

A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH TEACHING GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE CLASSROOM IN JAMAICA

AUTHOR: Camile A. Clarke

PROGRAMME: Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction (Online)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Therese Ferguson-Murray

THE ISSUE

Climate change is the premier topic on the agenda of national leaders today as all nations will experience the effects of global climate change. The dissemination of climate change education (CCE) in Jamaican schools should be a priority if the nation is to meet both national and international goals geared towards climate change mitigation and adaptation. Teachers charged with this task should not only be knowledgeable about the facts surrounding climate change; they also should be competent in teaching methodologies that ensure positive learning outcomes.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Teaching global climate change in schools has taken root in the last two decades. The position of climate change as a top priority for world governing bodies due to the impending threat to lives and livelihoods has seen the incorporation of the subject in all facets of school curricula in an attempt to raise awareness about the impacts of the phenomenon and to prepare a population that is ready to tackle the adverse effects. This inquiry seeks to highlight the experiences of Social Studies teachers in a rural Jamaican high school. The research will uncover the nature of teachers' knowledge, their level of preparedness, and how this translates to the delivery of lessons on global climate change.



METHODOLOGY

This qualitative inquiry is known as descriptive phenomenology and relies on interpretation as told by participants. Five Social Studies teachers with varying years of experience were selected from a high school in Eastern Jamaica. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with participants and document analysis. School closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented classroom observations.

MAIN FINDINGS

All participants of the study expressed confidence when delivering lessons in global climate change even though they all admitted to little or no exposure to the concept in high school or college. Participants were found to have limited knowledge of the 'basic science' of climate change and also admitted that they did not actively seek out professional development courses on the concept.

Climate change as a topic is not extensively covered in the CSEC Social Studies syllabus. The concept is however comprehensively covered in the relatively new National Standards Curriculum for Social Studies at the grade 8 level. All participants suggested limited access to ICT for conducting lessons. Novice teachers were however more likely to use ICT in lessons as they often used their own devices.

CONCLUSION

The limited exposure to CCE in high school and college, and the results from the content analysis showing a general lack of knowledge across the region, could suggest that teachers may not actually know that they have limited content knowledge in the area. This explains the high levels of self-perceived confidence in CCE.

Social Studies teachers were not previously required to have an in-depth knowledge of climate change before the NSC and so may have also contributed to them not seeking out professional development. Incorporating ICT in CCE fosters differentiation and provides avenues for many different learning experiences. The limited access to ICT, hesitation to use these techniques and the combination of limited knowledge on the basic science of climate change can result in poor learning outcomes.



IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- Teacher training programmes must introduce mandatory ESD courses that pay specific attention to CCE.
- Teachers who are now required to cover content on global climate change will have to partake in professional development sessions on CCE. The relevant authorities can arrange these sessions or point teachers to credible self-paced/online learning platforms.
- Existing curricula must be updated to ensure that students are exposed to CCE and Education for Sustainable Development principles.
- Teachers should be outfitted with ICT tools to ensure they can deliver lessons that will inspire and empower students to action in sustainable practices.

