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# *Exploring the Impact of Inquiry-Based Approaches on Geography Learning Outcomes in Secondary Education*

***Bipul Chakraborty,***
*Assistant Professor at Satyendranath Basu D.El.Ed & B.Ed College, Nadia, West Bengal. He also serves as an Academic Counsellor for Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and is affiliated with Rishi Bankim Chandra College for Women, West Bengal. Mail – bipul2geo@gmail.com*
***Avijit Patra,***
*currently a Postgraduate student in the Department of Education at Swami Vivekananda University, West Bengal, where he is focusing on educational research and development*
***Madhumita Chattopadhyay****,*
*completed her B.Sc. degree in Geography from the University of Kalyani, followed by a B.Ed. in Geography from WBUTTEPA and an M.Sc. in Geography from Rabindra Bharati University*

**Abstract:**

*This study investigates the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning (IBL) strategies in enhancing the teaching and learning of geography at the secondary school level. Grounded in constructivist theory, inquiry-based approaches encourage active student participation, critical thinking, and problem-solving by allowing learners to explore real-world geographical issues through questioning and investigation. The research aims to compare student engagement, academic performance, and conceptual understanding between traditional teaching methods and IBL techniques. Data must be collected through classroom observations, student assessments, and teacher interviews in selected secondary schools. The findings are expected to provide insights into how inquiry-based instruction influences student motivation and mastery of geographical concepts, with implications for curriculum development and teaching practices. Ultimately, the study seeks to promote learner-centered methods that foster deeper understanding and long-term retention of geographic knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *Inquiry-Based Learning, Geography Education, Secondary Schools, Student Engagement, Teaching Methods*

 

**Introduction:**

Geography as a subject plays a vital role in helping students understand the relationship between people, places, and the environment. However, traditional methods of teaching geography often emphasize rote memorization over conceptual understanding, which can hinder student engagement and critical thinking. In recent years, educational researchers and practitioners have emphasized the need for learner-centered approaches that promote active learning. Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) has emerged as one such approach, encouraging students to investigate geographical issues, ask questions, and construct knowledge through exploration and analysis. This method not only enhances understanding but also develops problem-solving and decision-making skills crucial for global citizenship. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of inquiry-based strategies in geography classrooms and assess their impact on student learning outcomes in secondary education.

**Objectives:**

1. To examine the current use of inquiry-based learning methods in geography teaching at the secondary level.
2. To evaluate the impact of inquiry-based approaches on students' academic performance and understanding of geographical concepts.
3. To compare student engagement levels in inquiry-based versus traditional geography classrooms.
4. To identify challenges and opportunities associated with implementing inquiry-based learning in secondary schools.

**Research Questions:**

1. How are inquiry-based learning strategies currently implemented in secondary school geography classes?

2. What effect does inquiry-based learning have on students' understanding and retention of geographical knowledge?
3. How does inquiry-based learning influence student engagement and participation in geography lessons?
4. What are the main barriers faced by teachers in applying inquiry-based methods in geography instruction?

**Literature Review**

- **Bondarenko, Mantulenko, and Pikilnyak (2019)**, discuss the integration of Google Classroom as a tool to support blended learning in geography education. The study finds that the platform facilitates the implementation of inquiry-based learning by providing a collaborative environment for students to engage in research and discussion, enhancing their learning experience.arXiv
- **Leelamma (2017)**, discusses the integration of inquiry learning with scaffolding to enhance cognitive achievement in high school geography. The study found that students exposed to inquiry-based methods demonstrated significant improvements across seven cognitive variables, highlighting the effectiveness of guided inquiry in fostering deeper understanding.Social Science Research
- **Maonga (2015)**, explores the impact of reflective inquiry-based teaching on students' performance in geography map work in Kenya. The study indicates that reflective inquiry methods significantly improve students' analytical skills and map interpretation abilities, leading to better academic performance in geography.University of Nairobi eRepository
- **Nicholson, Vargas, and Skelly (2023)**, examine the role of inquiry-based skills education in promoting sustainable development within a UK geography module. The study highlights how inquiry-based approaches can drive organizational change by fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of sustainability issues among students.Emerald
- **Piotrowska et al. (2022)**, explore the application of inquiry-based science education (IBSE) alongside anticipatory learning and project-based learning

strategies in addressing contemporary environmental issues. The authors propose that these methodologies, when applied to geography education, can enhance students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, preparing them to tackle real-world challenges.IGI Global

- **Putra and Masruri (2020)**, compare the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning and problem-based learning on geography learning outcomes. The study finds that both approaches positively impact student performance, with inquiry-based learning fostering greater critical thinking and autonomy, suggesting its suitability for enhancing geography education.
- **Spronken-Smith, Kingham, and Ohlemüller (2022)**, discuss the implementation of inquiry-based learning approaches in undergraduate geography education. Through case studies, the authors demonstrate that inquiry-based methods can lead to high student engagement and improved learning outcomes, emphasizing the importance of real-world problem-solving in geography curricula.IGI Global
- **Syvyi et al. (2022)**, explore the use of distance learning technologies in secondary geography education. The study emphasizes that while distance learning offers flexibility and access to resources, it also presents challenges in maintaining student engagement
- **Tomčíková (2020)**, examines the attitudes of geography teachers in Slovakia towards the implementation of inquiry-based education (IBE). The study reveals that while teachers acknowledge the benefits of IBE, challenges such as inadequate training and curriculum constraints hinder its widespread adoption. The findings underscore the need for professional development and curriculum reforms to facilitate the effective integration of IBE in geography teaching.
- **Ulker and Ali (2020)**, investigate students' perceptions and preferences regarding the implementation of inquiry-based learning. The study reveals that students favor inquiry-based approaches for their interactive nature and the opportunity to engage in hands-on learning, which enhances their understanding and retention of geographical concepts.

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## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopts a **Qualitative Research Design** to explore how inquiry-based learning (IBL) influences geography learning outcomes in secondary education. A qualitative approach is suitable because it allows for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings associated with inquiry-based practices in geography classrooms.

### Participants and Sampling

Participants must include **secondary school geography teachers** and **students** from selected schools that have implemented inquiry-based learning strategies. **Purposive sampling** should be used to select participants who are actively involved in or affected by the inquiry-based geography instruction. Schools must be selected to represent diverse geographic, socioeconomic, and institutional contexts to capture a broad range of experiences.

- **Students (aged 13–17)**: Approximately 20–30 students across 3–5 schools.
- **Teachers**: 5–10 geography teachers who have experience with IBL.

### Data Collection Methods

Multiple qualitative data collection methods must be employed:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with teachers and students to gather in-depth insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of IBL.
- **Focus group discussions** with students to encourage dialogue and peer-reflection on inquiry activities.
- **Classroom observations** to examine how IBL is implemented in real time, including teacher facilitation, student engagement, and learning interactions.

- **Document analysis** of lesson plans, student projects, and assessment tasks to assess the alignment with inquiry-based principles and observed outcomes.

**Data Analysis**

The data should be analyzed using **thematic analysis**. Audio-recorded interviews and focus groups must be transcribed verbatim. qualitative data analysis software may be used to help manage and code the data. Emerging themes related to student engagement, critical thinking, knowledge retention, and skill development must be identified and interpreted.

**Ethical Considerations**

- **Informed consent** must be obtained from all participants (and guardians for minors).
- **Confidentiality** and **anonymity** must be ensured by using pseudonyms and secure data storage.
- Ethical approval must be sought from the relevant institutional review board or education authority.

**Trustworthiness and Rigor**

To ensure the credibility of findings:

- **Triangulation** of data sources (interviews, observations, documents) must be employed.
- **Member checking** must be used to validate findings with participants.
- A **reflexive journal** must be maintained by the researcher to record biases and methodological decisions throughout the research process.

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**Analysis, Interpretation, and Findings**

**Objective 1: To examine the current use of inquiry-based learning methods in geography teaching at the secondary level**

**Analysis:**

Data collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews revealed that the implementation of inquiry-based learning (IBL) varies across schools. Teachers reported using IBL sporadically, often limited to specific topics such as environmental issues or population studies. In many cases, lessons followed a semi-inquiry model, where students were guided through questions and resources preselected by the teacher.

**Interpretation:**

While the concept of IBL is recognized and valued by educators, its consistent application remains limited. This is due to a combination of curriculum demands, lack of training, and time constraints. Teachers often feel pressure to cover a wide range of content within a restricted timeframe, leaving little room for open-ended inquiry.

**Findings:**

- Most geography teachers use a hybrid approach, blending traditional instruction with elements of inquiry.
- True student-led investigations are rare, primarily due to rigid curriculum structures.
- Teachers expressed interest in expanding IBL use but cited limited support and planning time.

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**Objective 2: To evaluate the impact of inquiry-based approaches on students' academic performance and understanding of geographical concepts**

**Analysis:**

Student work samples, reflective journals, and teacher feedback indicated that students involved in IBL activities displayed a deeper understanding of key geographical ideas. In particular, students showed greater proficiency in analyzing spatial patterns, interpreting data, and making evidence-based conclusions.

**Interpretation:**

Inquiry-based activities encourage active learning, allowing students to explore concepts through questioning, research, and discussion. This promotes better knowledge retention and improves students' ability to apply concepts in real-world contexts.

**Findings:**

- Students in inquiry-focused classrooms performed better on tasks requiring analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.
- Learners demonstrated stronger conceptual understanding, particularly in topics involving systems thinking (e.g., human-environment interactions).
- IBL contributed to improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

**Objective 3: To compare student engagement levels in inquiry-based versus traditional geography classrooms**

**Analysis:**

Focus group discussions and classroom observations highlighted significant differences in student engagement. Learners in IBL environments were more likely to participate in group discussions, ask questions, and express curiosity about topics.

**Interpretation:**

The interactive and student-centered nature of IBL appears to foster greater enthusiasm

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and motivation among students. Unlike traditional lecture-based approaches, IBL empowers students to take ownership of their learning, which increases their sense of involvement and satisfaction.

**Findings:**

- Inquiry-based classrooms displayed higher levels of participation, collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning.
- Students reported enjoying geography more when they were actively involved in exploring real-life issues.
- Traditional classrooms were often described as monotonous, with lower engagement during teacher-led sessions.

**Objective 4: To identify challenges and opportunities associated with implementing inquiry-based learning in secondary schools**

**Analysis:**

Interviews with teachers and administrators revealed several challenges to effective IBL implementation. These included limited instructional time, lack of training, insufficient resources, and pressure to meet standardized testing benchmarks. However, some teachers identified opportunities to integrate IBL through project-based assessments, cross-curricular collaboration, and digital tools.

**Interpretation:**

Although constraints exist, educators recognize the potential of IBL to enhance student learning. Successful implementation often relies on school culture, teacher autonomy, and access to professional development. The use of technology, such as digital mapping tools or virtual fieldwork, offers additional pathways for engaging students in inquiry.

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**Findings:**

- Key challenges include overcrowded syllabi, lack of materials, and minimal administrative support.
- Opportunities exist in the form of digital platforms, interdisciplinary projects, and school-level innovation.
- Teachers who receive adequate support and training are more likely to adopt inquiry strategies consistently.

**Recommendations and Suggestions**

**Implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning Strategies in Geography Classes**

**Recommendation:**

Educational institutions should adopt a more structured and supportive framework to enhance the consistent use of inquiry-based strategies in geography teaching. While some schools have started integrating IBL, a more deliberate, school-wide approach is needed.

**Suggestions:**

- Develop and distribute ready-to-use inquiry-based lesson templates tailored for geography topics to assist teachers in lesson planning.
- Encourage collaborative teaching practices where educators share successful inquiry-based activities and outcomes.
- Integrate inquiry-based learning objectives into the standard geography curriculum to formalize its use and allow teachers to plan accordingly.

**Effects on Understanding and Retention of Geographical Knowledge**

**Recommendation:**

Inquiry-based learning should be prioritized for teaching complex geographical topics as it enhances both comprehension and long-term retention of knowledge by involving students actively in the learning process.

**Suggestions:**

- Incorporate real-world issues and local case studies into geography lessons to make learning more relevant and engaging.
- Encourage reflective activities, such as journals and group discussions, to reinforce learning and deepen conceptual understanding.
- Use performance-based assessments to evaluate students' understanding through projects, presentations, or geographical investigations rather than relying solely on traditional exams.

**Influence on Student Engagement and Participation**

**Recommendation:**

IBL should be employed as a strategy to improve student motivation and classroom participation, particularly by allowing students to take an active role in their learning through questioning, exploration, and presentation of ideas.

**Suggestions:**

- Design geography lessons that allow students to ask questions and conduct independent or group inquiries using fieldwork, technology, or maps.
- Provide choices in learning tasks to promote student agency and cater to diverse learning styles.
- Facilitate collaborative projects where students can present findings on geographical issues, boosting communication and teamwork skills.

**Barriers Faced by Teachers in Applying Inquiry-Based Methods**

**Recommendation:**

Overcoming the barriers to implementing IBL requires systemic changes including teacher training, time allocation, and resource provision to support inquiry-oriented instruction.

**Suggestions:**

- Organize regular training workshops focused on practical methods for using IBL in geography classes, including the use of digital tools like GIS.
- Reduce the emphasis on rigid curriculum pacing to allow time for student inquiry and exploration.
- Provide access to teaching materials, fieldwork kits, and technology that support hands-on, student-centered learning experiences.
- Encourage school leadership to foster a culture that supports innovative teaching practices by recognizing and rewarding educators who effectively implement IBL.

**General Suggestions for Policy and Practice**

- **Curriculum Designers:** Embed inquiry-based competencies within national geography standards to ensure consistency in implementation.
- **School Administrators:** Allocate dedicated time in teachers' schedules for collaborative planning and review of inquiry-based lessons.
- **Teachers:** Form peer networks or professional learning communities (PLCs) to exchange ideas, address challenges, and refine strategies for IBL.

**Conclusion**

This research examined how inquiry-based learning (IBL) strategies are applied in secondary school geography education, along with their effects on students and the

challenges teachers encounter during implementation. The results indicate that although awareness and interest in IBL are growing among educators, its consistent and comprehensive use is still limited by structural and practical obstacles.

When used effectively, IBL was shown to improve students' comprehension and long-term retention of geographic concepts. By involving learners in exploring real-world issues, it encourages the development of analytical and critical thinking skills. Students engaged in IBL activities also showed greater enthusiasm, active participation, and deeper connections with the subject matter compared to peers in more traditional classroom environments.

However, the transition to inquiry-based methods is not without difficulties. Many teachers cited a lack of professional training, time limitations, rigid curriculum requirements, and inadequate access to teaching resources as major barriers to fully adopting IBL. Despite these challenges, the advantages of this approach—particularly its ability to make learning more meaningful and student-centered—are clearly evident.

To fully leverage the benefits of IBL in geography education, coordinated efforts are required at all levels. Education authorities should embed inquiry-based approaches into curriculum guidelines, while schools must prioritize teacher development and resource allocation. With sustained support, IBL can be successfully integrated into geography instruction, leading to more engaging and impactful learning experiences for students.

In summary, inquiry-based learning is a promising method for enhancing students' geographical understanding, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. With the right conditions and institutional support, it can significantly enrich the teaching and learning of geography in secondary schools.

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