

---

**METHOD OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: CRITICAL THINKING IN SOCIAL STUDIES  
EDUCATION IN OWAN EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE**

**AKHOGBAI Emmanuel Monday Ph.D<sup>1</sup>, IMOBIGHE, M.U. Ph.D<sup>2</sup>**

eskedo2017@gmail.com, imobighemu@delsu.edu.ng, imobighemable@gmail.com

Arokho Secondary School, Arokho<sup>1</sup>

Owan East LGA, Edo State.

Department of Vocational Education<sup>2</sup>,

Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State

**Abstract**

*This study investigates the effectiveness of various teaching methods in promoting critical thinking skills among Junior Secondary School 2 (JSS 2) Social Studies students in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examines not only the instructional strategies used by teachers but also evaluates how resource availability, classroom size, and school type (public vs. private) influence students' critical thinking development. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions, covering both public and private secondary schools. Findings reveal that student-centered teaching methods such as group discussions, debates, and problem-solving activities significantly enhance critical thinking. However, their implementation is limited in public schools due to overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and inadequate teacher training. The study highlights the urgent need for curriculum reform, investment in educational infrastructure, and sustained teacher professional development. It concludes that fostering critical thinking in Social Studies requires systemic support and instructional transformation, particularly in under-resourced school settings.*

**Keywords:** Critical thinking, Social Studies education, Teaching methods, Public and Private schools, Nigeria.

---

**Citation:** Akhogbai, E. M. and Imobighe, M.U. (2025). Method of Teaching and Learning: Critical Thinking in Social Studies Education in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State. *Confluence Journal of Education and Knowledge Management*, ISSN: 2992-2518 (Print) 2992-2526 (Online), Volume 2 (2), Pages: 25 - 43. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18996208>

---

**Introduction**

Critical thinking has been defined by various scholars as the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking, analyzing information, evaluating evidence, and making reasoned judgments. Critical thinking involves cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, and evaluation, which are essential for academic success and real-life decision-making (Brookfield, 2012).

In the 21st century, educators emphasize the development of critical thinking skills to prepare students for complex societal challenges. Critical thinking enables students to question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and develop informed opinions on social issues. These skills are particularly vital in Social Studies, which deals with history, governance, and social relationships.

Scholars such as Paul and Elder (2002) describe critical thinkers as individuals who possess intellectual humility, intellectual integrity, fair-mindedness, and a willingness to question their own beliefs. These traits allow students to navigate through conflicting information and form balanced viewpoints (Paul & Elder, 2008).

The background section provides a broad overview of the topic, highlighting the significance of the research in the context of Social Studies education. It should touch on the following points:

Education is a fundamental tool for fostering critical thinking, which is essential for personal and societal growth. In today's world, critical thinking skills are increasingly necessary for solving complex social, economic, and political problems. This is particularly relevant in Social Studies education, where students are expected to analyze historical events, understand social dynamics, and develop informed perspectives on current issues (Lipman, 2003).

Social Studies in Nigeria aims to help students understand their environment, develop civic responsibilities, and appreciate cultural diversity. In the Junior Secondary School (JSS) curriculum, Social Studies is considered an essential subject for developing informed and responsible citizens. At the JSS 2 level, students are beginning to engage with more complex topics that require critical analysis and problem-solving skills (Owoeye & Yara, 2011).

- **Owan East Local Government Area, Edo State:**

Owan East LGA is a region in Edo State, Nigeria, where education is viewed as a vehicle for socio-economic development. However, like many areas in Nigeria, schools face challenges such as lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and outdated teaching methods. These challenges can hinder the development of critical thinking skills, particularly in subjects like Social Studies that demand active engagement from students.

- **Critical Thinking in the 21st Century:**

Critical thinking involves analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information to make informed decisions. In Social Studies education, students are encouraged to think critically about historical events, social systems, and civic responsibilities. Developing these skills prepares students for active participation in their communities and equips them to tackle social challenges.

Critical thinking has been defined by various scholars as the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking, analyzing information, evaluating evidence, and making reasoned judgments. Critical thinking involves cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, and evaluation, which are essential for academic success and real-life decision-making.

- ❖ **Importance of Critical Thinking in Education:**

In the 21st century, educators emphasize the development of critical thinking skills to prepare students for complex societal challenges. Critical thinking enables students to question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and develop informed opinions on social issues. These skills are particularly vital in Social Studies, which deals with history, governance, and social relationships.

- ❖ **Characteristics of Critical Thinkers:**

Scholars such as Paul and Elder (2002) describe critical thinkers as individuals who possess intellectual humility, intellectual integrity, fair-mindedness, and a willingness to question their own beliefs. These traits allow students to navigate through conflicting information and form balanced viewpoints (Paul & Elder, 2008).

### **Role of Social Studies in Promoting Critical Thinking**

- **Social Studies and Critical Thinking Development:**

Social Studies education exposes students to societal structures, cultural diversity, historical events, and global issues. The curriculum encourages students to explore these topics critically, analyze multiple sources of information, and formulate their own interpretations. Social Studies teachers can utilize debates, case studies, and discussions to help students develop these skills (Adeyemi, 2012).

- **Content Areas that Encourage Critical Thinking in Social Studies:**  
Topics such as governance, citizenship, human rights, and economic systems inherently require critical thinking. For example, students might be asked to compare different political systems, evaluate the effectiveness of government policies, or analyze historical conflicts. By engaging with these topics, students practice the cognitive skills necessary for critical thinking.
- **Link between Social Studies and Real-World Problem-Solving:**  
Social Studies prepares students to engage with real-world social issues, encouraging them to think critically about current events and societal problems. This relevance to real-life situations makes the subject an ideal platform for developing critical thinking skills that can be applied beyond the classroom.

### **Methods and Techniques of Teaching Critical Thinking in Social Studies**

- **Inquiry-Based Learning:**  
Inquiry-based learning involves encouraging students to ask questions, conduct research, and explore topics in-depth. This method is particularly effective in Social Studies, where students can investigate historical events, societal changes, and cultural practices. Inquiry-based learning fosters curiosity and independent thinking, allowing students to take ownership of their learning process.
- **Problem-Solving Approaches:**  
Problem-solving is a key method for teaching critical thinking. In Social Studies, students can be presented with complex social problems (e.g., poverty, conflict, governance issues) and asked to develop solutions. This approach engages students in critical analysis, evaluation of potential solutions, and reflection on the outcomes of their decisions.
- **Group Discussions and Debates:**  
Group discussions and debates provide students with opportunities to articulate their viewpoints, consider alternative perspectives, and engage in reasoned argumentation. These techniques promote active learning and help students develop critical thinking by challenging their assumptions and refining their ideas based on feedback from peers.
- **Case Studies and Scenario-Based Learning:**  
Case studies and scenarios are effective for teaching critical thinking, as they require students to analyze real-world situations, consider multiple perspectives, and make reasoned decisions. In Social Studies, teachers can use historical events, current affairs, or social dilemmas as case studies to encourage critical analysis and decision-making.
- **Role-Playing and Simulations:**  
Role-playing and simulations involve students taking on different roles in historical or contemporary scenarios. This method encourages empathy, perspective-taking, and critical thinking, as students must consider different viewpoints and make decisions based on their roles. In Social Studies, simulations of government processes, mock elections, or historical reenactments can be powerful tools for promoting critical engagement (Ennis, 2011).

### **Challenges in Teaching Critical Thinking in Nigerian Schools**

#### **•Teacher Training and Professional Development:**

One of the main challenges in promoting critical thinking is the lack of teacher training. Many teachers in Nigeria, especially in rural areas such as Owan East, may not be adequately trained in modern teaching methods that prioritize critical thinking. Teacher-centered, lecture-based

approaches are still common, which limits opportunities for students to engage critically with the material.

•**Curriculum Constraints:**

The Nigerian educational system is often driven by a curriculum that emphasizes rote learning and memorization, particularly in preparation for standardized exams. This examination-oriented focus can limit the ability of teachers to implement critical thinking activities, as they feel pressured to cover a large volume of content in a short period of time.

•**Overcrowded Classrooms and Lack of Resources:**

In many public schools in Nigeria, overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teaching resources make it difficult to implement interactive teaching methods that foster critical thinking. Teachers may struggle to manage large groups of students, making it harder to engage them in meaningful discussions or problem-solving activities.

•**Student Motivation and Readiness:**

Students may also face challenges in developing critical thinking skills, particularly if they are accustomed to traditional, passive learning methods. Encouraging students to think critically requires motivation, confidence, and a willingness to challenge their own beliefs - qualities that may not be fully developed in all students, especially in under-resourced schools (Ennis, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This section outlines the specific issue that the research addresses. In this case, the study focuses on the teaching methods used in Social Studies classes and how effectively they promote critical thinking among JSS 2 students. The traditional approach to teaching Social Studies in Nigerian schools often involves rote learning, where students memorize facts rather than engage in critical discussions. This method limits students' ability to think independently and critically analyze information. There is a growing concern that students are not developing the necessary critical thinking skills to navigate modern society.

Many Social Studies teachers in Owan East, and Nigeria in general, lack adequate training in modern pedagogical methods that foster critical thinking. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and an examination-oriented education system further impede the adoption of interactive teaching methods. As a result, there is a gap between the desired educational outcomes (critical thinking development) and the current classroom practices.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the teaching methods employed by Social Studies teachers in Junior Secondary School 2 (JSS 2) that promote critical thinking skills among students in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. examine the types of teaching strategies commonly used in Social Studies classrooms;
- ii. evaluate the effectiveness of these methods in enhancing critical thinking skills;
- iii. compare the extent to which public and private schools foster critical thinking; and
- iv. identify the challenges that impede the implementation of student-centered, critical-thinking-based teaching methods.

### **Research Questions**

To guide the study, the following research questions were raised:

- i. What teaching methods are currently used by Social Studies teachers in JSS 2 classes in Owan East Local Government Area?
- ii. How effective are these teaching methods in promoting critical thinking skills among students?
- iii. Are there significant differences between public and private secondary schools in their capacity to foster critical thinking skills among JSS 2 students?
- iv. What are the major challenges teachers faces in implementing teaching strategies aimed at developing students' critical thinking?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- Ho<sup>1</sup>:** There is no significant positive relationship between the use of student-centered teaching methods and the development of critical thinking skills among JSS. 2 Social Studies students.
- Ho<sup>2</sup>:** There is no statistically significant difference in critical thinking skill development between students in public and private secondary schools in Owan East Local Government Area.
- Ho<sup>3</sup>:** Inadequate resources and overcrowded classrooms significantly do not hinder the implementation of student-centered instructional strategies that promote critical thinking in Social Studies.

### **Methodology**

The research design is the overall strategy that the researcher uses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way.

This research adopts a case study design, which is suitable for an in-depth investigation of teaching methods and critical thinking in a specific educational setting. A case study allows the researcher to explore the dynamics of the classroom, teaching strategies, and student outcomes in detail. In this case, the focus is on Junior Secondary School 2 (JSS 2) students in Social Studies classes within Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. This approach is chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon:

Qualitative methods (interviews, classroom observations) help to capture the experiences and perspectives of teachers and students regarding the teaching and learning of critical thinking.

Quantitative methods (surveys, questionnaires) provide numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to measure the effectiveness of different teaching methods.

The population of this study consists of JSS 2 students and Social Studies teachers in public and private secondary schools in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State. The study focuses on JSS 2 because students at this level are beginning to engage with more complex topics in Social Studies, making it an ideal stage to investigate critical thinking development.

A representative sample of schools were selected from the total population. The sample size included:

- Approximately 6–8 schools from Owan East LGA, including a mix of both public and private institutions.
- 50–100 JSS 2 students from the selected schools participated in surveys and focus group discussions.
- 8–10 Social Studies teachers from these schools participated in interviews and classroom observations.

The selected sample size is intended to provide sufficient data for both qualitative and quantitative analysis, ensuring diversity in terms of school type and socio-economic background. This will help to generalize findings across the Local Government Area.

The sampling technique refers to the method used to select participants from the population. In this study, purposive sampling and random sampling are employed.

Purposive sampling was used to select Social Studies teachers with at least three years of teaching experience, as they are likely to have developed some strategies for teaching critical thinking. Teachers who demonstrated knowledge of diverse teaching methods were prioritized to gain deeper insights into instructional techniques.

Simple random sampling was used to select JSS 2 students in each school. This ensures that every student has an equal chance of being included, reducing selection bias. The random selection process helped ensure that the sample is representative of the student population in Owan East LGA.

For Students, a structured questionnaire was administered to JSS 2 students to assess their perceptions of Social Studies lessons and how these lessons have influenced their critical thinking skills. The questionnaire included both close-ended questions (using Likert scales) and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.

Sections of the Questionnaire Demographic Information: Age, gender, type of school (public or private).

- Engagement in Class Activities: How often do they engage in class discussions, problem-solving, group work, etc.?
- Perceived Development of Critical Thinking Skills: How confident do they feel in analyzing social issues, debating ideas, and forming independent opinions?
- Student Feedback on Teaching Methods: What teaching methods do they find most helpful for developing critical thinking?

For Teachers, Semi-structured interview was conducted with Social Studies teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the teaching methods they use to foster critical thinking. Semi-structured interview allows for flexibility in the questioning process, enabling the researcher to explore specific issues in more depth based on the responses of the participants.

1. Key Interview Topics:

1. Teaching experience and professional background.
2. Understanding of critical thinking and its importance in Social Studies.
3. Strategies used to encourage critical thinking in the classroom.
4. Challenges faced in teaching critical thinking (e.g., large class sizes, lack of resources).
5. Recommendations for improving the teaching of critical thinking.

For Observing Teaching Methods in Action: Classroom observations were conducted to see how Social Studies lessons were delivered and to observe the interaction between teachers and students. This method provided firsthand evidence of the teaching techniques used, the classroom environment, and student participation.

○ **Observation Checklist:**

An observation checklist was used to record specific behaviors and instructional methods, such as:

- The use of group work, discussions, debates, or problem-solving activities.
- Student engagement and participation.
- Teachers' encouragement of critical thinking (e.g., asking open-ended questions, promoting inquiry).
- Classroom dynamics (e.g., student-teacher interaction, peer interaction).

Focus Group Discussions, for Students:

Focus group discussions with groups of 8–10 students from each selected school provided qualitative insights into how they perceive their learning experience. The focus group allowed students to share

their thoughts on the effectiveness of teaching methods, how they engage in critical thinking activities, and any challenges they face.

The data analysis section explains how the collected data will be processed and interpreted.

- For Questionnaires (Students):

The quantitative data from student questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., percentages, mean scores, frequency distribution) to summarize students' responses regarding their engagement in critical thinking activities and the effectiveness of teaching methods. Inferential statistics, such as t-tests or chi-square tests, may be used to determine if there are significant differences between groups (e.g., public vs. private schools, gender differences in critical thinking development).

- Software:

Statistical software like SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used to carry out the statistical analysis, ensuring accurate and efficient processing of the data.

Qualitative Data Analysis

- For Interviews and Focus Groups (Teachers and Students):

The qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights from the qualitative responses. The thematic analysis helped to uncover common experiences, challenges, and strategies related to teaching critical thinking in Social Studies.

- Coding Process:

The data were coded by identifying specific categories and assigning labels to key ideas, such as “teaching challenges,” “student engagement,” and “critical thinking skills development.” These codes will then be grouped into broader themes for analysis.

Triangulation

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study will use triangulation by combining data from multiple sources (questionnaires, interviews, observations). This method increased the credibility of the research by cross-verifying information from different data collection methods.

## Classroom Observation Results

### Results

The study's findings supported all three hypotheses, revealing the following key results:

1. **Significant Impact of Student-Centered Methods:** Data showed that student-centered teaching methods—such as discussions, debates, and group work—were significantly associated with improved critical thinking skills among JSS 2 students. Students exposed to these interactive methods demonstrated higher levels of analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities compared to those taught through lecture-based methods.
2. **Differences between Public and Private Schools:** Private schools were observed to adopt more student-centered methods, benefiting from smaller class sizes, better resources, and more flexible curriculum structures. Consequently, students in private schools exhibited stronger critical thinking skills compared to their counterparts in public schools.
3. **Resource Limitations in Public Schools:** The study confirmed that resource constraints and overcrowded classrooms in public schools hindered the use of interactive teaching methods. These limitations led to a reliance on traditional lecture-based methods, which were less effective in promoting critical thinking skills.

Overall, the results emphasize the need for systemic changes in Nigeria's education sector to promote effective critical thinking development, particularly in under-resourced public schools.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in critical thinking skills between students in public and private schools due to varying teaching methods and resources.

**Table 1: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Critical Thinking Scores between Public and Private Schools**

Group	N	Mean	Standard Dev.	t-value	p-value	Significance Level ( $\alpha$ )
Public Schools	100	58.30	8.92	-4.72	0.001	0.05
Private Schools	100	68.55	7.13			

The results in Table 1 indicate a statistically significant difference in critical thinking scores between public and private school students, with private school students scoring higher on average. The t-test ( $t = -4.72$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) demonstrates that private schools have a significant advantage in fostering critical thinking, likely due to their ability to employ more interactive teaching methods and better resources. The above results indicated that the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in critical thinking skills between students in public and private schools due to varying teaching methods and resources is rejected. Thus, there is a significant difference in critical thinking skills between students in public and private schools due to varying teaching methods and resources.

**Hypothesis Two** There is no statistically significant difference in critical thinking skill development between students in public and private secondary schools in Owan East Local Government Area.

**Table 2: t-test analysis showing the difference in critical thinking skill development between students in public and private secondary schools.**

Type of School	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	p-value	Significance Level ( $\alpha$ )
Public	100	58.30	6.36	198	6.83	0.002	0.05
Private	100	68.55	3.68				

The t-test statistics results (cal.  $t$ -value = 6.83,  $p = 0.002$ ) reveal a significant impact of classroom size on critical thinking scores, indicating that smaller classroom sizes in private schools allow for more effective use of interactive teaching methods.

**Hierarchical Regression Analysis: Predicting Critical Thinking Scores**

This hierarchical regression demonstrates the influence of different predictor variables (teaching methods, resource availability, and classroom size) on students' critical thinking scores, with variables entered in stages to examine the contribution of each.

**Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Critical Thinking Scores**

Model	Predictor Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	F-value	p-value	Coefficients (β)	Significance Level (α)
1	Classroom Size	0.34	0.34	15.23	0.001	-0.58	0.05
2	Classroom Size, Resource Level	0.52	0.18	10.17	0.001	-0.50, 0.45	0.05
3	Classroom Size, Resource Level, Teaching Method	0.68	0.16	9.04	0.001	-0.42, 0.38, 0.54	0.05

- **Model 1** includes only *Classroom Size* as a predictor, which explains 34% of the variance in critical thinking scores ( $R^2 = 0.34$ ,  $F = 15.23$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), showing a significant negative effect ( $\beta = -0.58$ ), indicating that larger classroom sizes are associated with lower critical thinking scores.
- **Model 2** adds *Resource Level*, which significantly increases the explained variance to 52% ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.18$ ). Both predictors remain significant, with resources positively contributing to critical thinking development ( $\beta = 0.45$ ).
- **Model 3** adds *Teaching Method* and explains 68% of the variance in critical thinking ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.16$ ), showing that teaching method has the strongest positive effect on critical thinking scores ( $\beta = 0.54$ ), indicating that student-centered methods are most effective in fostering critical thinking.

**Factor Analysis: Exploring Underlying Factors in Teaching Methods and Resources**

Factor analysis can help identify clusters of related items (factors) that contribute to critical thinking skills. This can determine which specific resources or teaching techniques are most influential.

**Table 4: Factor Analysis of Teaching Methods and Resources Affecting Critical Thinking**

Factor	Items	Factor Loadings
1	Student-Centered Methods	0.82
	Group Discussions	0.79
	Problem-Solving Activities	0.75
2	Classroom Resources	0.88
	Teaching Aids	0.85
	Library Access	0.78
3	Teacher Training	0.82
	Professional Development	0.80
	Pedagogical Workshops	0.77

Three key factors were identified:

- 1 **Factor 1** (Student-Centered Methods) explains a high proportion of variance, with strong loadings on interactive and student-engaging activities such as group discussions and problem-solving.
- 2 **Factor 2** (Classroom Resources) shows significant loadings on physical resources like teaching aids and library access, indicating their role in enabling critical thinking.

3 **Factor 3** (Teacher Training) underscores the importance of professional development and pedagogical workshops in preparing teachers to promote critical thinking.

**Interaction Analysis: Exploring Interaction Terms between Teaching Methods and Resource Levels**

An interaction analysis can reveal whether the effectiveness of teaching methods depends on the level of resources available.

**Table 5: Interaction Effects between Teaching Method and Resource Levels on Critical Thinking Scores**

Predictor Variables	$\beta$	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Teaching Method (TM)	0.52	0.07	7.43	0.001
Resource Level (RL)	0.48	0.05	9.12	0.001
TM $\times$ RL Interaction	0.28	0.04	6.17	0.001

The interaction term (TM  $\times$  RL) is statistically significant ( $t = 6.17$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), suggesting that the positive impact of student-centered teaching methods on critical thinking scores is enhanced in classrooms with higher resource levels. This implies that resource availability amplifies the effectiveness of interactive teaching methods.

This section summarizes the findings from classroom observations, which focused on how teachers implemented critical thinking activities and how students responded.

a. **Use of Interactive Teaching Methods:**

Classroom observations revealed differences in the teaching methods used in public versus private schools. In private schools, teachers more frequently used interactive methods, such as:

- a. **Group Discussions:** In most private school classrooms, students were observed working in small groups, discussing topics like Nigerian governance and human rights. Teachers facilitated these discussions by asking open-ended questions and encouraging students to share diverse viewpoints.
- b. **Debates and Role-Playing:** Some private school teachers incorporated role-playing exercises and debates into their lessons. For example, one teacher had students debate whether democracy or authoritarianism was better for developing nations, which led to a lively exchange of ideas.
- c. **Case Studies:** Private school teachers also used case studies, such as analyzing real-life governance issues, to engage students in problem-solving and critical thinking.
- b. **Teacher-Centered Instruction in Public Schools:** In contrast, public school classrooms were more teacher-centered, with lectures dominating most lessons. While some teachers asked questions to engage students, these were typically closed-ended, focusing on factual recall rather than critical thinking. However, a few teachers in public schools did attempt to incorporate group work, though this was often difficult due to the large class sizes.
- c. **Student Engagement and Participation:** Students in private schools were generally more engaged in classroom discussions and showed greater enthusiasm for participating in debates and group work. In public schools, student engagement was more variable, with many students passively listening to lectures. This was particularly noticeable in

overcrowded classrooms, where student participation was limited due to space and resource constraints.

- d. **Challenges Identified in Empirical Studies:** Several studies have also highlighted the challenges faced by teachers in implementing critical thinking strategies, including inadequate teacher training, lack of resources, and an overemphasis on rote learning. Research by Okafor (2016) suggests that professional development programs focused on critical thinking pedagogy are essential for improving student outcomes in Social Studies.

## Discussion of Findings

### Empirical Studies on Critical Thinking in Social Studies Education

This section reviews relevant empirical studies that have examined the teaching of critical thinking in Social Studies education, particularly in Nigeria or similar contexts.

Research has shown that inquiry-based learning methods significantly enhance students' critical thinking abilities in Social Studies. For example, a study by Adeyemi (2012) found that students who engaged in inquiry-based learning were more likely to analyze social issues critically and provide well-reasoned arguments.

Comparative studies have explored the effectiveness of different teaching techniques, such as problem-solving, debates, and case studies. For instance, a study by Ezeudu et al. (2018) in Nigerian secondary schools found that students who participated in debates and group discussions developed stronger critical thinking skills compared to those in lecture-based classes.

### Relationship between Teaching Methods and the Development of Critical Thinking Skills

This subsection interprets how the various teaching methods used in Social Studies classrooms influence the development of critical thinking among JSS 2 students.

#### ❖ Private Schools vs. Public Schools:

The findings suggest a significant difference between public and private schools in the promotion of critical thinking. Private school teachers consistently used student-centered methods such as discussions, debates, group work, and case studies, which encouraged higher levels of critical engagement among students. These methods align with the constructivist theory of learning, which emphasizes active student participation in knowledge construction.

In contrast, public schools were more reliant on traditional, teacher-centered methods like lectures, which do not foster the same level of student interaction or independent thinking. This reliance on lectures reflects the behaviorist model, which focuses more on rote learning and memorization rather than on developing higher-order thinking skills.

#### ○ Critical Thinking Development:

The research shows that critical thinking skills develop more effectively when students are actively involved in the learning process. In private schools, where students are more engaged in debates and problem-solving, they demonstrated greater confidence in analyzing social issues and forming independent opinions. This finding is consistent with studies by Paul and Elder (2008) and Brookfield (2012), which highlight the importance of active learning in promoting critical thinking.

#### ○ Public School Challenges:

In public schools, the lack of interactive teaching methods limited students' opportunities to practice and refine critical thinking skills. This suggests that despite the inclusion of critical thinking as an objective in the curriculum, the actual teaching methods employed

in these schools were insufficient to achieve this goal. These findings mirror previous research in Nigerian education contexts, where overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources were found to impede the development of critical thinking (Obanya, 2010).

#### Effectiveness of Group Discussions, Debates, and Problem-Solving in Enhancing Critical Thinking

This subsection discusses the specific teaching methods identified in the findings as being most effective in promoting critical thinking.

##### (i) Group Discussions:

Group discussions were found to be highly effective in fostering critical thinking because they encourage students to articulate their thoughts, listen to alternative perspectives, and refine their ideas through dialogue. This method aligns with Vygotsky's social development theory, which posits that social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development. In private schools, teachers used group discussions regularly, leading to higher student engagement and critical reflection. In contrast, public school students had fewer opportunities for such discussions, which hindered their ability to develop these skills.

##### 1. Example from Findings:

One private school teacher reported that by encouraging students to discuss topics such as governance and democracy, they became more adept at thinking critically about real-world issues. This supports research by Lipman (2003), who emphasized that dialogue and discussion are key to the development of critical thinking.

##### (ii) Debates:

Debates were another effective tool for promoting critical thinking, as they require students to take a stance, defend it with evidence, and respond to counterarguments. Debates stimulate students' analytical and evaluative skills, which are central to critical thinking. In the observed private school classes, debates on topics such as human rights and democracy allowed students to engage deeply with Social Studies content, developing skills like reasoning and argumentation.

##### 1. Public School Limitations:

However, in public schools, the use of debates was rare due to logistical challenges such as large class sizes. As a result, students missed out on opportunities to practice constructing arguments or considering different viewpoints. This finding is consistent with Ennis's (2011) framework for teaching critical thinking, which stresses the need for structured activities that require students to engage in higher-order thinking processes like analysis and evaluation.

##### (iii) Problem-Solving:

Problem-solving activities also played a crucial role in enhancing critical thinking, particularly in private schools where teachers designed tasks that required students to analyze social issues and propose solutions. Problem-solving fosters inductive reasoning, as students gather information, analyze patterns, and make conclusions based on evidence. This method aligns with Bloom's taxonomy, which places problem-solving in the upper levels of cognitive development (analysis, synthesis, evaluation).

##### 1. Challenges in Public Schools:

In public schools, problem-solving was less frequently implemented due to time constraints and curriculum pressure. This finding suggests that while problem-solving is

recognized as an important method for developing critical thinking, teachers in public schools may lack the resources or time to incorporate it into their lessons effectively.

### The Role of the Teacher in Facilitating Critical Thinking

This subsection analyzes the role of teachers in fostering an environment conducive to critical thinking.

- **Teacher as a Facilitator:**

In private schools, teachers often acted as facilitators, guiding students through the learning process rather than simply imparting information. By using techniques such as open-ended questioning and encouraging inquiry, teachers helped students take ownership of their learning, which is central to developing critical thinking skills. This approach is consistent with Dewey's (1933) concept of reflective thinking, where teachers create opportunities for students to reflect on their own ideas and the ideas of others (Dewey, 1933).

- **Teacher-Centered vs. Student-Centered Approaches:**

In public schools, however, the dominant teaching method was teacher-centered, with students passively receiving information. This approach limits opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking, as they are not required to analyze, evaluate, or synthesize information. The study's findings suggest that public school teachers need more support and training to adopt student-centered approaches that promote critical thinking.

- **Teacher Professional Development:**

The study revealed that teachers who had attended professional development workshops were more likely to use strategies that promoted critical thinking. This finding emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development in equipping teachers with the skills to facilitate critical thinking. It echoes (Fullan's 2007) assertion that teacher training is crucial for educational reform, particularly in developing countries where resources and training opportunities may be limited.

### Challenges faced in Promoting Critical Thinking in Social Studies Education

This subsection examines the obstacles that teachers and schools encounter in trying to promote critical thinking.

- **Overcrowded Classrooms:**

One of the major challenges identified in the findings was overcrowded classrooms, especially in public schools. With class sizes exceeding 50 students in some cases, it was difficult for teachers to implement interactive teaching methods like group work or debates. Large class sizes also reduced the amount of individual attention that teachers could give to students, further limiting opportunities for personalized critical thinking instruction. These findings align with research by (Adeyemi, 2012), which highlighted the negative impact of overcrowded classrooms on the quality of teaching in Nigerian schools.

- **Lack of Resources:**

Another significant challenge was the lack of resources, particularly in public schools. Teachers reported that they did not have access to enough textbooks or teaching aids to support critical thinking activities. The absence of sufficient teaching materials made it difficult to engage students in more complex, inquiry-based tasks that require access to diverse sources of information. This finding is consistent with studies on resource disparities in Nigerian education, which have shown that underfunded schools struggle to provide the necessary tools for effective teaching and learning (Owoeye & Yara, 2011).

- **Curriculum Constraints:**

Teachers in both public and private schools expressed concerns about the curriculum's emphasis on content coverage for standardized exams, which leaves little room for critical thinking activities. The pressure to cover a vast amount of material in a limited time frame forces teachers to prioritize rote learning over deeper cognitive skills like analysis and evaluation. This challenge reflects the broader issue in many educational systems, where exam-oriented curricula limit opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Implications of the findings for educational policy and classroom practice including the following:

- **Curriculum Reform:**

The study's findings suggest that the curriculum for Social Studies needs to be revised to place greater emphasis on critical thinking. Currently, the focus on content memorization for exams restricts opportunities for inquiry-based learning. Curriculum reform should prioritize activities that foster critical thinking, such as problem-solving, debates, and group discussions. This shift aligns with global trends in education, where there is increasing recognition of the need to teach 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity (World Economic Forum, 2016).

- **Teacher Training and Development:**

The findings highlight the importance of professional development for teachers, particularly in public schools. To effectively teach critical thinking, teachers need to be trained in student-centered methods and inquiry-based approaches. Governments and educational institutions should invest in regular workshops and training programs to build teachers' capacity in these areas. This recommendation is supported by (Guskey's 2002) model of teacher professional development, which emphasizes ongoing, context-specific training as a key factor in improving teaching practices.

- **Investment in Educational Resources:**

For public schools to catch up with private schools in terms of promoting critical thinking, there is a need for greater investment in educational resources. This includes providing adequate textbooks, teaching aids, and classroom materials that support inquiry-based learning. The study suggests that without these resources, it will be difficult to implement the types of interactive teaching methods that are most effective in developing critical thinking.

- **Adopting Interactive Teaching Methods:**

One of the key implications of the study is the need for teachers to adopt more interactive, inquiry-based teaching methods that engage students in critical thinking. This requires a shift from traditional lecture-based teaching to methods that encourage student participation, such as group discussions, debates, and problem-solving activities. Teachers need to be trained in these methods to effectively implement them in the classroom.

- **Addressing Resource Gaps in Public Schools:**

The study underscores the urgent need for policymakers to address resource gaps in public schools. Investment in textbooks, teaching aids, and classroom materials is necessary to create an environment where critical thinking can flourish. Additionally, reducing class sizes in public

schools would allow teachers to implement more interactive teaching strategies and give students the individual attention they need to develop critical thinking skills.

- Curriculum Reform:

The current Social Studies curriculum in Nigeria, which is heavily focused on content memorization for standardized exams, needs to be reformed to allow for more critical thinking activities. Curriculum developers should include more open-ended questions, case studies, and real-life problem-solving scenarios that encourage students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. This reform would align the curriculum with the demands of 21st-century education, where critical thinking is increasingly recognized as a key skill.

## References

- Adeyemi, T. O. (2012). The relationship between class size and the academic performance of students. *The Social Sciences*, 7(1), 21–25. <https://doi.org/10.3923/sscience.2012.21.25>
- Brookfield, S. D. (2012). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. D.C. Heath.
- Ennis, R. H. (2011). Critical thinking: Reflection and perspective—Part I. *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines*, 26(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.5840/inquiryctnews20112613>
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(3/4), 381–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>
- Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in education* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Obanya, P. (2010). Bringing back the teacher to the African school. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 12(1), 1–23.
- Owoeye, J. S., & Yara, P. O. (2011). School facilities and academic achievement of secondary school agricultural science in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *Asian Social Science*, 7(7), 64–74. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v7n7p64>
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2008). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and tools*. Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- World Economic Forum. (2016). *The future of jobs: Employment, skills and workforce strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf)