

EFFECT OF MASTERY LEARNING STRATEGY ON STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL STUDIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of Mastery Learning Strategy on students' engagement and performance in Social Studies in Benue State, Nigeria. The study answered two research questions; while two null hypotheses were formulated and tested. The study adopted quasi-experimental design, specifically the non-randomized, pretest post-test control group design. The population consisted of 274 Upper Basic 2 students during the 2021/2022 academic session. The sample comprised 44 Upper Basic 2 students drawn from two intact classes using multi-stage sampling technique. Social Studies Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ), and Social Studies Performance Test (SSPT) with reliability coefficients of 0.83, and 0.85 respectively were used for data collection. Mean, standard deviation and bar graphs were used to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that students taught Social Studies with mastery learning strategies had significantly higher mean engagement scores than those taught with conventional modified lecture strategy ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The study further revealed that there is statistically significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning and conventional modified lecture strategies ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that Social Studies teachers should adopt mastery learning strategy as a core pedagogical approach to enhance student engagement and performance.

Keywords: Pedagogical innovations, inclusive learning, mastery strategy, Social Studies

Introduction

Social Studies is an integrated and interdisciplinary subject that draws from the social sciences and humanities to examine human relationships, societal institutions, and the dynamic interactions between individuals and their environment. It is designed to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to function effectively as responsible citizens in a complex and ever-evolving society (Kissock, 2010). As a subject, Social Studies fosters civic competence, promotes national consciousness, and encourages social responsibility particularly within the framework of a democratic and pluralistic society.

In Nigeria, Social Studies occupies a central position in the junior secondary school curriculum, where it serves as a tool for addressing national issues and instilling in learners the values of unity, discipline, and patriotism. The subject was introduced into the Nigerian education system to help resolve social problems and to cultivate civic values necessary for peaceful coexistence and national development (Utulu, 2016). The Nigerian National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) underscores the importance of Social Studies, outlining its objectives to include the inculcation of respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, the development of a sense of national consciousness and loyalty, and the promotion of national unity and social responsibility.

Despite the laudable objectives of Social Studies, the actual practice of teaching the subject has raised concerns among scholars, educators, and policymakers. A persistent challenge in Nigerian classrooms is the continued reliance on the traditional, teacher-centered lecture method. Often referred to as the modified lecture method, this approach is characterized by the verbal transmission of information from teacher to student with limited opportunities for inquiry, interaction, or active engagement (Shamija, 2011). This mode of instruction tends to encourage rote learning and memorization rather than fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, or the application of knowledge skills that are central to the goals of Social Studies.

As a result, student outcomes in Social Studies have often been below average. For instance, in Benue State, the situation has not been different as records from the Benue State Examination Board between 2016 and 2019 show that less than 60% of students had distinction and credit pass indicating poor performance (Tsebee, 2023). Many learners exhibit low engagement, and declining academic performance, signaling a mismatch between pedagogical methods and the needs of today's diverse learners. These challenges highlight the urgent need for pedagogical innovations that not only align with the curriculum's goals but also enhance inclusivity, participation, and performance among students.

One such innovation gaining traction in contemporary educational discourse is the mastery learning strategy. Originally conceptualized by Bloom (1968), mastery learning is grounded in the belief that virtually all students can achieve a high level of understanding given appropriate conditions, sufficient instructional time, and systematic feedback. It challenges the notion that learning outcomes are predetermined by innate ability and instead asserts that learning is a function of time and instructional support. The strategy involves breaking the curriculum into smaller, manageable units, each with specific learning objectives. Learners are assessed formatively at the end of each unit, and those who have not achieved mastery receive additional support through corrective instruction before proceeding to the next unit.

Mastery learning strategy offers a practical and effective alternative to conventional teacher-centred instructional methods in Social Studies. The strategy is founded on the principle that nearly all students can achieve predetermined learning objectives when provided with sufficient time, appropriate instructional support, and corrective feedback (Bloom, 1968). Unlike conventional teaching approaches, which require all learners to progress at the same pace regardless of their level of understanding, mastery learning allows students to advance

only after demonstrating competence in previously taught concepts. This learner-centred approach promotes active participation, strengthens confidence, and reduces learning disparities among students.

The strategy is particularly relevant to inclusive learning because it recognizes individual differences in students' learning abilities and provides opportunities for every learner to attain success. By allowing students to learn at their own pace while receiving continuous assessment, timely feedback, and corrective instruction, mastery learning promotes equitable participation and improves learning outcomes irrespective of learners' backgrounds or initial academic abilities (Mezieobi, Fubara & Mezieobi, 2015). Consequently, the strategy supports the fundamental goals of Social Studies, which include developing informed, responsible, and active citizens through meaningful classroom engagement.

The effectiveness of mastery learning is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs most effectively through social interaction within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to the theory, learners achieve higher levels of understanding when guided through appropriate instructional support or scaffolding. Mastery learning reflects these principles by providing continuous assessment, immediate feedback, corrective instruction, and enrichment activities that enable students to master one learning task before progressing to the next. Consequently, the theory provides a strong theoretical basis for using mastery learning to improve students' engagement and academic performance in Social Studies.

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of mastery learning across different subject areas. Studies conducted in science-related disciplines have shown that the strategy significantly enhances students' academic achievement compared with conventional instructional approaches. For example, Adeyemo and Babajide (2014), Oluwatosin and Bello (2015), Lubna and Arshad (2017), and Iserameiya and Ibeneme (2018) reported that mastery learning improved students' achievement, conceptual understanding, retention, and attitudes toward learning in Physics and Basic Technology. Similarly, Nwoke et al. (2014) and Filgona et al. (2017) found that mastery learning enhanced students' cognitive achievement and overall learning outcomes in Mathematics and Physical Geography. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that mastery learning is an effective instructional strategy across diverse disciplines. However, because they were conducted in subjects outside Social Studies, their findings cannot be generalized directly to Social Studies classrooms.

Within Social Studies education, the available evidence is comparatively limited, although the findings remain encouraging. Abiodun (2018), Garba (2019), and Tsebee (2023) reported that mastery learning significantly improved students' academic performance and classroom engagement when compared with conventional teaching methods. These findings suggest that mastery learning has considerable potential for improving learning outcomes in Social Studies. Nevertheless, the existing studies differ in their focus, geographical coverage, and measured outcomes. While some concentrated solely on students' academic achievement, others examined engagement independently or were conducted in different educational settings. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence that simultaneously examines the influence of mastery learning on both students' engagement and academic performance in Social Studies, particularly among junior secondary school students in Benue State, Nigeria.

Although previous studies provide substantial evidence supporting the effectiveness of mastery learning, three important gaps remain. First, much of the available research has been undertaken in science-oriented subjects, with relatively fewer studies focusing specifically on Social Studies. Second, many studies have examined either academic performance or engagement separately rather than investigating both learning outcomes simultaneously. Third, there is limited evidence from the Benue State context, where differences in curriculum implementation, learner characteristics, and classroom practices may

influence the effectiveness of instructional strategies. These gaps justify the need for further investigation.

Against this background, the present study investigated the effect of mastery learning strategy on students' engagement and academic performance in Social Studies in Benue State, Nigeria. By examining both outcome variables within the same study, the research contributes empirical evidence that extends the existing literature on mastery learning and provides practical insights for promoting inclusive and effective Social Studies instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Mastery learning has been reported to improve students' academic outcomes across several subject areas, the available evidence has been drawn predominantly from disciplines such as Physics, Mathematics, Basic Technology, and Civic Education, with relatively few empirical studies focusing on Social Studies in Nigerian junior secondary schools. In addition, most previous studies have concentrated primarily on academic performance, giving limited attention to students' engagement, which is a key indicator of effective learning and inclusive classroom practice. Furthermore, there is insufficient empirical evidence on the effectiveness of mastery learning in enhancing both students' engagement and academic performance in Social Studies within the context of Benue State, Nigeria. This gap in the literature makes it difficult for teachers and education stakeholders to determine whether mastery learning is a suitable instructional strategy for improving learning outcomes in the subject. It is against this background that this study investigated the effect of mastery learning strategy on students' engagement and performance in Social Studies in Benue State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of Mastery Learning Strategy on students' engagement and performance in Social Studies in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. determine the effect of mastery learning strategy on students' engagement in Social Studies.
2. assess the effect of mastery learning strategy on students' academic performance in Social Studies.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What difference exists in the mean engagement scores of students taught Social Studies using the mastery learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method?
2. What difference exists in the mean performance scores of students taught Social Studies using the mastery learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean engagement scores of students taught Social Studies using the mastery learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Social Studies using the mastery learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method.

Research Method

The research adopted a quasi-experimental design, specifically the non-randomized pre-test post-test control group design. This design was chosen due to the impracticality of complete randomization and allowed the researcher to examine cause-effect relationships in naturally occurring classroom settings using intact classes (Emaikwu, 2016). The study was

carried out in Gwer-West Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This location was selected due to persistent reports of poor student engagement and low academic achievement in Social Studies. The study population included 274 Upper Basic 2 students drawn from government UBE schools in the area during the 2021/2022 academic session. From this population, a sample of 44 students was selected using multi-stage sampling technique. The sampled schools met specific inclusion criteria: presence of qualified Social Studies teachers, co-educational structure, adherence to the 1:30 teacher-student policy ratio, and government approval. Two instruments were employed in line with the study's focus on engagement and performance. The Social Studies Engagement Questionnaire (SSEQ) and the Social Studies Performance Test (SSPT) were developed by the researcher. The SSEQ consisted of 30 Likert-scale items designed to measure the frequency and depth of student engagement in Social Studies. It included both positively and negatively worded statements to ensure response variability and reliability. The SSPT, on the other hand, comprised 30 multiple-choice questions based on Social Studies topics relevant to the Upper Basic 2 curriculum, such as family life, marriage, and drug abuse. The items were modeled after past Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) questions. The two instruments underwent rigorous validation. Five experts in Social Studies education and measurement and evaluation reviewed the items for content and face validity. A table of specifications based on Bloom's taxonomy was also used to align test items with cognitive levels and curriculum content. Following expert feedback, some items were revised or eliminated. Reliability testing was conducted through a pilot study involving 30 Upper Basic 2 students from a school not used in the main study. The SSEQ yielded a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Similarly, the SSPT achieved a Kuder-Richardson (K-R20) reliability index of 0.85, confirming its suitability for measuring academic performance in Social Studies. Before the intervention, research assistants Social Studies teachers from the selected schools were trained over two days on the application of the mastery strategy and administration of the instruments. Uniform lesson plans were developed to guide instruction in all groups. The experimental teaching phase lasted five weeks, with pre-tests administered in the first week, instruction delivered from the second to the fourth weeks, and post-tests administered in the fifth week. To ensure the integrity of the experimental process, several control measures were put in place. These included controlling for teacher bias by using regular classroom teachers, reducing the Hawthorne effect by not introducing unfamiliar personnel, and using ANCOVA to statistically control for pre-existing group differences. The data collected were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviations, and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The data analysis and interpretation are presented according to the research questions and hypotheses formulated for the study. The decision rule was that null hypotheses were rejected if the P-value was less than 0.05 and not rejected if otherwise.

Research Question One

What is the difference in the mean engagement scores of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Table 1: Mean Engagement Score of Students Taught Social Studies Using Mastery Learning and Modified Lecture Strategies

Instructional Strategy		Pre-SSEQ	Post-SSEQ	Mean Gain
Mastery	Mean	2.76	2.80	0.04
	N	14	14	
	Std. Deviation	0.22	0.39	
Modified Lecture	Mean	3.23	3.41	0.18
	N	30	30	
	Std. Deviation	0.37	0.46	

Table 1 shows that 14 students were taught using mastery learning strategy, while 30 students were taught using modified lecture strategy. The table further reveals that the mean engagement scores of students taught using mastery learning strategy is 2.76 with a standard deviation of 0.22 during pre-test and 2.80 with a standard deviation of 0.46 in post test. The mean engagement scores of students taught using modified lecture strategy is 3.23 with a standard deviation of 0.37 during pre-test and 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.46 in post test. The table further shows that the mean gain for mastery learning strategy is 0.04 and modified lecture strategy is 0.18. The summary of the pre-test, post-test mean gain in the engagement score of upper basic 2 students taught Social Studies using mastery learning and modified lecture strategies is shown in Figure 1.

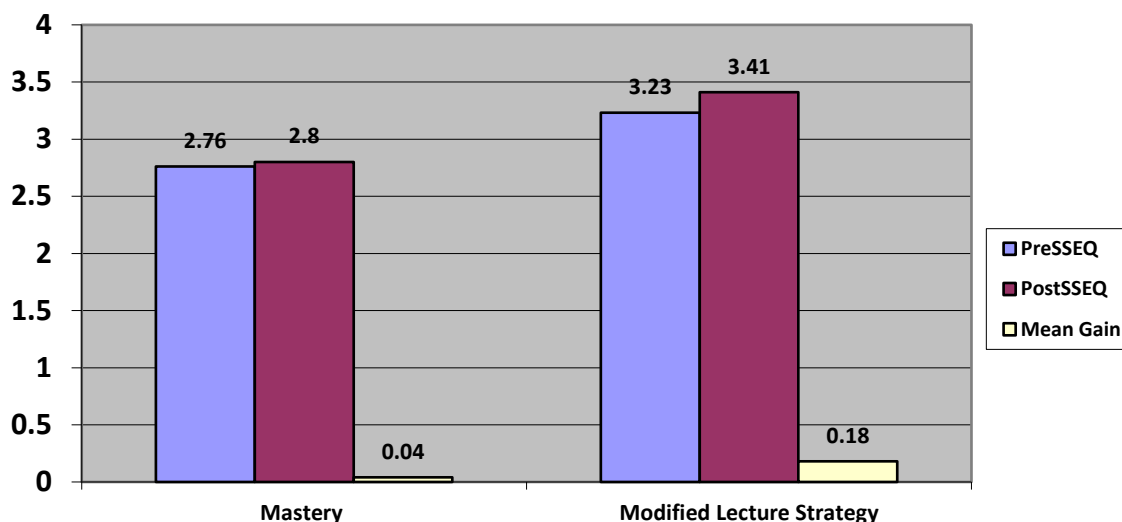


Figure 1: Bar Chart of Pretest, Posttest Mean Engagement score of Students taught Social Studies using Mastery Learning and Modified Lecture Strategies.

Research Question Two

What is the difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Table 2: Mean Performance Scores of Students Taught Social Studies Using Mastery Learning and Modified Lecture Strategies

Instructional Strategy		Pre-SSPT	Post-SSPT	Mean Gain
Mastery	Mean	13.43	14.69	1.26
	N	14	14	
	Std. Deviation	4.89	4.11	
Modified Lecture	Mean	10.47	15.60	5.26
	N	30	30	
	Std. Deviation	4.75	5.39	

Table 2 shows that 14 students were taught using mastery learning strategy while 30 students were taught using modified lecture strategy. The table further reveals that the mean performance score of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning strategy is 13.43 with a standard deviation of 4.89 during pre-test and 14.69 with a standard deviation of 4.11 in post-test. The mean performance score of students taught using modified lecture strategy is 10.47 with a standard deviation of 4.75 during pre-test and 15.60 with a standard deviation of 5.39 in post-test. The mean gain of students taught with using mastery learning strategy is 1.26 while that of students taught with modified lecture strategy is 5.26. The summary of the pre-test, post-test mean gain in the performance scores of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning and modified lecture strategies is shown in Figure 2.

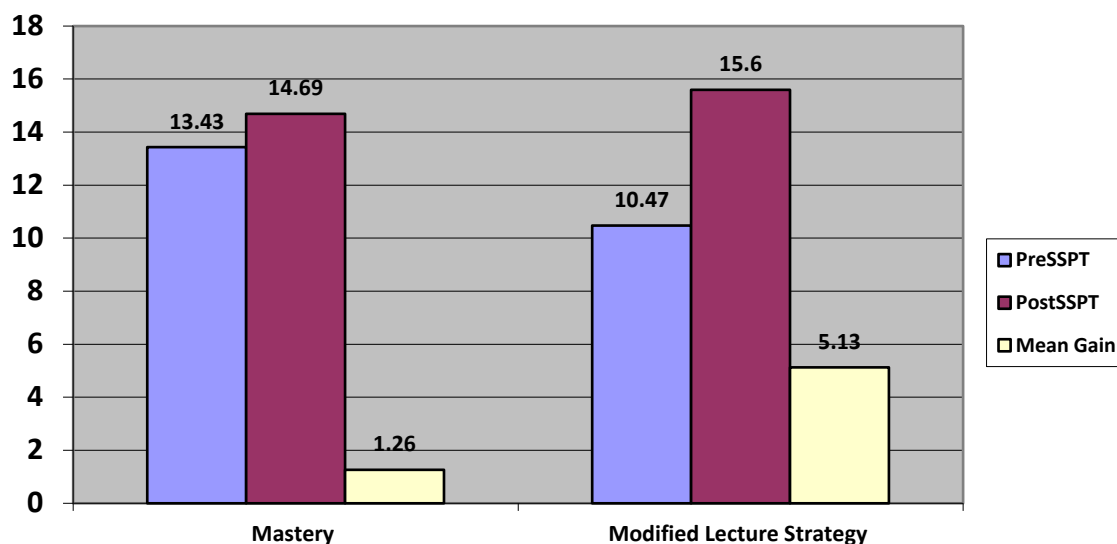


Figure 2: Pretest, Posttest Mean Performance Scores of Students taught Social Studies using Mastery Learning and Modified Lecture Strategies

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the mean engagement scores of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning strategy and those taught using the Modified lecture strategy

Table 3: ANCOVA of Engagement Scores of Upper Basic 2 Students Taught Social Studies Using Mastery Learning and Modified Lecture strategies

Dependent Variable: PostSSEQ

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	17.280 ^a	3	5.760	36.339	.000	.592
Intercept	4.759	1	4.759	30.026	.000	.286
preSSEQ	.180	1	.180	1.139	.289	.015
Strategies	7.212	2	3.606	22.750	.000	.378
Error	11.888	75	.159			
Total	664.818	79				
Corrected Total	29.168	78				

a. R Squared = .592 (Adjusted R Squared = .576)

Table 3 reveals that $F(2,75) = 22.750$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. Since p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference among the mean engagement scores of upper basic 2 students taught Social Studies using mastery learning and modified lecture strategies. The partial Eta square of 0.378 was obtained for the strategies. This means that 37.8% of engagement scores of students in Social Studies can be accounted for by the strategies employed.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning strategy and those taught using the modified lecture strategy

Table 4: ANCOVA of Performance Scores of Students' taught Social Studies using Mastery Learning and Modified Lecture Strategies

Dependent Variable: postSSPT

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2117.577 ^a	3	705.859	24.459	.000	.495
Intercept	3180.306	1	3180.306	110.204	.000	.595
preSSPT	.714	1	.714	.025	.875	.000
Strategies	1934.848	2	967.424	33.523	.000	.472
Error	2164.372	75	28.858			
Total	35802.000	79				
Corrected Total	4281.949	78				

a. R Squared = .495 (Adjusted R Squared = .474)

Table 4 reveals that $F(2,75) = 33.523$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is statistically significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught Social Studies using mastery learning and modified lecture strategies. The partial Eta square of 0.472 was obtained for the strategy. This means that 47.2% of performance scores of students in Social Studies can be accounted for by the strategies employed.

Discussion of Findings

Finding revealed that there is significant difference between the mean engagement scores, and academic performance of upper basic 2 students taught Social Studies using mastery strategy and those taught with modified lecture strategy. This is because teaching using mastery learning strategy equipped students to function on their own without solely depending on the teacher. As students engage in their work independently to master the task being assigned to them, their general perception of Social Studies is changed thereby developing their positive attitude towards the learning of Social Studies. The finding agrees with Bello and Oluwatosin (2014) who found that students taught with mastery learning strategy had positive engagement in Physics. The finding is also in line with Oloko (2016) who revealed a significant effect of mastery learning strategy on students' engagement to Civic Education.

In a related development, Majid and Zahra (2016) also found that the use of mastery learning strategy enhance students engagement which lead to increase performance of the weak students to chemistry. Supporting these findings, Animola and Bello (2019) also revealed that mastery learning strategy showed effectiveness in improving the students' engagement to Basic Science.

The aforementioned shows that mastery learning strategy enhances students' engagement in Social Studies. This change in students' positive engagement could also leads to students' performance. This is because students learn better when given an opportunity to participate actively in teaching process. In mastery learning class, students are given time to master a content after given an instruction. This opportunity enhances their performance. Tukur, Nurulwahida and Ruzlan (2018) reported that students in mastery learning strategy performed significantly better in the post-test than conventionally instructed students in Mathematics. The finding corroborate with that of Oloko (2016) that there was significant main effect of treatment on students' academic performance in Civic Education. The finding also agrees with Nwoke, Uzoma and Akukwe (2014) that students in the mastery learning class had better performance than those in traditional method class in Mathematics. The

finding also agrees with that of Abiodun (2018), Adeyemi (2017) and Oluwatosin and Bello (2015) that there was a significant effect of treatment on the academic performance of students taught with mastery learning strategy and conventional strategy with students taught using mastery learning strategy showing the best academic performance than the conventional strategy. These results align with the conclusions of Christenson, Reschly and Wylie (2012), who argue that student engagement is a critical predictor of academic success. By ensuring that students are not left behind, mastery learning accommodates individual learning differences, thereby fostering inclusivity.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that mastery learning strategy is an effective pedagogical tool for achieving inclusive education in Social Studies. It enhances students' engagement and academic performance by providing equitable learning opportunities, structured feedback, and pacing suited to individual learner needs. The strategy's emphasis on comprehension before progression ensures no student is left behind, thereby fostering equity, inclusivity, and academic success in the Nigerian classroom.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Social Studies teachers should adopt the Mastery Learning Strategy as a regular instructional approach because the study found that students taught with the strategy demonstrated significantly higher engagement than those taught using the conventional teaching method. The use of continuous assessment, timely feedback, and corrective instruction should therefore be integrated into classroom practice to sustain students' active participation in learning.
2. School administrators and curriculum implementers should encourage the use of Mastery Learning Strategy in the teaching of Social Studies since the study established that it significantly improved students' academic performance. This can be achieved by providing teachers with adequate instructional resources and creating supportive classroom conditions that allow learners sufficient time to attain mastery before progressing to subsequent learning tasks.
3. Teacher education institutions and educational agencies should organize regular in-service training, workshops, and professional development programmes on the effective implementation of Mastery Learning Strategy. Such training will equip teachers with the knowledge and skills required to design mastery-based lessons, conduct formative assessments, and provide appropriate corrective instruction that enhances both students' engagement and academic performance.
4. Curriculum developers should incorporate mastery-based instructional procedures into Social Studies curriculum guides and teacher manuals to facilitate wider implementation of learner-centred instructional practices that promote inclusive learning and improve educational outcomes.
5. Researchers should conduct similar studies in other states and educational levels using different research designs and larger samples to determine whether the positive effects of Mastery Learning Strategy on students' engagement and academic performance observed in this study are consistent across different contexts.

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