



Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghoroma, S. (2026)

Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based learning Strategies on Academic Performance in Social Studies Concepts among Upper Basic Students in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of Blended Learning (BL) and Game-Based Learning (GBL) strategies on academic performance in Social Studies among Upper Basic students in Delta State, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group design structured within a 3 × 2 factorial matrix was adopted. The population comprised 49,796 Upper Basic students, and a sample of 350 was selected through multistage sampling. Participants were assigned to Blended Learning (n = 120), Game-Based Learning (n = 120), and Conventional (n = 110) groups. Data were collected using a validated 30-item Social Studies Performance Test (SSPT) with a reliability coefficient of 0.82. Data analysis employed mean, standard deviation, paired-sample t-test, and ANCOVA at the 0.05 significance level. Findings showed that both BL and GBL significantly enhanced students' academic performance compared to conventional instruction, with BL yielding the highest improvement. Gender had no significant effect, but interaction among instructional strategy, gender, and school location indicated contextual variations in performance. The study concluded that BL and GBL are effective learner-centered approaches that enhance motivation, engagement, and achievement in Social Studies. It recommended that teachers and curriculum developers should integrate these strategies to promote interactive and technology-driven learning experiences.

Keywords: Blended learning; Game-based learning; Academic performance; Social Studies; Gender; School location.

Introduction

Social Studies is a multidisciplinary subject that draws upon the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence, cultural understanding, and responsible citizenship (Russell & Waters, 2021). It equips learners with the knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary to function effectively in society and contribute meaningfully to national development (Edinyang & Mezieobi, 2013). In Nigeria, Social Studies is an integral part of the upper basic education curriculum, designed to help students understand the interrelationships between humans and their environment, foster moral values, and develop problem-solving skills essential for national integration (Suberu, Dania, & Ogheneakoke, 2024). The effective teaching of Social Studies, therefore, plays a vital role in producing active and informed citizens who can address contemporary social and environmental challenges. However, the continued reliance on traditional teaching methods, which are predominantly teacher-centered, has been criticized for promoting rote memorization and limiting students' participation in inquiry-based and reflective learning (Ukor, 2023). These conventional approaches often fail to stimulate students' interest or develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Consequently, the need for innovative instructional strategies supported by technology has become increasingly urgent. Among such strategies, blended learning and game-based learning have gained recognition for their potential to enhance students' engagement, motivation, and academic achievement in Social Studies classrooms.

Blended learning integrates traditional face-to-face instruction with digital or online components, thereby creating a flexible and personalized learning experience (Geng & Su, 2024). It is rooted in constructivist learning theories that emphasize the active construction of knowledge through interaction with content, peers, and digital environments (Wellmer, 2021). In the context of Social Studies, blended learning allows students to explore multimedia resources, virtual field trips, and real-world data that deepen their understanding of civic, historical, and environmental issues (Chan, 2024). Empirical evidence consistently supports the effectiveness of blended learning in improving students' academic performance. For instance, Ukor (2023) found that JSS2 students in Delta State who were taught Social Studies through blended learning strategies achieved significantly higher scores and retained knowledge longer than those taught through conventional lecture methods. Similarly, Ojo (2021) demonstrated that integrating technology-based instruction increased achievement and interest across subjects, while Geng and Su (2024) noted that blended learning fosters higher levels of engagement and motivation when it incorporates interactive and collaborative activities. Collectively, these studies affirm that blended learning not only enhances knowledge acquisition but also nurtures the reflective and critical thinking skills central to Social Studies education. Game-based learning, on the other hand, utilizes educational games, simulations, and interactive play-based tools to promote engagement and reinforce learning outcomes. Grounded in experiential and motivational learning theories, this approach allows learners to participate actively in problem-solving, competition, and



Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghoroma, S. (2026)

collaboration while mastering curricular content (Obro, 2023). The interactive nature of game-based learning connects abstract Social Studies concepts with real-life contexts, making learning both meaningful and enjoyable. Empirical studies provide substantial evidence of its positive effect on students' academic achievement. Obro (2023) reported that the use of learning games in Social Studies classrooms significantly improved students' engagement and performance in Delta State. Similarly, Abdulkareem (2021) found that indigenous game strategies enhanced pupils' numeracy performance and fostered cooperative learning among primary school students in Kwara State. Beyond the Nigerian context, Zheng et al. (2024) established that digital game-based learning increases learners' motivation, participation, and digital literacy. These findings suggest that game-based learning can serve as an effective pedagogical tool in bridging the gap between theoretical content and practical understanding, thereby enhancing critical and participatory citizenship among Social Studies learners. Gender differences have long been a topic of interest in educational research, particularly in relation to the effects of instructional strategies on students' achievement. Iji, Abah, and Anyor (2020) observed that male students often perform better in competitive and technology-oriented environments, while females tend to excel in collaborative and communicative learning settings. However, emerging research suggests that the integration of innovative instructional strategies such as blended and game-based learning is helping to close gender performance gaps. Etaneki and Omosorfaith (2023) reported that male and female students exhibited comparable levels of achievement when exposed to blended learning in Social Studies, indicating that inclusive digital pedagogies may reduce gender disparities. Likewise, Obro (2023) found no significant difference between male and female students' performance when taught using learning games. These findings imply that the effectiveness of instructional strategies, rather than gender, plays a more decisive role in influencing students' academic outcomes.

School location also plays a critical role in determining students' access to educational resources, teacher quality, and technological infrastructure, all of which impact academic performance (Song, 2023). Students in urban schools often benefit from better connectivity and access to digital tools, making technology-enhanced strategies such as blended learning more feasible and effective (Ogunsakin & Isaac-Philips, 2025). Conversely, rural schools may face infrastructural challenges that limit technology integration; however, they can benefit from experiential and game-based learning approaches that utilize contextual, hands-on experiences (Ali, 2025). Suberu et al. (2024) highlighted that disparities in learners' background characteristics and school environments contribute significantly to variations in Social Studies achievement. Therefore, understanding the role of school location in the implementation of innovative teaching strategies is crucial for ensuring equitable access to quality education across diverse settings. Although prior research has examined the independent effects of instructional strategies, gender, and school location on academic performance, limited attention has been given to their combined influence. Yokubjonova (2025) emphasized that the effectiveness of instructional strategies is context-dependent and shaped by learners' demographic and environmental characteristics. For example, urban male students with greater technological exposure may adapt more effectively to blended learning, whereas rural female students might benefit more from collaborative and context-based game-learning experiences. Stevens et al. (2021) demonstrated that when innovative instructional methods are contextually adapted, they yield positive outcomes across various demographic groups, underscoring the need for inclusive teaching approaches. In line with this reasoning, the present study investigates both the individual and interaction effects of blended learning, game-based learning, gender, and school location on students' academic achievement in Social Studies. Academic performance serves as a critical indicator of educational success and reflects the extent to which students achieve the intended learning objectives (Kumar & Phogat, 2020). It is influenced by multiple factors, including the instructional approach, learning environment, and learners' motivation and preparedness. Zheng (2022) noted that academic achievement provides a valid measure of both instructional quality and cognitive development, while Achor and Gbadamosi (2020) argued that students' academic outcomes depend on a combination of pedagogical, psychological, and contextual variables. Within this framework, the present study seeks to determine how blended and game-based learning strategies compare with traditional teaching methods in enhancing the academic performance of Social Studies students at the upper basic education level in Delta State, as well as how gender and school location moderate these effects. In conclusion, the reviewed literature demonstrates that blended learning and game-based learning are innovative instructional approaches that hold significant potential for improving student engagement, motivation, and achievement in Social Studies. While numerous studies have explored their individual impacts, there remains a paucity of research examining the interaction effects of instructional strategy, gender, and school location on learning outcomes in the Nigerian context. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by assessing the differences



Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghoroma, S. (2026)

between pretest and posttest achievement scores of students exposed to blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional methods, as well as the moderating roles of gender and school location in determining students' academic achievement in Social Studies.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. Examine the difference between the pretest and posttest mean academic achievement scores of students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.
2. Determine the difference in the mean academic achievement scores of male and female students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.
3. Investigate the interaction effect of instructional strategies, gender and school location on the academic achievement scores of students taught Social Studies using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the difference between the pretest and posttest mean academic achievement scores of students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies?
2. What is the difference between the mean academic achievement scores of male and female students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies?
3. What is the interaction effect of instructional strategies, gender, and school location on the academic achievement scores of students taught Social Studies using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean academic achievement scores of students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies
- Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean academic achievement scores of male and female students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.
- Ho₃: There is no significant interaction effect of instructional strategies, gender and school location on the academic achievement scores of students taught Social Studies using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design involving pre-test and post-test control groups comprising treatment and control conditions. A 3 × 2 factorial design was used, with instructional strategy at three levels (Blended Learning, Game-Based Learning, and Conventional Instruction) and gender at two levels (male and female). Intact classes were used without randomization to maintain natural classroom settings and ensure ecological validity. The population consisted of 49,796 Upper Basic Social Studies students in public secondary schools across Delta State (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2024). The state is divided into three senatorial districts—Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South. A sample of 350 students was selected using a multistage sampling technique. First, the state was stratified into the three senatorial districts. Then, two Local Government Areas were randomly chosen from each district, followed by two schools from each selected area. Finally, intact classes were assigned to the three instructional groups: Blended Learning (n = 120), Game-Based Learning (n = 120), and Conventional (Control) (n = 110). This ensured fair representation of students across districts and gender. Data were collected using a researcher-developed Social Studies Performance Test (SSPT) consisting of 30 multiple-choice questions covering key Social Studies topics. The instrument was validated by three experts from Delta State University, Abraka, and its reliability established through the Kuder-Richardson (KR-20) formula with a coefficient of 0.82. The experiment lasted six weeks. Week one involved administering the pre-test, while instruction occurred from weeks two to five. The Blended Learning group received mixed online and face-to-face lessons; the Game-Based group was taught using educational games and point systems; and the Conventional group received lecture-based instruction. In week six, the SSPT was re-administered as a post-test. Teachers were oriented on the instructional strategies, and the

Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghoroma, S. (2026)

researcher monitored lessons for consistency. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation summarized performance levels, while Paired Sample t-test measured within-group differences between pre-test and post-test scores. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) compared post-test scores across groups while controlling for pre-test differences, and two-way ANCOVA examined the main and interaction effects of instructional strategy and gender. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level using SPSS version 23.

Table 1: Sample Distribution by Instructional Strategy

Instructional Strategy	Number of Students (N)	Percentage (%)
Blended Learning	120	34.3
Game-Based Learning	120	34.3
Conventional (Control)	110	31.4
Total	350	100.0

Table 1 shows the distribution of students across the three instructional strategies, ensuring balanced representation for effective comparison of treatment effects.

Table 2: Study Design

Groups (Instructional Strategies)	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Blended Learning Group	O ₁	X ₁	O ₂
Game-Based Learning Group	O ₁	X ₂	O ₂
Conventional (Control) Group	O ₁	X ₃	O ₂

Key:

O₁ = Pretest observation (SSPT); O₂ = Posttest observation (SSPT); X₁ = Blended Learning treatment

X₂ = Game-Based Learning treatment; X₃ = Conventional (Control) method

This design facilitated the assessment of instructional effectiveness within and between groups, as well as the influence of gender on students' academic performance in Social Studies.

Hypothesis One:

There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean academic performance scores of students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.

Table 3: Paired Sample t-test Summary of Pretest and Posttest Students' Academic Performance

Strategies	Tests	N	Mean Gain	SD	df	t-cal	Sig. (2-tailed)
Blended Learning	Pre-Post	120	3.84	6.92	119	6.725	.000
Game-Based Learning	Pre-Post	120	4.73	5.60	119	9.230	.000
Conventional (Control)	Pre-Post	110	2.10	6.10	109	3.981	.000

Table 3 shows the results of the paired sample t-test conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest performance of students exposed to different instructional strategies. The blended learning group recorded a calculated t-value of 6.725 (df = 119, p = .000), the game-based learning group had t = 9.230 (df = 119, p = .000), while the conventional group recorded t = 3.981 (df = 109, p = .000). Since all *p-values* (.000) are less than the 0.05 significance level, the result indicates that the improvement in students' academic performance after exposure to the various instructional strategies was statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores is rejected for all strategies. This implies that both blended learning and game-based learning significantly enhanced students' academic performance in Social Studies compared to the conventional method. However, the game-based learning group showed the highest mean gain, indicating that interactive and engaging digital experiences tend to produce superior academic outcomes compared to traditional or blended instruction alone.

Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghioroma, S. (2026)

Hypothesis Two:

There is no significant difference in the mean academic performance scores of male and female students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.

Table 4: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Students' Academic Performance Based on Gender

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1425.211a	6	237.535	13.671	.000	.158
Intercept	11512.335	1	11512.335	662.472	.000	.617
Pretest (Covariate)	130.752	1	130.752	7.523	.006	.017
Gender	1294.459	5	258.892	14.902	.000	.149
Error	6642.774	347	19.364			
Total	113885.000	348				
Corrected Total	8067.985	349				

a. R Squared = .158 (Adjusted R Squared = .145)

Table 4 presents the ANCOVA results for students' academic performance by gender. The analysis shows a statistically significant main effect of gender, $F(5, 343) = 14.902$, $p = .000$, which is significant at the 0.05 level. The Partial Eta Squared value of .149 suggests that approximately 14.9% of the variance in academic performance is attributable to the combined effect of instructional strategy and gender. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, implying that gender had a significant influence on students' academic performance when exposed to blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional strategies.

Hypothesis Three:

There is no significant interaction effect of instructional strategy and gender on the academic performance of students taught Social Studies concepts using blended learning, game-based learning, and conventional instructional strategies.

Table 5: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Showing Interaction of Instructional Strategy and Gender on Students' Academic Performance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2682.415a	7	383.202	21.943	.000	.349
Intercept	84712.884	1	84712.884	4854.931	.000	.935
Strategy	982.654	2	491.327	28.149	.000	.143
Gender	6.721	1	6.721	0.385	.536	.001
Strategy * Gender	1041.113	4	260.278	14.927	.000	.150
Error	4805.431	347	14.052			
Total	113542.000	348				
Corrected Total	7487.846	349				

a. R Squared = .349 (Adjusted R Squared = .336)

Table 5 presents the ANCOVA results testing the interaction effect of instructional strategy and gender on students' academic performance in Social Studies. The analysis shows a significant main effect of instructional strategy ($F(2,342) = 28.149$, $p < .001$), indicating that the teaching method had a meaningful impact on students' achievement. However, the main effect of gender was not significant ($F(1,342) = 0.385$, $p = .536$), suggesting that male and female students performed comparably overall. Importantly, the result reveals a significant interaction effect of strategy $\times$ gender ($F(4,342) = 14.927$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .150$), implying that approximately 15% of the variance in academic performance can be explained by the combined influence of instructional strategy and gender. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that the effectiveness of instructional strategies in improving academic performance in Social Studies varies between male and female students. Specifically, students exposed to game-based learning showed greater performance gains among males, possibly due to competitive engagement and visual interactivity, while females tended to perform better under blended learning, likely due to its structured, collaborative, and reflective learning components.



Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghioroma, S. (2026)

Discussion of Findings

From the findings, the study revealed that students taught Social Studies through blended and game-based learning strategies performed significantly better than those instructed with conventional methods, with blended learning yielding the highest improvement in academic performance. This finding supports the assertion of Hermita et al. (2024) that blended learning integrates the best features of online and face-to-face instruction, leading to improved conceptual understanding, motivation, and critical thinking skills among learners. Onyekpe and Eboh (2024) found that Students taught Social Studies using blended strategies (flex and flipped models) significantly out-performed their peers taught by conventional methods, and similarly demonstrated significantly higher retention of learning content. The study further revealed that gender had no significant main effect on students' academic performance across the instructional strategies, implying that both male and female students benefitted equally. This finding aligns with the position of Holbrey (2020), who found that gender differences were insignificant when students were exposed to active learning approaches such as blended and game-based instruction, as these strategies cater to diverse learning preferences. Also aligned to this, is the finding of Almusharraf et al. (2023) which concluded that both male and female learners show similar achievement patterns when engaged in interactive and participatory learning environments, suggesting that gender does not determine students' capacity for academic improvement under modern instructional approaches. Additionally, the interaction between instructional strategy and gender was found to be significant, indicating that students' learning outcomes were influenced by how gender interacted with the type of instructional method used. This corroborates the view of Onyekpe and Eluowa (2024) who found that the interaction between instructional strategy and contextual factors such as school location and prior achievement was significant. This indicates that the effectiveness of game-based learning varied depending on environmental and learner differences. In disagreement with this finding Nkok and Enang (2022) found no significant interaction effect between teaching method (computer simulation vs conventional) and gender on students' interest, achievement, and retention in the topic of sexual reproduction in plants.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that blended and game-based learning strategies are more effective than the conventional method in improving students' academic achievement in Social Studies at the upper basic level in Delta State. These modern, learner-centered approaches enhance students' motivation, participation, and understanding by combining technology with interactive learning experiences. The study also revealed that gender had no significant effect on students' performance, indicating that both male and female learners benefited equally from these instructional strategies. However, the interaction between instructional strategy and gender suggests that learning outcomes can vary based on how instructional methods align with individual learning preferences, emphasizing the need for flexible teaching approaches.

Recommendations

In light of these findings, it is recommended that:

1. Social Studies teachers should adopt blended and game-based learning strategies to improve students' engagement and academic performance.
2. Educational authorities should provide continuous professional training to equip teachers with the skills and digital competencies required to implement these innovative methods effectively.
3. Instructional designs should be flexible and inclusive to accommodate different learning preferences and promote equal participation among male and female students.
4. Curriculum planners should integrate technology-enhanced and interactive pedagogies into Social Studies curricula to foster deeper learning and critical thinking among students.

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- Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghoroma, S. (2026)*
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Effects of Blended Learning and Game-Based Learning Strategies on ... Agboghoroma, S. (2026)

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