical, and globally-conscious paradigm. It expressly emphasises 21st-century competencies, inclusivity, personal identity development, and the fostering of a "justice-oriented citizen" equipped to confront societal prejudices and structural inequities. This intentional rearticulation links Social Studies with modern global educational trends and promotes the subject as a catalyst for revolutionary social change and civic empowerment in Ghana. To actualise the revolutionary potential of the Standards-Based Curriculum, systemic and contextual barriers must be confronted. It is strongly advised that Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions in Junior High Schools focus on educating Social Studies teachers with the objectives and reasons of the new curriculum, as well as the necessary transition to learner-centred and critical pedagogy. Moreover, school leaders must partner with Ghana Education Service Directorates to guarantee intentional investment in institutional support, including access to sufficient teaching resources, specialised professional development opportunities, and the establishment of a conducive school atmosphere. Failure to link pedagogy, resources, and ongoing teacher development to the objectives of the new curriculum will likely hinder the realisation of the aspirational vision of fostering empowered, internationally capable citizens, leaving it limited to traditional instruction and plagued by persistent implementation obstacles.

## **6. Implications of the study**

The implications of the findings are clear. The adjustments to the subject's rationale and aims reflect the Social Studies curriculum's responsiveness to evolving educational and societal demands. The findings signal a deliberate effort to address the limitations of the Objective-Based Social Studies Curriculum. For teachers who implement curriculum innovations, this means that adapting to the revised rationale and aims will require a process of reculturing, involving changes in their pedagogical practices and values to align with competency-based and global citizenship education.

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