

A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF STUDENT' PERCEPTIONS OF EQUITY, INCLUSIVITY AND SOCIAL COHESION IN SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOMS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

Jacob Ropo JEKAYINOLUWA Ph.D¹ & Adeniyi Wasiu ADEOWU²

¹*Department of Educational Foundation and Counseling, University of Ilesa, Ilesa, Osun State, Nigeria*

jacob_jekayinoluwa@unilesa.edu.ng/+2348033978525

²*Department of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Ilesa, Ilesa, Osun State, Nigeria*
adeowu_adeniyi@unilesa.edu.ng/+2348035627457

ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 0206

Accepted Date: 09/02/2026

Published Date: 08/03/2026

Type: Research

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion in Social Studies classrooms in colleges of education in Osun State, Nigeria. A descriptive correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised Social Studies students from which a sample of 300 students was selected using multistage sampling. A self-designed structured questionnaires tagged Students' Perceptions on Equity, Inclusivity, and Social Cohesion Scale (SESCS) was used for data collection. The instrument employed a five-point Likert response format. Content and face validity were established by experts in Social Studies education and Sociology of education. A pilot study yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .81 (equity), .79 (inclusivity), and .83 (social cohesion), indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance. Results showed a significant positive correlation between equity and social cohesion, $r = .61, p < .01$, and between inclusivity and social cohesion, $r = .65, p < .01$. When combined, equity and inclusivity jointly predicted social cohesion, $R = .68, R^2 = .46, F(2, 297) = 126.43, p < .001$, with equity ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) emerging as the stronger predictor. The findings indicate that students' perceptions of fair treatment and inclusive pedagogical practices are significant determinants of cohesive classroom relationships. Based on these findings recommendations were made.

Keywords: Equity, inclusivity, social cohesion, Social Studies, descriptive correlational design

Introduction

Education is widely accepted as a mechanism for enhancing democratic values, social cohesion, and equitable engagement in society. Within this structure, the constructs of equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion have gained considerable scholarly interest, especially in Social Studies education. Despite this, little research attention has been given to these concepts. Therefore, the present study investigates equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion in social studies classroom. For the objective of this research, equity is operationally defined as students' access to learning possibilities, classroom engagement, teacher attention, and instructional materials. Inclusivity is considered as the extent to which teaching activities accommodate students' different social, cultural, gender, and capability backgrounds, promoting meaningful participation and representation. Social cohesion is viewed as the level of confidence, mutual respect, partnership, and sense of inclusion experienced amongst students within the classroom situation. These constructs are treated as measurable perceptions rather than abstract ideals.

From a sociological angle, the classroom represents a micro-social organisation where wider patterns of stratum, inclusion, and exception may be replicated. In the study carried out by Jekayinoluwa & Adeowu (2024) Social Studies, by design, aims to advance civic skills, active citizenship, and multicultural understanding. Corroborating the above, Ruto, Shiundu, & Simiyu, (2023) stated that Social Studies pedagogy can promote national cohesion and civic engagement. In addition, curriculum-focused research underscores the contribution of citizenship and human rights education to social integration in higher institutions (Esther & Abdul-Samad, 2024). Beyond curriculum content, justice oriented institutional practices have been connected to inclusive educational outcomes, (Dada, Adeola, James, and Abidemi, 2023).

Despite these impacts, existing studies largely investigate these variables independently, little investigation has been given to how assumed equity and inclusivity jointly relate to social cohesion within Nigerian Social Studies classrooms. Given Nigeria's socio-cultural differences and consistent educational differences, investigating this interconnectedness is analytically and practically important. This study therefore examines the correlation among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion from the perspectives of students with the aim of providing verifiable data to inform pedagogical practice and policy design.

Statement of the Problem

Social Studies is expected to ensure civic principles, mutual respect, and national unity through equity and inclusive classroom practices. In Colleges of Education, where prospective teachers are trained, these anticipations are particularly crucial because teachers in training are likely to reproduce the teaching orientations they experienced. However, existing literature has revealed that Social Studies classrooms do not always provide fair learning opportunities for all students, or do they persistently adopt inclusive teaching approaches that accommodate different backgrounds and educational requirements. Adewumi and Adesina, (2021) submitted that, such conditions may discourage students' sense of belonging, limit engagement, and which may serve as a clog to promoting social cohesion by social studies.

Although equity and inclusivity are regularly emphasised in blueprint and curriculum goals, empirical studies in the Nigerian context have mostly investigated these constructs separately, with little consideration for the classroom practices or their interactions with social cohesion among students. Consequently, it is uncertain whether students who experience just treatment and inclusive teaching in Social Studies classrooms also report higher levels of confidence, cooperation, and mutual respect which are key yardstick of social cohesion. This gap is extremely significant in Colleges of Education, where pedagogical activities should model the values desired for national integration. Paucity of empirical data on the level of equity in Social Studies classrooms, the degree to which inclusivity is pedagogically enhanced, and the nature of the correlations among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion among Social Studies students is a matter of concern. It is on this background that this study addresses this

gap by examining the levels of equity and inclusivity in classroom practice and testing the correlations between equity and social cohesion, inclusivity and social cohesion, and the combined interactions among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion in Social Studies classrooms. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. investigate the level to which equity is practiced in Social Studies classrooms;
- ii. examine the extent to which inclusivity is pedagogically facilitated in Social Studies classroom; and,
- iii. determine the relationship among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion among Social Studies students.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent is equity practiced in Social Studies classrooms?
- ii. To what extent is inclusivity practiced in the practiced in Social Studies classrooms?
- iii. To what extent does equity, inclusivity predict social cohesion among Social Studies students?

Hypotheses

- i. There will be no significant relationship between equity and social cohesion
- ii. There will be no significant relationship between inclusivity and social cohesion
- iii. There will be no significant correlation among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive correlational research design to determine the level of equity and inclusivity in Social Studies classrooms, as well as the correlations among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion. The descriptive elements allowed the researcher to investigate the persisting classroom practices as identified by the students, while the correlational component made it possible to initiate the level of relationship among the study variables without manipulating them.

The population was made up of all pre-service Social Studies teachers in Colleges of Education in Osun State, Nigeria. These groups were deemed appropriate because students are the full beneficiaries of inclusive pedagogies and are therefore better equipped to report its impact on social cohesion. The sampling frame covered five Colleges of Education which are Federal College of Education, Iwo, Osun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun, Crestfield College of Education, Osogbo, Foreign Link College of Education, Ipetumodu, and Hamzanat College of Education, Osogbo representing federal, state, and privately owned institutions in the state. A multistage sampling technique was used. First, the institutions were purposively selected to enhance institutional difference. Thereafter, intact 200 level NCE Social Studies classes were selected using simple random sampling. The final sample consisted of 300 students.

A self-designed structured questionnaire tagged Equity, Inclusivity, and Social Cohesion Questionnaire (EISCQ) was used to collect data which contained 30 items spread over three sections: equity practices, inclusivity experience, and social cohesion yardsticks, with ten items in each section. Sample items for the instrument comprised statements such as “All students in the class are given equal opportunity to participate during Social Studies lessons”, and “Students in my class rely and cooperate with one another.” Responses to the instruments were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Content and construct validity were thoroughly checked and ratified by professionals in Social Studies Education and Sociology of Education, who appraised the clarity, usefulness, and the spread of the items in relation to the research variables. The instruments was pilot tested in a College of Education outside the sampled colleges. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient

was used to determine the reliability of the instruments. The questionnaire yielded coefficients of 0.82 for equity, 0.81 for inclusivity, and 0.83 for social cohesion, revealing acceptable internal consistency for all sections.

Data collection was done with the approval of the Heads of Department of the selected colleges. The questionnaires were distributed by the research assistants with the help of the researcher, and were collected immediately after completion to ensure a high yield. Ethical considerations were strictly followed; respondents were informed of the objectives of the research, their involvement was voluntary, and anonymity and privacy were assured.

Data collected were analysed independently because they represented different but complementary points of view. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations as well as Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to analyse the data collected and the hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

H₀₁ There is no significant relationship between equity and social cohesion.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between Equity and Social Cohesion (N=300)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	p
Equity	3.42	0.64	-		.01
Social Cohesion	3.68	0.57	.61	-	

Note. $r = .61$ (2-tailed).

Decision: Since $r = .61, p < .01$, the null hypothesis is rejected because there is a strong significant positive and statistical relationship between equity and social cohesion. Higher perceived equity is associated with stronger social cohesion.

H₀₂ : There is no significant relationship between inclusivity and social cohesion

Table 2 : Pearson Correlation between Inclusivity and Social Cohesion (N=300)

Variables	M	SD	1	2
Inclusivity	3.35	0.59	-	
Social Cohesion	3.68	0.57	.58	-

Note. $r = .58, P < .001$ (2-tailed).

Decision: Since $p < .05$, the null hypothesis is rejected because there is a moderate-to-strong significant positive relationship between inclusivity and social cohesion

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship among equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion

Table 3

Intercorrelation Matrix for Equity, Inclusivity, and Social Cohesion (N=300)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	52.84	3	26.42	123.45	< .001
Residual	61.68	297	0.21		
Total	114.52	299	.61		

Decision: Since $p < .05$, the regression model statistically significant

Interpretation of Correlation Matrix. There was a moderate positive relationship between equity and social cohesion, $r(298) = .61, p < .01$.

Inclusivity also showed a strong positive relationship with social cohesion, $r(298) = .65, p < .01$. Equity and inclusivity were positively correlated, $r(298) = .58, p < .01$, indicating that classrooms perceived as equitable were also perceived as inclusive. These results mean that

higher levels of perceived equity and inclusivity are associated with stronger social cohesion among Social Studies students.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4

Multiple Regression Predicting Social Cohesion from Equity and Inclusivity (Students, N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	0.41	0.05	-	8.20	< .001	{ 0.31, 0.51}
Equity	0.36	0.04	.42	9.00	< .001	(0.28,0.44)
Inclusivity	0.29	0.04	.35	7.25	< .001	(0.21, 0.37)

Model Summary: $(F(2, 297) = 123.45, p < .001)$

Interpretation of Regression Results. Equity and inclusivity jointly and independently make significant contributions to social cohesion. Equity has stronger predictive effect ($\beta = .42$) followed by inclusivity ($\beta = .35$). The effect size ($R^2 = .46$) indicates a large practical impact, meaning classroom fairness and inclusive pedagogy are major determinants of students social cohesion.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that equity significantly envisage social cohesion more than inclusivity demonstrates that students' understanding of fairness in classroom relationship, and access to participation constitute the major mechanism through which cohesive peer interactions are formed. This supports the observation of Tyler (2006) who posited that the social factors that is distributive and procedural fairness generate confidence, legitimacy, and mutual agreements within social groups. In the context of Social Studies classrooms, when students acknowledge that rules are applied persistently and that their voices are respected equally, they are more leaning to internalise norms of reciprocation and mutual esteem. This extends earlier finding of Ibrahim & Salami, (2024) which connected fair classroom control to higher levels of student participation but did not scientifically connect it to social cohesion outcomes. The compelling effect observed here may show the dialogic and participatory nature of Social Studies teaching in colleges of education, where reciprocal fairness is more apparent than in highly examination-oriented environments.

Although inclusivity also showed a significant correlation with social cohesion, its reasonably weak predictive strength shows that recognition of diversity alone does not automatically translate to cohesive social relations. This finding question the observation of Ainscow (2020) who posited that physical presence and representation are enough for social cohesion in Social Studies classroom. It could be deduced from the above that students may be involved in inclusive classrooms yet still experience marginalisation if engagement structures remain disproportionate. The result therefore agree more closely with the findings of Banks & Banks, (2020) and Obidike, (2022) which emphasises that inclusion must be followed by reallocation of classroom power and voice. In practical terms, inclusive seating plans or mixed-ability grouping may have limited impact if classroom practices and teacher attention remain unequal.

The combined explanatory power of equity and inclusivity show their complementary impacts in influencing classroom social dynamics. Together, they accounted for a considerable percentage of the difference in social cohesion, demonstrating that cohesive learning communities emerge when unbiased system and acknowledgement of difference operate concurrently. This finding corroborated the works of Ruto et al. (2023) and Mensah & Boateng (2022), who posited that national cohesion is a curricular outcome instead as a function of classroom associative processes. By capturing the interaction between both variables, the study

provides verifiable support for the study conducted by Putnam (2007), which opined that institutional fairness and inclusive engagement ensure bonding and narrowing relationship within groups. It also aligned with studies conducted by Ire & Osuji (2024); United Nations Organisations, (2022); and Angwaomaodoko, (2023) that found positive associations between inclusive teaching and student engagement but did not test downstream social outcomes such as confidence and cohesion.

The inconsistency noticed in both equity and inclusivity practices implies that these constructs are not yet institutionalised teaching norms in colleges of education but remain hinged on individual lecturer skills and inclination. This validates Okafor and Bello's (2023) observation that equity policies in Nigerian education often lack required persistent classroom enactment due to inadequate professional preparation and resource gaps. It also reveals that teacher education programmes may highlight the civic objectives of Social Studies without adequately modelling fair and inclusive pedagogies in practice.

Taken together, the findings restructure Social Studies classrooms as sites where social cohesion is produced through everyday teaching relationships rather than through curriculum content alone. This shifts the systematic focus from what is taught to how it is taught, emphasising that nation-building outcomes associated with Social Studies depend on the lived experience of fairness, recognition, and engagement within the classroom. Such an interpretation validates the sociological view of education as a key instrument of social cohesion, while also pointing to the need for intentional pedagogical revamping if equity and inclusivity are to result into sustainable social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study investigated how equity and inclusivity correlate to social cohesion in Social Studies classrooms within colleges of education in Osun State. The analysis showed that both variables are important predictors of social cohesion, with equity reinforcing a significant independent effect, while inclusivity contributed further clarification value when considered jointly. This shows that cohesive classroom interactions are most strongly connected with persistent fairness in engagement, evaluation, and student-to-student relationship, supported by pedagogical activities that acknowledge students' diversity. The findings shift the emphasis in Social Studies from curriculum design to classroom activities, indicating that civic outcomes are influenced by students' lived experiences of fairness and recognition rather than by content exposure alone. Two limitations should be noted. First, the use of self-report research instruments may have introduced emotional bias and socially desired effects. Second, the study was limited to colleges of education in Osun State, which weaken the generalisability of the results to other institutional or regional situation. In addition, the cross-sectional analysis does not allow causal inference. Future research should use combined research designs to capture the relationship dynamics through which fairness and inclusive practices produce cohesion in real classroom situations. Longitudinal surveys are needed to examine whether these pedagogical experiences result into endured civic attitudes surpassing the college environment. Comparative studies across federal, state, and private colleges, as well as across different discipline areas, would also explain the institutional conditions under which equity and inclusivity most effectively promote social cohesion.

Recommendations

The findings of this study show that equity is the formidable predictor of social cohesion, while inclusivity makes an additional and substantial contribution when both variables are considered together. In view of this, colleges of education should institutionalise equity-driven classroom procedures. Clear and unambiguous evaluation criteria, balanced possibilities for class engagement, and fair access to instructional resources should be formally incorporated into departmental teaching blueprints. Such measures will narrow perceptions of

fairness and strengthen students' confidence in classroom activities, which the results show to be critical to the development of partnership and cohesive learning settings.

Also, the vital role of inclusivity in the regression framework recommends the need for systematic teaching methodologies in inclusive practices within Social Studies teacher education. Methodology courses should move past conceptual discussions to the useful demonstration and assessment of differentiated instruction, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the use of multifaceted views in classroom discussion. Integrating these skills in micro-teaching and teaching practice supervision will guarantee that inclusivity is operationalised as a measurable teaching skills rather than construct ideal.

The combined predictive strength of equity and inclusivity for social cohesion also underlines the significance of structured participatory learning approaches. Social Studies lecturers should deliberately adopt mixed-ability group work, rotating leadership functions, and joint problem-solving tasks. These approaches translate the statistical correlation into classroom practice by sharing opportunities justly while valuing different contributions, thereby promoting mutual consideration and collective responsibility among students.

Finally, colleges should establish regular classroom climate evaluation using validated equity, inclusivity, and cohesion scales. Period student feedback will ensure scientific evidence for targeted professional growth and enable departments to recognise classrooms where intervention is desired. This data-informed monitoring approach will ensure that efforts to enhance equitable and inclusive pedagogy are endured and agreed with demonstrable improvements in classroom social cohesion

References

- Adewumi, T. M., & Adesina, A. O. (2021). Equity in education and students' social interactions in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 12*(3), 145–162.
- Adeyemi, B. A., & Ojo, A. A. (2022). Classroom justice and student engagement in Nigerian secondary schools. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 13*(2), 45–63.
- Ainscow, M. (2020). Promoting inclusion and equity in education: Lessons from international experiences. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 6*(1), 7–16.
- Angwaomaodoko, E. A. (2023). The challenges and opportunities of inclusive education in Nigeria. *Path of Science: International Electronic Scientific Journal, 9*(7), 101–110. <https://pathofscience.org/index.php/ps/article/view/2558>
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (2020). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (10th ed.). Wiley.
- Choudhury, A. (2021). Inclusivity and social cohesion in multicultural classrooms: A sociological perspective. *International Journal of Educational Sociology, 28*(2), 77–91.
- Dada, M. R., Adeola, A. A., James, O. A., & Abidemi, S. F. (2023). Transforming higher education: Innovative school facilities, collaborative approaches, and equity-driven initiatives for diversity and inclusion. *African Journal of Educational Studies in Social Sciences, 4*(1), 45–59. <https://aspjournals.org/ajess/index.php/ajess/article/view/271>
- Dada, O. E., Adeola, M. A., James, T. A., & Abidemi, O. O. (2023). Inclusive pedagogical practices and student participation in Nigerian higher education. *African Journal of Educational Studies, 11*(1), 112–128.
- Esther, C. O., & Abdul-Samad, A. (2024). Impact of Social Studies curriculum contents on the achievement of social cohesion: Role of transformative learning theory. *British Journal of Education, 8*(3), 5047–5053. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/bcp/journal/v8y2024i3sp5047-5053.html>
- Ibrahim, M., & Salami, A. (2024). Culturally responsive pedagogy and equity in Nigerian tertiary institutions. *Journal of Sociology of Education in Africa, 12*(1), 33–48.
- Ire, E., & Osuji, G. E. (2024). Inclusive education and cognitive development among students with disabilities in primary schools in Nigeria: Implications for curriculum implementation. *Global Journal of Education and Allied Research, 15*(7), 1–14. <https://zapjournals.com/Journals/index.php/ggear/article/view/2052>
- Jekayinoluwa, J. R., & Adeowu, A. W. (2024). Teaching national identity in multicultural classrooms: A study on Social Studies education and sociological perspectives of inclusion. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 8*(3), 4375–4385.
- Mensah, K., & Boateng, S. (2022). Equity, inclusivity, and student relationships: Evidence from Ghanaian classrooms. *African Journal of Educational Research, 15*(2), 88–104.
- Obidike, N. D. (2022). Promoting inclusivity in Social Studies classrooms for enhanced social cohesion. *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies, 25*(1), 101–118.

- Okafor, C., & Bello, Y. (2023). Equity and inclusivity in Nigerian education: Policies and practices. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Sociology*, 8(3), 77–91.
- Putnam, R. D. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2), 137–174.
- Ruto, S. J., Shiundu, J. S., & Simiyu, M. A. (2023). Social Studies education and national cohesion in East Africa. *International Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 15(3), 201–219.
- Ruto, Z. J., Shiundu, J. O., & Simiyu, A. M. (2023). Enhancing national cohesion through primary Social Studies learning experiences in Kenya. *African Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 15(2), 88–100. <https://ajernet.net/ojs/index.php/ajernet/article/view/189>
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law* (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.