
Module for Bachelor of Education Programme (Primary and JHS)

EBS228SW: SOCIAL STUDIES AS AN INTEGRATED SUBJECT

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REPUBLIC OF GHANA



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**IoE/MoF/TUC/GHANA CARES TRAINING AND RETRAINING
PROGRAMME FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS**



Ministry of Finance



Trade Union Congress



University of Cape Coast

DECEMBER, 2022

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UNIT 1: THE INTEGRATED NATURE OF SOCIAL STUDIES

The nature of social studies is a subject that is often discussed by educators, researchers and scholars. Some of the vexing questions often asked are: Is social studies a combination of subjects such as economics, geography, history and sociology? Is it a mishmash of courses such as career education, gender studies and environmental studies? Is it a subject that defines its goals in terms of cultivating skills such as interpersonal relations and critical thinking? In this unit, we try to answer these and similar questions by discussing the integrated nature of social studies.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

1. Identify important features of social studies by examining some definitions of the subject given by educators in the field.
2. Provide their own operational definition of social studies,
3. Explain the meaning of integration, its psychological basis, and its different forms.

SESSION 1: MEANING OF 'INTEGRATION'

In this session, we review some definitions of social studies given by some educators in the field. This will lead us to a discussion of the meaning of the term 'integration,' which describes the unique nature of social studies.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

1. State two definitions of social studies from the professional literature.
2. Explain the term 'integration.'

Key Points to Remember

1. *The Use of 'Integration' in Some Definitions of Social Studies*

- a) "Social Studies is the *integrated* study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence" (NCSS, 1994, p. 105).
- b) "The social studies are an *integration* of knowledge, skills and processes that provide powerful learning in the humanities and social sciences for the purpose of helping children learn to be good problem solvers and wise decision makers" (Lindquist, 1995, p. 1).
- c) The two definitions stated above specifically use the words 'integrated' and 'integration' respectively to describe the nature of social studies. In fact, integration appears to be the catch word used by most writers to describe the nature of social studies.

- d) There are different meanings ascribed to the word ‘integration,’ so unless the meaning of ‘integration’ as used to describe the nature of social studies is clarified, the subject might erroneously be “interpreted by some individuals.

2. Meaning of Integration

- a) To “integrate” means to coordinate, blend or bring together separate parts into a functioning, unified and harmonious whole.
- b) Glatthorn and Foshay (1991) defined integration as an “attempt to relate more closely the separate divisions of the program of studies” (p.160). We may simply call this curriculum integration.
- c) It assists students to identify the links, not only between ideas and processes within a single field, but also between ideas and processes in separate fields, and in the world outside of school.
- d) According to Cobbold (2013), integration generally calls for some form of blending, fusion, convergence or unification of disciplines and curricular elements. He explains that integration is the use of relevant ideas, concepts, principles, generalizations, theories, skills and methodologies from two or more disciplines to describe or explain a phenomenon, solve a problem or resolve an issue intelligently and holistically.
- e) NaCCA/MOE (2020) also states that integration is the application of concepts, theories and generalizations from a variety of relevant disciplines to analyze, investigate and come out with appropriate solutions to personal and societal problems.
- f) Integration attempts to create units of understanding that consist of integrated materials of instruction from several related disciplines in order to present a whole picture of a phase of knowledge rather than just a part.

SESSION 2: APPROACHES TO ‘INTEGRATION’

Integration may take several different forms, depending on the epistemological, methodological and pedagogical position adopted by the curriculum developer who is doing the integration. These different forms are called *approaches to integration* by some writers, and *types of integration* by others. In this session, we discuss the different approaches to integration.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

Describe the three main types of integration.

Using specific examples to illustrate the three main types of integration.

Key Points to Remember

1. *Intra-disciplinary Integration*

- a) This is integration within a broad field of study (also called mono-disciplinary integration). It involves an arrangement of the knowledge and skills within one subject area.
- b) For example, a social studies teacher might design a course to improve the reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing skills of his students within the broad subject area of Language Arts. This is done by focusing on general themes and relating these skills to those themes. Similarly, biology, chemistry, ecology and physics could be integrated in the study of sciences.
- c) This approach respects the subject's way of knowing distinct conceptual structures and methods of enquiry. It aims at integrating the subject's knowledge and skills into a coherent whole.
- d) Also a part of this approach is vertical integration where knowledge and skills within one subject area are connected from grade to grade.

2. *Interdisciplinary Integration*

- a) In this approach to integration (also called horizontal integration), the curriculum is organized around common learning from two or more disciplines.
- b) The approach connects the interdependent knowledge and skills from more than one subject area to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic or experience.
- c) The disciplines are usually predetermined and identifiable, and they assume importance in the learning process because they are self-consciously used as exploratory tools.
- d) Inter-disciplinary courses employ the disciplines as intellectual structures to ensure that there is methodological and conceptual clarity.
- e) For example, in designing teaching and learning about the key concept of *change*, ideas may be drawn from the disciplines of history and geography as the predetermined disciplines. Similarly, using *sustainable development* as a theme, students pursue learning outcomes from science, geography, economics and language arts to better understand an otherwise complex issue.
- f) At higher levels of the education system, such as colleges and universities, inter-disciplinary courses such as Political Economy of Ghana, Historical Geography of Ghana, and Medical Sociology may be offered. The content of such courses clearly shows the disciplines from which such content is drawn.

3. *Multidisciplinary Integration*

- a) In a multi-disciplinary integration, a theme is chosen and a number of disciplines independent of one another but related to the theme are drawn upon to enhance understanding of the theme. It is an attempt to show the relationship of different subjects to each other and to a common theme.
- b) There are different ways to achieve multi-disciplinary integration. The most common are:
 - ✓ Teachers deliberately coordinate the timing and delivery of related topics, but make no attempt to synthesize or draw together different subject area perspectives. For example, the mathematics teacher focuses on graphing skills, while the science teacher has students carry out experiments where results are presented in graph form.
 - ✓ The school timetable may be arranged in such a way that mathematics is taught prior to physics so that students would acquire prerequisite mathematics skills.

4. *Transdisciplinary Integration*

- a) Trans-disciplinary programmes transcend or ignore the disciplines. The curriculum is built upon broad learning experiences or pervasive social problems and organized around students' characteristics, needs, interests, questions, concerns and personal learning processes.
- b) There are two routes to this type of integration. They are:
 - ✓ experience or project-based learning
 - ✓ learning by negotiating the curriculum.
- c) In both cases, the main theme is first selected and as many relevant subjects and skills as possible are drawn upon in an effort to understand the theme.
- d) For example, the theme of 'Waste Management' may be chosen by both teachers and students based on students' interests, curriculum standards and available local resources. The teacher helps students to generate relevant questions to explore the theme from the perspectives of many subjects.
- e) Similarly, an experiential project such as 'Planning and Enacting the Celebration of a Local Festival' may be identified. The students would then be taught whatever skills they needed to accomplish that project, irrespective of the disciplines that are traditionally associated with those skills. However, as students work on the projects, they naturally acquire

knowledge and skills that are based in the subject areas, though the subject areas are subordinate to the project goals.

- f) The aim of the student engagement in independent projects is to develop initiative, imagination and creativity, research skills, analysis and synthesis skills and personal autonomy.

SESSION 3: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF INTEGRATION: GESTALT THEORY

The concept of integration is underpinned by Gestalt psychological theory. In this session, we will discuss Gestalt theory focusing on how it developed, its nature, main principles and laws.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain the focus of Gestalt psychology and its basic principles.
2. Explain the educational implications of Gestalt psychology.
3. Explain why Gestalt theory adequately explains the concept of integration.

Key Points to Remember

1. Meaning and Nature

The term “Gestalt,” comes from a German word that roughly means *pattern* or *form*. Gestalt psychology is a school of thought that looks at the human mind and behaviour as a whole. Gestalt psychology suggests that when trying to make sense of the world around us, we do not simply focus on every small component. Instead, our minds tend to perceive objects as part of a greater whole and as elements of more complex systems.

One aspect of Gestalt theory is *phenomenology*, which is the study of how people organize learning by looking at their lived experiences and consciousness. The implication is that learning happens best when the instruction is related to their real life experiences. The human brain has the ability to make a map of the stimuli caused by these life experiences. This process of mapping is called “isomorphism.”

2. Origin of Gestalt

Gestalt psychology originated in the work of Max Wertheimer, especially his observations one day at a train station. He purchased a toy stroboscope which displayed pictures in a rapid sequence to mimic the appearing movement. He later proposed the concept of the Phi phenomenon in which flashing lights in sequence can lead to what is known as apparent motion. In other words, we perceive movement where there is none. Movies are one example of apparent motion. Through a sequence of still frames, the illusion of movement is created.

Gestalt psychology formed partially as a response to the structuralism of Wilhelm Wundt. While Wundt was interested in breaking down psychological matters into their smallest possible part, the Gestalt psychologists were instead interested in looking at the totality of the mind and behaviour. Max Wertheimer expressed what he called “the fundamental 'formula' of Gestalt theory” in this way: "There are wholes, the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole. It is the hope of Gestalt theory to determine the nature of such wholes."

The guiding principle or main tenet behind Gestalt psychology, therefore, was that the *whole was greater than the sum of its parts*. By implication, learning is more than just invoking mechanical responses from learners.

The development of this area of psychology was influenced by a number of thinkers, including Immanuel Kant, Ernst Mach, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

3. Major Gestalt Psychologists

There were a number of thinkers who had an influence on Gestalt psychology. Some of the best-known Gestalt psychologists, regarded as the founders of Gestalt psychology were:

Max Wertheimer: Regarded as one of the three founders of Gestalt psychology, Wertheimer is also known for his concept of the phi phenomenon. The phi phenomenon involves perceiving a series of still images in rapid succession in order to create the illusion of movement.

Kurt Koffka: Known as one of the three founders of Gestalt psychology, Kurt Koffka had diverse interests and studied many topics in psychology including learning, perception, and hearing impairments.

Wolfgang Kohler: Also a key founding figure in the history of the Gestalt movement, Kohler also famously summarized Gestalt theory by saying, "The whole is different than the sum of its parts." He was also known for his research on problem-solving, his criticisms of the introspection used by the structuralists to study the human mind, and his opposition to behaviourism.

4. Laws of Perceptual Organization

As with other learning theories, the Gestalt theory has laws of organization by which it must function. These organizational laws already exist in the make-up of the human mind and how perceptions are structured. Gestalt theorists propose that the experiences and perceptions of learners have a significant impact on the way that they learn.

Have you ever noticed how a series of flashing lights often appears to be moving, such as neon signs or strands of Christmas lights? According to Gestalt psychology, this apparent movement happens because our minds fill in missing information. This belief that the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts led to the discovery of several different phenomena that occur during perception.

In order to better understand how human perception works, Gestalt psychologists proposed a number of laws or factors of perceptual organization, including the **laws of closure, similarity, proximity Pragnanz, closure and continuity**.

The first organizational law is the *law of closure* or the “factor of closure.” It states that when we look at a complex arrangement of visual elements, we tend to look for a single, recognizable pattern. In other words, when you see an image that has missing parts, your brain will fill in the blanks and make a complete image so you can still recognize the pattern. The law does not only apply to images, but it also applies to thoughts, feelings and sounds.

Based upon Gestalt theory, the human brain maps elements of learning that are presented close to each other as a whole, instead of separate parts. This organizational law is called the “factor of proximity,” and is usually seen in learning areas such as reading and music, where letters and words or musical notes make no sense when standing alone, but become a whole story or song when mapped together by the human brain.

The *law of similarity* (also called *factor of similarity*) suggests that similar items tend to be grouped together. If a number of objects in a scene are similar to one another, you will naturally group them together and perceive them as a whole. For example, a series of circles or squares stacked together will be viewed as a series of columns rather than just individual shapes.

The educational implication of this law is that learning is facilitated when groups that are alike are linked together and contrasted with groups that present differing ideas. This form of Gestalt learning enables learners to develop and improve critical thinking skills.

The *law of proximity* (also called *factor of proximity*) states that the human brain maps elements of learning that are presented close to each other as a whole, instead of separate parts. The law suggests that objects near each other tend to be viewed as a group. For example, if you see a number of people standing close together, you might immediately assume that they are all part of the same social group.

Also at a restaurant, for example, the host or hostess might assume that people seated next to each other in the waiting area are together and ask if they are ready to be seated. In reality, they may only be sitting near each other because there is little room in the waiting area or because those were the only open seats.

This organizational law is usually seen in learning areas such as reading and music, where letters and words or musical notes make no sense when standing alone, but become a whole story or song when mapped together by the human brain.

When observing things around us, it is normal for the eye to ignore space or holes and to see, instead, whole objects. This organizational law is called the “*figure-ground effect*.”

As new thoughts and ideas are learned the brain tends to make connections, or “traces,” that are representative of the links that occur between conceptions and ideas, as well as images. This organizational law is called the “*trace theory*.”

Gestalt psychology also helped introduce the idea that human perception is not just about seeing what is actually present in the world around us. Much of what we see is heavily influenced by our motivations and expectations.

SESSION 4: INTEGRATION AS APPLIED TO SOCIAL STUDIES

In the previous sessions of this unit, we discussed the concept of integration generally. In this session, we will explain the meaning of integration as applied to social studies.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the concept of integration as applied to social studies.
2. Define social studies from an integrated perspective.

Key Points to Remember

1. Generally, integration calls for some form of blending, fusion, convergence or unification of disciplines and curricular elements. As applied to social studies, integration is the use of relevant ideas, concepts, principles, generalizations, theories, skills and methodologies from two or more disciplines to describe or explain a phenomenon, solve a problem or resolve an issue intelligently and holistically. The intent is to help students create meaning and order out of the world in which they find themselves.

2. Integration breaks the artificial wall of partition between and among disciplines so that each one makes inroads into the territory of the other. Young students in their natural learning situations do not compartmentalize knowledge into subjects. Their knowledge is the outcome of innumerable experiences, each contributing some new features to what they know. This is achieved through integration.
3. Social Studies by its integrated nature, therefore, attempts to fulfil the principle of Gestalt psychology which places emphasis on the presentation of knowledge as a whole rather than in separate watertight compartments.
4. As we saw in session 1 of this unit, some definitions of social studies present it as an integrated subject. Specifically, social studies integrates materials – essential information, ideas, skills, methods, issues and enquiry processes – from the social sciences.

Reflection

1. Reflect on the secondary school (JHS and SHS) social studies curricula that Ghana has had from 1987-2022. What is the extent of integration in each curriculum?

Discussion

1. Discuss the view that Gestalt theory adequately explains the basis of integration.

UNIT 2: HISTORY IN SOCIAL STUDIES

History, arguably, may be regarded as a discipline from either the humanities or the social sciences or both. In this unit we will consider it as a social science. Many social studies programmes tend to be history-centred. In some states in the United States of America, for example, Ryan and Cooper (2010) wrote that history “has traditionally been the leading discipline of social studies at both the elementary and secondary levels” (p.134). Martorella (1994) also confirmed, “Among all of the social sciences, history and geography particularly have nourished the social studies curriculum throughout its history” (p. 21). This unit discusses the place of history in the social studies curriculum, focusing on the meaning and nature of history, its characteristics and some key concepts and generalizations in the subject.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

1. Discuss the meaning and nature of history as a subject in the social studies curriculum.
2. Explain the major features of history.
3. Identify some important concepts and generalizations of history.

SESSION 1: MEANING AND NATURE OF HISTORY

The status of history in Ghana’s educational system has changed from time to time. It has either been taught as a separate subject, usually at the secondary and tertiary levels or as part of social studies at the primary level. Whatever its status and the level where it is taught, it is important that history and social studies teachers get a better and professional understanding of history as a curriculum area so that they can teach it effectively to promote students’ learning and maximize their outcomes in the subject. In this session, we will discuss the meaning and nature of history.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Discuss the meaning and nature of history.
2. Distinguish clearly between the external and internal facts of history.
3. Define some important concepts in history.
4. State some important generalizations in history.

Key Points to Remember

1. The English word “history” is derived from the Latin word “historia” which originally meant an *enquiry into past human action*.
2. The word *enquiry* denotes the process of getting information. Later history referred to both the *process* and the *record* of enquiry. Emphasizing the record aspect, Sir Charles Firth defined history as “*the record of the life of societies, of men, of the changes which those societies have gone through, of the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies and of the*

material conditions which have helped or hindered their development” (Sarumi et al., 2004, p.26). Similarly, Prof. A.L. Rowse asserted that history is “*essentially the record of the life of men in societies in their geographical and physical environment*” (Sarumi et al., 2004, p.26).

3. A common idea in the two definitions above is that history is a record of human activities and development in society, including the factors that have influenced or determined those historical events. It is also implied in both definitions that the human activities and societal developments recorded belong to a period in the past.
4. In schools today, history is defined as *the study of past human activities and the motives that prompted them*.
5. According to Collingwood, this definition of history implies two types of historical facts: the *external* facts of human action and the *internal* facts of human action.
6. The external facts are the past human events themselves (e.g., the march of the ex-servicemen to the Christiansburg castle in Ghana in 1948). These facts are also called *history-as-actuality* (Banks 1990).
7. The internal facts are the reasons or motives behind the actual events; they are the causes of the events. For example, one reason for the march of the ex-servicemen to the Christiansburg castle in Ghana in 1948 was to demand of payment which the British promised them for their fighting on their side during the First World War.
8. Banks (1990) identifies two other components of history. These are (1) the *methods* used by historians to reconstruct the past, the process and record of their enquiry; and (2) the *statements* historians write about the past events.

SESSION 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF HISTORY

We noted in session 1 that historical facts have external and internal aspects. However, in the strictest sense of the word, it is not anything that man has thought, said or done that comes within the scope of history. All human activities within the scope of history must have some fundamental characteristics. In this session, we outline these characteristics.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. State the characteristics of history.
2. Explain the characteristics of history.

Key Points to Remember

1. Definite in time and space – this tries to locate the event in both time and place and, therefore, answers the question, *When and where did the event take place?*

2. Social in nature – the event must have involved a large group of people and not just an individual.
3. Socially significant – the event must have had a remarkable effect on society. In this respect, physical factors such as drought and earthquake only fall within the range of historical topics if they affect the social scene.
4. Historical facts are integrated in nature – that include facts from other disciplines or subject areas.
5. Historical facts are generally unobservable – the actual events cannot be observed in the present because they are past, unless they were filmed. The motives or causes of the events also cannot be observed because they are/were in the minds of the actors.
6. History can be viewed either in horizontal perspective or vertical perspective. Historians can write about different aspects of life of a place, and look at events from the point of view of their practical effects on the people of the past (horizontal). They can also focus on a single aspect of life of a place, and look at events from the point of view of their practical effects on the people living in the present (vertical).
7. Historical events can be grouped or explained in different patterns: developmental, colligation, covering law and uniqueness.
8. There is an element of subjectivity in the selection and interpretation of historical facts

SESSION 3: CONCEPTS AND GENERALIZATIONS IN HISTORY

The key concepts, generalizations and theories of a discipline are part of its structure. These knowledge components enable the social scientist to view human behaviour from a restricted perspective. History deals with human beings who have a free will to act the way they want. The effect is that historical generalizations are difficult to make. However, the establishment and statement of inductive generalizations are part of the content of history. There are two types of generalizations which history can make. Firstly, there are generalizations which are not restricted to time and place and, second, there are generalizations that are restricted to time and place. This session outlines some concepts and generalizations in history.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the study, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain some historical concepts.
2. State some historical generalizations.

Key Points to Remember

1. Concepts

- a) **Change:** Things in our social and physical environment are constantly becoming different each day, week, month and year. Our culture keeps on changing, and so is the natural vegetation. Compare the roles of women now and in the nineteenth century. It is very important for us to understand the factors that cause change and be able to adjust to and accept change.
- b) **Conflict:** Throughout history, disagreements and hostilities have arisen between individuals, groups and nations when they had divergent goals or different ideas about how similar goals could best be attained. Conflict occurs in the home, school, playground, the church or mosque; and among children, youth and adults. It occurs on small scale and on large scale. In Africa, revolutions that occurred in Libya, Egypt, Algeria and Ghana as well as the two World Wars were the climax of conflicts. It is important to note that most conflicts have both negative and positive consequences.
- c) **Cooperation:** Cooperation occurs when individuals or groups work together to achieve common goals. Individuals and groups have cooperated in the past, and still cooperate today, to solve problems and to bring about social, economic and political change. The existence of international organizations such as the United Nations, African Union, Economic Community of West African States and the Commonwealth are evidences of cooperation among nations.
- d) **Nationalism:** Nationalism exists when leaders and individuals within a nation take actions intended primarily to strengthen and develop their nation, and to inculcate loyalty among its citizens. Nationalists tend to be less interested in international relations; they are primarily concerned with the development of their own nation. Nationalism grows from feelings and attachments that people have to their family, school, clubs and society.

2. Generalizations

- a) Material prosperity tends to breed moral decay
- b) Extreme governmental repression provides rebellion
- c) Parents love their children and will safeguard their lives
- d) A person of recognized integrity of life will not commit a shocking crime

Reflection

1. What are some of the key events in Ghana's pre-independence history that indicated that nationalism was developing, and what challenges did it face?
2. What role did nationalism play in the achievement of Ghana's independence?

Discussion

To what extent has history influenced the social studies curricula in Junior or Senior High School in Ghana since 2007?

UNIT 3: GEOGRAPHY IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Besides history, geography is perhaps the next social science subject that has greatly influenced the social studies curriculum in many countries. It is one of the oldest social sciences, with its history dating back to the time of the ancient Greeks. This unit deals with the perspective of geography, focusing on its meaning and nature, major traditions and theories as well as concepts and generalizations.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain the main focus of geography as a subject.
2. Distinguish between the five main traditions of geography.
3. Discuss the theories of geography.
4. Outline some important concepts and generalizations in geography.

SESSION 1: MEANING AND NATURE OF GEOGRAPHY

In unit 2, we indicated that historical events are definite in both time and space, where the space element answers the question, *where did the event take place?* This space element is the interest area of geographers. This session explains what geographers are concerned with.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Define geography as a school subject.
2. Describe the main focus of geographers.

Key Points to Remember

1. The term *geography* comes from two Greek words, *geo* which means “earth” and *graphia* which means “write.” Literally, therefore, geography means “to write about the earth.”
2. Geographers have a unique concern for place and, more specifically, for the features that give a place its distinctive character and differentiate it from other places.
3. Geographers are also interested in the relationship between places and the factors that serve as connecting links (or barriers) in the space between places.
4. In short, geographers endeavour to develop descriptions and explanations that carefully integrate people and the place and space in which they live.
5. Structurally, geographers sometimes organize their discipline in terms of five central themes: *location, place, relationships within place, movement* and *region*. We shall discuss these and other concepts in session 4 of this unit.

SESSION 2: THE FIVE TRADITIONS IN GEOGRAPHY

There are five different perspectives or research interests shared by geographers. These are called traditions in geography because they represent the major areas in which the early geographers concentrated their observations and study of the earth. Each tradition is somewhat different in its approach to the study of place and space, but all of them are recognized and accepted by most geographers as being well within the mainstream of the discipline. Taken together, these five traditions reflect the broad scope of the field, that is, the major divisions or aspects of geography and the varied approaches used by geographers. Elements of each of these traditions may be found in the geography components of the social studies curriculum in schools. In this session, we explain each of the five traditions.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain the unique focus of each of the five traditions in geography.
2. Distinguish between the five traditions of geography.

Key Points to Remember

1. *The Earth Science Tradition*

- a) This tradition corresponds with what is known today as *physical geography*.
- b) It deals with the study of the surface of the earth, particularly the arrangement and function of natural features.
- c) The broad areas of concern in this tradition are:
 - *Spheres* – hydrosphere, lithosphere, atmosphere, biosphere.
 - *Physical elements* – landforms, water bodies and natural resources.
 - *Biotic elements* – plants, animals, birds, fungi, etc.

2. *The Area Studies Tradition*

- a) This tradition is today called *regional geography*.
- b) It is concerned with the study of an area or region of the earth's surface that is *homogeneous* in character in terms of some specific criteria, such as location, manufacturing, landforms, climate, economic activity, cultural trait or ethnic origins of the people.

- c) For example, some regions of the world, using climate as a criterion, are Mediterranean region and the temperate zones.
- d) The area studies or regional geographer is interested in identifying the key features that give the region its distinctive character, and how those features are related to other features in the same or adjacent areas.
- e) The ultimate aim is to present, as much as possible, a comprehensive description and analysis of the area.
- f) Three types of regions are usually studied by regional geographers. These are:
 - *Physical regions* – These are places where the land features are basically alike.
 - *Cultural regions* – These are places where some aspect of culture or level of technology predominates.
 - *Political regions* – These are places grouped along the lines of territorial boundaries.

3. *The Human-Land Tradition*

- a) This perspective is called *Man-Land Tradition* in some documents. Here we prefer to call it *Human-Land Tradition*.
- b) It focuses on the relationships between people and the environment.
- c) It is an attempt to blend cultural geography with relevant aspects of physical geography to develop understandings of how people with different cultures use resources in their environment.
- d) The human-land tradition is specifically concerned with the interrelations of cultural development and environmental conditions. This is based on the premise that the importance or use humans make of the physical and biotic features of the earth is a function of the attitudes, objectives and technical skills of their culture.
- e) In explaining the human-land tradition, we should take care is taken to avoid the outmoded concept of *environmental determinism*, that is, the notion that the natural environment influences people and determines how they live.
- f) Rather, emphasis is given to the importance of culture as a primary factor in determining how people live in families, communities and regions around the world. This emphasis is reflected in the concept of possibilism, which holds that people can adjust to their environment or overcome an environment.

4. *The Location Theory Tradition*

- a) This perspective, also called *spatial geography*, deals with the location of places and the patterns of distribution.

- b) It seeks to explain why features such as cities, mountains or human populations are arranged as they are on the earth's surface, and why there are differences in the densities, dispersions and patterns.
- c) Another major part of this perspective is the geometry of the earth's surface. This includes the study of maps and the design of map projections (cartography) and the precise location and mapping of places and surfaces of the earth (geodesy and geodetic survey).
- d) In recent times, the emphasis on spatial geography has been on developing theories of location. This emphasis has pushed spatial geographers to study the central location of towns, the spatial interaction or movement of trade, people and ideas, and the spatial structure of urban areas and their relation to surrounding areas.
- e) Unlike the regional or cultural geographer, the spatial geographer is more likely to use quantified data and statistical methods to determine the interaction of a cluster of variables relating to economic activities.
- f) Finally, spatial geographers have attempted to develop high-order generalizations and to integrate these into comprehensive theories about the location of place and space. We shall discuss generalizations in geography in session 4 of this unit.

5. The Historical Geography Tradition

- a) This is the study of the geographical change of a region as it has occurred over time. For example, why has a once forest region become a desert?
- b) Historical geographers use time as the main dimension for studying spatial distributions and patterns on the earth's surface.
- c) They are primarily concerned with how various features of the landscape appeared in the past and with the physical and human patterns that have combined to bring about a change in that landscape.
- d) Thus, though the geographer shares with the historian the element of time, the geographer is more concerned with what happened within a specified time period.

SESSION 3: THEORIES IN GEOGRAPHY

There are comparatively very few theories in geography that systematize sets of higher-order generalizations and principles into a comprehensive explanation of complex phenomena. This is because geographers tend to be less concerned with the formulation of broad universal laws and principles. Rather, they tend to be more concerned with developing maximum understanding of individual areas or regions. This session describes the most prominent theories in geography.

Learning Outcome(s)

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the main theories in geography.

Key Points to Remember

1. *Location Theory*

- a) Location theory is a well-developed body of knowledge that helps to explain why things are located where they are and the relationship between the location of one phenomenon and another.
- b) For example, is there a relationship between the location of a senior high school and the distance to a university? Why is a meat processing factory located near a cattle rearing farm?
- c) Essentially, location theory is concerned with the geographical location of economic activities.
- d) Put more broadly, it is the study of the effects of place and space on the organization of economic activities.

2. *Central Place Theory*

- a) Central place theory is more connected with the growth of urban centres.
- b) Developed by the German geographer, Walter Christaller, the theory posits that small villages tend to cluster about larger towns or cities in a rather hexagonal pattern.
- c) These larger towns serve as the centre of many important marketing, social and cultural activities.
- d) Today, the development of the railroad and the interstate or intercity network of freeways and airways has greatly changed the growth and importance of many towns and cities, thus making Christaller's earlier concept of hexagonal trade patterns obsolete.
- e) These new developments have led to modifications in central place theory, yet it remains an important component in the study of urban geography.

3. *Spatial Structure Theory*

- a) Spatial structure theory is concerned with the distribution of entities and their associated properties as point, line or area phenomena, (but not necessarily) dependent upon specified assumptions about the nature of associated flows or interactions.

SESSION 4: GEOGRAPHICAL CONCEPTS AND GENERALIZATION

In explaining the different traditions and theories in geography, we came across a number of concepts in the discipline. In this session, we isolate and discuss some of the concepts that relate to the more prominent geographical emphases.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain some concepts in geography.
2. State some generalizations in geography.

Key Points to Remember

1. Concepts

a) Location

- Identifying and describing the positions of people, places and things on the earth's surface. This is done in either absolute or relative terms. Absolute location uses the system of latitudes and longitudes or other precise measures such as distance.
- For example, we describe the location of Ghana in **absolute** terms by saying Ghana lies between latitudes 4° and 11.5° north of the Equator and longitudes 3.11° west and 1.11° east of the Greenwich Meridian.
- **Relative** location describes the position of a place in relation to another place or phenomenon. For example, we say Accra is 150 kilometres from Cape Coast.
- The concept of location also includes several other closely related sub-concepts. These sub-concepts are *site*, *situation* and *environment*.
- **Site** refers to the location of a place in terms of its local internal features and resources such as the presence of a number of steep hills in a town, a winding river or the junction of two major roads.
- **Situation** refers to the larger context of a site. It deals with the external relations of a place and its interaction with other places. For example, situation might refer to the location of a town within a valley and its surrounding hilly country, or to the location of a larger city and its relation to the network of rail, air and waterways that connect it to many other surrounding places.
- **Environment** describes the totality of both site and situation. It includes the physical, biotic and cultural features of the landscape and their interactions. Thus, the use of the

term environment helps us to recognize that cultural development and technological growth are part of the total picture of the earth's surface.

b) Place

- Place details the human and physical characteristics of places on the earth.
- Place is a central concept in geography because geographers are concerned with the location and character of places on the earth's surface and the factors that have shaped these places.
- Geographers have abiding interest in how the places affect the lives of those who locate there.
- More especially, geographers are interested in why people and things are located in particular places.
- They attempt to relate these places to events and to explain how goods, events and people pass from place to place.

c) Spatial Distribution

- This refers to the pattern or arrangement of phenomena on the earth's surface, and the factors influencing such patterns.
- Questions that illustrate spatial distribution include: How are homes arranged around schools? Where are the residence and business sections of the town and why are they so located?

d) Areal Association/Relationship

- It describes how distributions are related, how they tend to be found together.
- For example, homes and schools are usually found near each other, meat processing factories are also usually located near cattle rearing farms.
- These raise the questions: *Why is it so? How can we show such relationships?*

e) Spatial Interaction

- This is the relationship of one place to another within the surrounding space and to the varying degrees of mutual dependence that may exist between places.
- Spatial interaction addresses the fact that very few places on earth exist entirely alone, isolated or completely independent from one another. Instead, people form relationships with other places as they move from one place to another, engage in trade, provide services, share ideas, learning and culture.

- Geographers look for the links that promote or hinder the movement of people, trade or ideas between places and for the patterns these movements create.
- The concept of *movement* which we mentioned as one of the major themes in geography is embedded in the concept of spatial interaction.
- Geographers use the sub-concepts ***circulation*** and ***access*** to help describe the relationships in spatial interaction.
- ***Circulation*** refers to the pattern of movement between places. For instance, mountain passes, intercity highways, rivers, canals, lakes and airways serve as paths for the circulation of people or trade.
- In contrast, deserts, mountains, large swamps and jungle areas could serve as barriers to the easy movement of people and goods. Of course, modern technology helps to overcome some of these barriers, but it at the same time creates new barriers to circulation.
- ***Access*** deals with the ease of entry into and exit from the circulation patterns. Some places have good access to the circulation pattern but others do not.
- For example, cities that are intermediate stops along a main railroad or airline route, or have port facilities on a river or sea coast, have good access to the circulation pattern.
- In contrast, island areas with limited ferry service to the mainland and people whose towns have been bypassed by freeways and have to drive some kilometres to enter or leave a modern highway, have bad access to the circulation pattern.
- Lastly, these modern freeways sometimes cut across large cities and create walls that divide traditional neighbourhoods, force a major rearrangement of social patterns and often lead to urban decay.
- Thus, the modern technology that has helped society to overcome some of the circulation limits of mountains and deserts, also presents problems of access for smaller towns and inner-city urban areas. One can therefore say that modern technology is both a blessing and a curse.

f) Region

- A region is a defined area of the earth's surface that is relatively homogeneous in one or more characteristics.
- The features that give a region its special character could be location, landforms, climate, cultural traits, economic activity or ethnic origins of the people who live there.

- Knowing the reasons (criteria) that were used to group areas into regions helps to develop an understanding of regionalizing as the process of using criteria to define regions.
- Other concepts addressed by geographers include *internal structure of a city, urban spatial patterns, environmental perception* and *cultural diffusion*. Find out what these concepts mean.

Generalizations in Geography

Below are some generalizations related to the concepts we have discussed above. Few of these generalizations are predictive; most are descriptive or explanatory. Nevertheless, they represent appropriate end points for student learning in concept-oriented studies in geography or social studies. For teachers, they represent convenient starting points for planning and organizing instruction, gathering appropriate materials and devising activities to engage students in direct learning experiences.

1. *Cities are located at places where there is easy access to one or more major routes of transportation.*
2. *A variety of relationships exist between a city and the smaller towns surrounding it. These relationships are based on the exchange of trade, services or ideas.*
3. *The location and productive activities of a community are key factors in its interaction with other places.*
4. *Regions defined in terms of one or more common features may vary as needed in terms of the purposes of enquiry.*
5. *People everywhere identify and use resources in ways that are shaped by their culture.*

Reflection

Try and identify the geographical concepts related to the generalizations stated in this session. Can you formulate your own generalizations in geography?

Discussion

1. Is it true to say that besides history, geography is the next social science subject that has greatly influenced the social studies curriculum in Ghana?

UNIT 4: ECONOMICS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Human existence has been preoccupied with the production, distribution and consumption of wealth, the desire for which seems to arise from man's basic impulse to increase his welfare. The purpose of this unit is to present economics as the social science which seeks to explain the economic basis of human societies.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of unit, the participant will be able to:

1. Articulate the basic economic problem faced by all human societies.
2. Explain how different economic systems solve the basic economic problem,
3. Describe the different approaches and methods in economics.
4. Explain some basic economic concepts and generalizations.

SESSION 1: MEANING AND NATURE OF ECONOMICS

Economics is often confused with misery or unwillingness to spend. However, it is a social science which seeks to explain the economic basis of human societies. In this session, we explain the meaning and nature of economics, focusing attention on the basic economic problem encountered by all societies.

Learning Outcome(s)

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain the basic economic problem faced by all human societies.

Key Points to Remember

1. Definition and Problem

Economics has been defined as the social science that studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses. The major principle of economics is that there are not enough natural and human resources to satisfy all of people's wants. **Scarcity** is the basic economic problem.

The discipline, therefore, focuses primarily on how people try to satisfy their unlimited wants with limited resources. Economists study how people use limited resources to produce and distribute (or exchange) goods and services in the most efficient way, and consume them. So, production, distribution and consumption are important concepts in economics.

2. Making Rational Choices

Efficient utilization of scarce resources means that we must make rational **choices** by deciding which of our needs we should satisfy with the limited resources and which ones we should hold on for the time being.

3. *Scale of Preference*

To make a rational choice calls for the necessity to prioritize our needs, with the most important needs on the top of our list. That is to say, we draw a *scale of preference* and begin satisfying our needs in order of importance.

4. *Opportunity Cost*

As the saying goes, “You cannot eat your cake and have it.” So, whatever choice we make, we forego something. This foregone alternative is the real cost of what we choose and is known as *opportunity cost*.

SESSION 2: THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM AND TYPES OF ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

As we saw in Session 1, the basic economic problem faced by every human society is how to best use its limited resources to satisfy its wants and to assure its existence. Every human society must solve three related economic problems. These are: (1) *What goods and services shall we produce and in what amounts?* (2) *How shall the goods and services be produced?* (3) *For whom shall the goods and services be produced?* In this session, we discuss the different arrangements societies have put in place to solve these problems.

Learning Outcome(s)

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain traditional, command, market and mixed economic systems.

Key Points to Remember

1. *Traditional Economic System*

In determining what to produce and how to produce it, societies have relied heavily on tradition, that is, what the society has been producing in the past and how it has been produced. However, tradition can negatively influence an economy. The traditional way of solving the problems of production and distribution is a static one. A society which follows the path of tradition in its regulation of economic affairs does so at the expense of large scale rapid social and economic change.

2. *Controlled or Command Economy*

This is where public authorities determine what goods and services are produced. This is known Dictators such as Castro of Cuba and Hitler of Germany not only exercised political control within their nation, but to a great extent determined which goods and services would be produced and for whom they would be produced. Government control over the economy is more prevalent in communist countries than in democratic countries. However, it must be pointed out that in every society the government influences the type of goods and services that are produced as well as how they are distributed. The degree of government influence varies among different countries.

3. Market Economy

In this economy, consumers largely determine what goods and services are produced, and the quantities in which they are produced. Consumers make economic decisions, guided by their own self-interest, in a free market process with a minimum of government intervention. This happens through the interaction of the forces of demand and supply.

4. Mixed Economy

In this economic system, both consumers and government control determine what goods and services are produced.

SESSION 3: THE ECONOMIC METHOD

An aspect of economic methodology is the intellectual experiment in economics, which uses the process of deduction and empirical testing and is based on the *ceteris paribus* assumption. This session describes this method.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. State the assumption of the method of intellectual experiment.
2. Describe the steps of the method of intellectual experiment.

Key Points to Remember

1. Assumption of the Intellectual Experiment

In this method, economists test hypothesis by assuming that all the variables are constant (or equal), except the variable whose effect they are trying to determine (the independent variable). This is the *ceteris paribus* (all other things equal) assumption in economics. For example, in determining the most important factor influencing consumer demand for Benz cars, an economist would assume that only the price of Benz cars varies. All other factors such as the income of consumers, the quality of Benz cars and the price of other cars remain the same.

2. Steps of the Method of Intellectual Experiment

- a) Statement of a priori theory
- b) Statement of assumptions
- c) Logical reasoning deriving the theory from the model
- d) Predictions or testable hypotheses
- e) Empirical tests of predictions

SESSION 4: APPROACHES IN ECONOMICS

Approaches in economics, also called *economic methodology*, refer to the way in which economists go about the study of their subject matter. Broadly, they have followed two main lines of approach: positive economics and normative economics. This unit deals with the two approaches.

Learning Outcome(s)

By the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

1. Distinguish between positive economics and normative economics.

Key Points to Remember

1. *Positive Economics*

Also called *economic analysis*, positive economics is concerned with propositions that can be tested by reference to empirical evidence. It deals with the investigation of the ways in which the different economic agents in society seek to achieve their goals. For example, positive economists may analyze how a firm behaves in trying to make as much profit as it can or how a household behaves in trying to reach the highest attainable level of satisfaction from consumption. Positive economics, therefore, relates to statements of ***what is***, ***was*** or ***will be***. These are statements whose validity can be tested against the available evidence.

The main goal of positive economics is to develop scientific theory. High-level generalizations about the law of demand and supply and the law of diminishing returns are examples of the outcome of this method of enquiry. Economic analysis deals more with the scientific aspect of the discipline.

2. *Normative Economics*.

Also known as *policy economics*, normative economics is concerned with making suggestions about the ways in which society's goals might be more efficiently realized. It deals with propositions that are based on value judgements, that is, statements which are expressions of opinions. Normative economics, therefore, often relates to statements of ***what should*** or ***ought to be*** the case. Take, for example, the statements 'the present high level of unemployment and inflation in Ghana *ought to be* reduced' and 'the distribution of income in Ghana *should be* made more equal.' Both statements are within the realm of normative economics.

Normative or policy economics aims at using the generalizations and theories developed in economic analysis to solve social problems that are largely economic in nature.

SESSION 5: LEVELS OF ECONOMICS ANALYSIS

Economists derive generalizations about economic behaviour at two levels, namely, the *macro* level and the *micro* level. Thus, economists divide their subject matter into two main branches: macroeconomics and microeconomics. These two branches of economics, however, can never be completely separated from each other because there are many linkages between them. In this session, we explain briefly macroeconomics and microeconomics.

Learning Outcomes(s)

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Distinguish between macroeconomic variables and microeconomic variables.

Key Points to Remember

1. **Macroeconomics** focuses on large units or aggregates, such as the economy as whole or major divisions within it, such as government, households and businesses. Examples of macroeconomic variables are gross national product, aggregate supply, aggregate demand, unemployment, inflation and deflation, monetary policy and fiscal policy.
2. **Microeconomics** is concerned with specific economic units such as consumers (households), firms or industry and a detailed consideration of the behaviour of these individual units. For example, microeconomics considers an individual firm or industry and concentrates on its output of a specific product, number of employees, average revenue or average cost of production. As one economist graphically put it, “In microeconomics we examine the trees, not the forest.”

It is worth noting that generalizations that are valid in macroeconomics are not necessarily valid in microeconomics. This point is important because of the mistaken assumption some people make in economics that what is true for the part is also true for the whole. This is called the *fallacy of composition*.

SESSION 6: ECONOMICS CONCEPTS AND GENERALIZATIONS

There is a great deal of consensus about what the key economic concepts and generalizations are. The concepts in economics are probably more precise than those in any of the other social sciences. The meanings of such concepts as scarcity, production, opportunity cost, and division of labour are rather standard in the discipline; any economist would define them in much the same way as other economists. In this unit, we define some of the key economic concepts.

Learning Outcomes(s)

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Define three economic concepts.
2. State three economic generalizations.

Key Points to Remember

1. Concepts

a) Scarcity

The essence of this concept is that, while people and nations have unlimited wants, the amount of resources, goods and services available in any society for satisfying those wants are limited. Consequently, people and nations must make some hard choices when they decide what goods and services they will produce with their limited resources, how they will be produced and how they will be distributed. When a society becomes wealthier and develops a higher level of technology, it is able to create more and better goods and services. However, scarcity continues because people's wants also increase.

b) Production

Production is the process of creating goods and services to satisfy human wants. Goods are tangible products that satisfy human wants. Examples are books, food, houses, cars and clothes. A service is work done that satisfies consumer wants. Teaching, nursing, washing plates in restaurants and cleaning offices are examples of services. The farmer who grows cocoa, the worker who works in a car manufacturing company and the spouse who cooks are all producers.

Production involves the effective and efficient combination of four factors: *land*, *labour*, *capital* and *entrepreneurship* (also called enterprise or management). The process of production is assumed not to be complete until the goods and services produced reach the final consumer.

c) Interdependence

Interdependence is relying on other producers for the goods and services needed to satisfy one's wants, and helping others to satisfy their wants by participating in the production of goods and services consumed. The level of interdependence increases as societies become highly technological and people become more specialized. In traditional societies or economies workers, families, communities, cities, regions and nations were highly independent because they produced their own food and most of the other goods and services they needed. In today's society characterized by high technology and specialization, workers, families, communities, cities, regions and nations cannot exist without relying on the goods and services produced by other workers and economic units.

d) Specialization and division of labour

Specialization occurs when an economic unit, such as an individual, a business, a region or a nation produces a narrow range of goods and services than it consumes, or produces only those goods and services it can produce most efficiently. Specialization brings about comparative advantage, which is the ability or group (e.g. a society or nation) to carry out a particular economic activity more efficiently than another activity.

Division of labour is the breaking down of the production process into stages so that each stage is undertaken by a single worker doing a specific and specialized job. This process often involves an assembly line technique as found in the automobile industry. Usually each person who helps to manufacture an automobile makes or attaches only one part.

Division of labour and specialization help to produce goods more quickly and efficiently. Workers also develop greater skills at performing their particular tasks because they practise the skills frequently. But monotony and boredom also set in with constant repetition of the same task. In addition, with increased specialization, pride in workmanship tends to fade. If a large number of workers help to make a product, it is difficult for any one of them to get a great deal of satisfaction from its production.

2. Generalizations

Economic generalizations show the relationship between economic concepts. The following generalizations are representative of the types that can be used to guide the planning of a social studies programme or economic topics in a social studies programme.

- a) A conflict between unlimited wants and limited resources creates the need for decision making.
- b) Choices are based on the individual's value system, but value systems are to a large extent culturally derived.
- c) The growth of interdependence increases the problems of adjustment for the individual in the society.
- d) Price is a measure of the relative scarcity and need for goods, services or resources.
- e) People in a market economy have more freedom of choice than do people in a command economy.

Reflection

1. Make positive and normative statements concerning:

- a) the level of unemployment;
- b) the rate of inflation;
- c) the balance of payments; and
- d) the distribution of income and wealth in Ghana

Discussion

1. Discuss which of the following can be classified under the heading microeconomics and which can be classified under the heading macroeconomics:

- a) the determination of the price of oil in Ukraine;
- b) the influence of changes in the stock of money on the Ghanaian economy;
- c) the contribution of oil to Ghana's balance of payments; and
- d) the effects on the distribution of income of a reduction in the basic rate of income tax.

UNIT 5: SOCIOLOGY IN SOCIAL STUDIES

The “social” emphasis of social studies makes sociology an important component area of the subject. Teachers and students of social studies know and appreciate the need for them to leave their comfort zones, to be curious about events taking place around them and care about those who live in their immediate and distant environments. They also know that social experiences profoundly affect what they think and do. This is precisely what sociology is about. In this unit, we will look at sociology as a field of study. We will focus on the nature of the discipline, its special way of describing social phenomena and interpreting social life, and some of the key concepts and generalizations used in the field.

Learning Outcome(s)

By the end of the unit, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain what sociology is?
2. Describe the special way sociology looks at and interpret social phenomena.
3. Describe the main theoretical perspectives in sociology.
4. Explain some concepts and generalizations in sociology.

SESSION 1: MEANING AND NATURE OF SOCIOLOGY

In this session, we will explain what sociology is and its special way of looking at and interpreting social phenomena. We will also look at the theories and some of the concepts and generalizations sociologists look to describe and explain social phenomena.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain what sociology is.
2. Use the sociological imagination to describe or explain sociological phenomena.
3. Use perspectives of functionalism, interactionism and conflict theories to explain issues.

Key Points to Remember

1. *Meaning of Sociology*

- a) The name “sociology” was given to the discipline by a French philosopher called Auguste Comte. The word “sociology” is composed of two words: the Latin word *socius*, which means “companion” or “associate” or “being with others,” and the Greek word *logos*, meaning “word” or “study of doctrine, discourse or theory.”
- b) We can put these two words together and define sociology as “the scientific study of society and human behaviour”, or better still “the scientific study of human activity in society.”
- c) Human activity involves all the things people do with, to, and for one, and what they think and do as a result of others’ influence.

- d) In studying human activities, sociologists focus on social forces that shape the way human relationships and activities are organized and the effects that organization has on people's opportunities, sense of self and relationships with others and the larger environment.
- e) The special way in which sociology views human behaviour is termed the *sociological perspective* or *sociological imagination*. The term "sociological imagination" describes the ability to see the link between incidents in the lives of individuals and large social forces.
- f) Therefore, as a discipline, sociology tries to understand human behaviour by placing it within its broader social context, that is, the social contexts in which people live.
- g) The purpose of sociological study is not simply to describe social relationships, but also to analyze them and to discriminate between their specific forms, varieties and patterns.

SESSION 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGY

Sociologists place their observations into a conceptual framework called a theory. A theory is a general statement or a set of ideas that claims to explain how something works. A sociological theory is, therefore, a set of ideas that claims to explain how society or aspects of society fit together and how they work. It is an explanation of how two or more 'facts' are related to one another. Sociologists use three major theories: functionalism, conflict theory and interactionism. Each theory provides a distinct interpretation of social life. This unit examines the main elements of these theories.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain functionalism, interactionism and conflict theory.
2. Use functionalism, interactionism and conflict theory to interpret social life.

Key Points to Remember

1. Functionalism

- a) This perspective is also called *functional analysis* and *structural functionalism*.
- b) The central idea of functionalism is that society is a whole unit, made up of interrelated parts that work together. As an organism, if society is to function smoothly, its various parts must work together in harmony.
- c) Emile Durkheim believed that each part of society has its own function. When all the parts of society fulfil their functions, society is in a "normal" state. If they do not fulfil their function, society is in an "abnormal" or "pathological" state.

- d) Therefore, to understand society, we need to look at both *structure* (how the parts of a society fit together to make the whole) and *function* (what each part does, how it contributes to society), hence, the term *structural functionalism*.
- e) Functionalism, therefore, begins with the observation that behaviour in society is structured. This means that relationships between members of society are organised in terms of rules.
- f) The structure of society can be seen as the sum total of normative behaviour – the sum total of social relationships, which are governed by norms.
- g) The main parts of society, its institutions such as the family, the economy, and the educational and political systems, are major aspects of the social structure. Thus, an institution can be seen as a structure made up of interconnected roles or interrelated norms.
- h) For example, the family is made up of interconnected roles of husband, father, wife, mother, son and daughter. Social relationships within the family are structured in terms of a set of related norms.
- i) Functionalism also looks at how that social structure functions. This involves an examination of the relationship between the different parts of the structure and their relationship to society as a whole. This examination reveals the functions of society as a whole.
- j) At its simplest level of understanding, function means effect. Thus, the function of the family is the effect it has on other parts of the social structure and on society as a whole.
- k) In practice, the term function is usually used to indicate the contribution an institution makes to the maintenance and survival of the social system. For example, a major function of the family is the socialization of new members of society.
- l) Another contributor to functionalism was Robert Merton. He dismissed the organic analogy, but maintained the essence of functionalism – the image of society as a whole composed of parts that work together.
- m) Merton used the term *functions* to refer to the beneficial consequences of people's actions: functions help keep a group (society, social system) in balance. In contrast, *dysfunctions* are consequences that harm a society: they undermine a system's equilibrium.
- n) Functions can be either *manifest* or *latent*. A manifest function is an action intended to help some part of a system. For example, if the government of Ghana offered a bonus scholarship to university students, the intention or manifest function of the bonus is to increase enrolment in universities.

- o) A latent function is an action that has unintended consequences that help a system to adjust. Let's say that in the previous example, the scholarship works and many people are able to attend university and consequently have good jobs, they can take good care of their aged relatives. Because taking care of aged people was not the intended consequence, it is a latent function of the scholarship.
- p) However, human action can also hurt a system, that is, have unintended negative consequences. Merton called such unintended negative consequences latent dysfunctions.
- q) Functionalists see conflict as the outcome of temporary disturbances in the social system. These disturbances are quickly corrected as society evolves.
- r) Also, functionalists accept that social groups can have differences of interests, but believe that these are of minor importance to the interests that all social groups have in common.

2. **Conflict Theory**

- a) Conflict theorists hold that there are fundamental differences of interests between social groups. These differences result in conflict being a common and persistent feature in society, and not a temporary occurrence.
- b) Conflict theorists stress that society is composed of groups of varied interests that are competing with one another for scarce resources. Although alliances or cooperation may prevail on the surface, lying under that surface is a struggle for power.
- c) Karl Marx (1818-1883) who developed conflict theory analyzed European society at the time of the Industrial Revolution and the suffering and exploitation that characterized the period, and concluded that the roots of human misery lay in class conflict.
- d) Karl Marx explained that in each human society, some small group controls the means of production and exploits those who are not in control. In industrialized societies, the struggle is between the *bourgeoisie*, the small group of capitalists who own the means to produce wealth, and the *proletariat*, the mass of workers who are exploited by the bourgeoisie.
- e) When Marx made his observations, capitalism was in its infancy and workers were at the mercy of their employers. Workers had no economic rights such as the right to strike, minimum wages, eight-hour days, five-day work weeks, paid vacations and holidays, among others.
- f) Marx's analysis reminds us that these benefits workers enjoy today came not from generous hearts, but from workers forcing concessions from their employers.

- g) Today some conflict sociologists use conflict theory in a much broader sense than Marx did. They examine how conflict penetrates every layer of society – whether that be a small group, an organization, a community or the entire society.
- h) When people in a position of authority try to enforce conformity (which they must do), this creates resentment and resistance. The result is a constant struggle throughout society to determine who has authority and how far that authority goes.
- i) Sociologist Lewis Coser (1913-2003) pointed out that conflict is most likely to develop among people who are in close relationships. Such people, for instance, have worked out ways to distribute responsibilities and privileges, power and rewards. Any change in this arrangement can lead to hurt feelings, bitterness and conflict.
- j) Even in intimate relationships, such as marriage, people are in a constant balancing act, with conflict lying uneasily just beneath the surface.

3. *Interactionism*

- a) We can trace the origins of interactionism (also called symbolic interactionism) to the Scottish moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, who noted that individuals evaluate their own conduct by comparing themselves with others.
- b) In the United States, a long line of thinkers added to this perspective, including William James (1842-1910), and John Dewey (1859-1952), who analyzed how people use symbols to understand their experiences.
- c) Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective was brought to sociology by Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), William I. Thomas (1863-1947) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931).
- d) The key ideas that help the understanding of interactionism are meaning and interpretation, development of self-concepts, construction of meaning, and negotiation of roles.
- e) As a theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism views society as composed of symbols (the things to which we attach meaning) that people use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world and communicate with one another.
- f) People use symbols to understand their experiences when interacting with others. Symbolic interactionists believe that without symbols our social life would be no more sophisticated than that of animals.
- g) Symbols allow not only relationships to exist, but also society. Without symbols, we could not coordinate our actions with those of other people. In short, symbolic interactionists analyze how our behaviours depend on the ways we define ourselves and others.

- h) Symbolic interactionists point out that even the *self* is a symbol, for it consists of the ideas we have about who we are. And the self is a changing symbol. As we interact with others we constantly adjust our views of who we are based on how we interpret the reactions of others.
- i) Thus, changing symbols (or meanings) associated with a phenomenon means changes in people's views about that phenomenon. For example, changes in the meaning of marriage and divorce might explain the high divorce rate in many societies today, including Ghana.

SESSION 3: CONCEPTS AND GENERALIZATIONS IN SOCIOLOGY

Concepts and generalizations are the tools with which all social scientists, including sociologists, examine and interpret issues. In this session, we will discuss some of the concepts and generalizations in sociology.

- a) **Social class** refers to a large group of people who rank close to one another in wealth, education, power and prestige. That is, large numbers of people who have similar amounts of income and education and who work in jobs that are roughly comparable in prestige make up a social class. People's social class influences their behaviours as well as their ideas and attitudes.
- b) **Social status** refers to the position that someone occupies in society or in a social group. That position may carry a great deal of prestige, as in the case of a judge, a member of parliament, or a chief. On the other hand, the position may bring little prestige, as in the case of a messenger, a cleaner or a house-help.
- c) **Status set** refers to all the statuses or positions that a person occupies. For example, being a judge, a member of parliament or a chief, at the same. A person's status set changes as his/her particular statuses change. For example, suppose you are now a student and single. If you graduate from college or university and take a full-time job, get married, buy a house, have children, and so on, your status set changes to include the position of worker, spouse, homeowner and parent. Our status affects our actions and those of the people around us. Our status serves as guide for our behaviour.
- d) **Ascribed status** refers to a position an individual either inherits at birth or receives involuntarily later in life. For example, you inherit your status as male or female, Fante or Ewe, niece or nephew from birth.
- e) **Achieved status** is a position that an individual earns, accomplishes; it involves at least some effort on the individual's part. For example, as a result of your efforts – education and training, good behaviour and effective political campaigning you become the president of a group or the entire country. On the other hand, for lack of effort, you become a school dropout and truck pusher. In other words, achieved status can be either positive or negative.

- f) **Social role** is the term used by sociologists to describe the behaviours, obligations and privileges attached to a status. Roles are determined by society and, therefore, set up for the individuals before they are born. So we *occupy* a status but we *play* a role. For example, being a student is your status, but your role is to attend classes, take notes, do homework and take tests.
- g) Roles are like a fence. They allow us a certain amount of freedom, but for most people that freedom does not go very far. The sociological significance of roles is that they lay out what is expected of people.
- h) **Social institution** is the organized, usual or standard ways by which society meets its basic needs. The family, religion, education, the mass media and politics are some social institutions. Each social institution has its own groups, statuses, values and norms.
- i) In industrialized societies, social institutions tend to be more formal than in pre-industrial societies.
- j) **Socialization** is the process by which people learn the characteristics of their group – the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and actions taught appropriate for them.
- k) Men are more likely than women to commit suicide. (**Generalization**)
- l) Young people were more likely to vote for Mahama than Akufo-Addo in the 2016 elections. (**Generalization**).

Reflections

Reflect on some experiences you have had working with people.

Why would you consider such experiences worthy of study by sociologists?

Discussion

What are the main differences between the sociological imagination and the theoretical perspectives in sociology?