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**ESTABLISHMENT OF GEOGRAPHY SUBJECT'S RELEVANCE IN  
UNDERSTANDING SOCIETAL PROBLEMS AMONG SECONDARY  
SCHOOL LEARNERS IN UASIN GISHU COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Geography is a subject that assists individuals to understand societal problems based on the curriculum. However, challenges have emerged from the low enrolment of students in geography compared to religious studies and history which lie in the social studies group as shown from the figures from 2008-2014. There were 33,1249 students for religious studies, 116,687 students for geography, and 293,117 students for history in KCSE examinations (KSR, KNEC,2014). From the information above its clear that geography had the lowest enrolment and also poor results in KCSE examinations. This study sought to establish the Geography subject's relevance in understanding societal problems. The study utilized a conceptual framework showing the relationship between the independent variable (relevance of geography)and the dependent variable (understanding societal problems). A descriptive survey design was employed because the respondents are given an opportunity to express their views and it determines and reports things the way they are. A sample of 260 forms three geography students was obtained through a simple random sampling technique from a target population of 868 students from 21 extra county schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Data collection tools were the student questionnaire and interview guide schedule. Data were analyzed by transcription and assigning codes according to the objective of the study. All the coded questionnaires were entered into the SPSS program and run descriptive statistics. Data was presented in form of pie charts and bar graphs. The findings indicated that 74.6% of the respondents felt that the Geography subject is relevant in understanding environmental degradation while (45.8%) felt that the subject is least relevant in understanding drug abuse and violence. Recommendations made are that learners should be encouraged to choose geography subject as it guides learners to tackle various environmental and societal challenges. It is also recommended that geography should be made compulsory among all secondary school students because it helps to understand environmental issues and their possible solutions.

**Keywords:** Subject's Relevance, Understanding, Societal problems.

**1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The subject of geography is taught with the objective that learners will acquire basic foundation skills so as to propel them towards making valuable contributions to the society.

These contributions can be made through the acquisition of basic foundation skills as well as in the world of work. Geographic education can lead a learner into pursuing various career paths. In Britain the British geography curriculum puts emphasis on development of skills needed to carry out geographical inquiry, map work, and fieldwork, Clifford (2013). The fact that geography subject is optional in the Kenyan curriculum, means the students who choose the subject should be enlightened on the careers that geography subject can lead them to. Geography is a subject that should make learners understand and solve environmental problems, but little emphasis has been put on it yet it's a subject being offered at secondary school level with the least enrolment. In Kenya, a competency-based curriculum was introduced in the year 2017, with one of its objectives being to enable learners to understand and solve problems as well as placing emphasis on the attainment of relevant skills as opposed to academic certificates. Njengere (2017), holds the view that a major challenge of the current system is that it's too rigid and has limited opportunities to align basic education with children's career interests, aptitudes, and abilities. In conjunction to that, geography in Kenya as a subject holds a relevant portion of the competency-based curriculum yet enrolment is very low at the secondary school level.

A study carried out by the Research Division of Cambridge Assessment (2007) on the patterns of uptake and factors affecting subject preferences of 6000 A level students in England found that students think the subject chosen would be enjoyable and interesting; useful for their future or that they performed well in the subject at the GCSE examinations. This is an indication that students choose subjects which they believe will equip them with knowledge and skills that will suit their career interests. It is in this context that various countries have designed their geography curriculum to impart knowledge and skills for sustainable development. The Australian Curriculum identifies the skills, behaviors, and attributes that students need to succeed in life and work. The curriculum provides students with abilities to investigate the current geographical events and allows them to evaluate their findings against the criteria of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice, (ACARA, 2011).

In Kenya, the geography curriculum has been designed so as to suit the national goals of education. Advancement in any subject leads to a career related to that subject, Maweu, (2005). There are careers that require knowledge and application of geographical skills. Such careers are in the field of survey, cartography, photography, wildlife, and tourism. Technological advancement has seen the increase in geography-based careers such as map interpretation using computer software. The skills that one uses in geographical studies make an individual have a potential interest in a wide range of employers such as development aid agencies, environmental work using GIS, census/population studies, and tourism.

There has been a significant drop in the number of students that choose geography subject in secondary schools. According to Bardecki (1989), there has been a decline in enrolment into secondary school geography in Ontario province of Canada. The study notes that there was a decline of 21.2% in student numbers since 1972. In Kenya, the number of students who opt for geography in secondary school is lower than the other subjects in the same category.

**Table 1.1: Number of KCSE geography students (2008-2012)**

SUBJECT	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO SAT FOR EXAM</b>					
IRE/CRE/HRE	197,384	226,436	240,939	302,848	331,249
Geography	109,745	112,446	120,150	121,152	116,687
History	182,850	210,622	224,823	267,537	293,117

**Source:** Kenya Statistical Report, 2010 and KNEC, 2013

From the table above it is clear that the number of students who have been sitting for geography exams is low compared to that of other subjects. There seems to be little reaction to this low enrolment from educationists. The relevance of geography subject should be brought to the fore so that more students are knowledgeable on the role that geography subject plays in dealing with societal problems. Knapp (1987) notes that if a subject is seen to be useful, it has a place in the students' timetable. In order to increase enrolment in geography, the importance of geography subject should be emphasized.

The subjects in the curriculum all focus on knowledge and skill acquisition towards the betterment of the individual and society. Haines (2006) notes that infusing skills with subject area content, and especially cross-curricular content provides students with a strong learning capacity and helps them retain the learning for ongoing use. Since each of these subjects is unique in its own way geography's place should be established. Statistics have indicated a progressive improvement in the performance of geography as illustrated below.

**Table1.2: Performance in Geography (2008-2012).**

<b>SUBJECT MEAN SCORE IN %</b>					
YEAR	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Geography	37.0	38.9	40.1	41.65	46.58
CRE	50.4	42.8	44.1	48.93	44.03
IRE	54.7	48.5	49.9	43.07	32.13

**Source;** Kenya Statistical Report, 2010, KNEC, 2013

The objectives of the geography syllabus in Kenya require learners to; appreciate the importance of learning geography, acquire knowledge of available natural resources and demonstrate ability and willingness to utilize them sustainably, and demonstrate the acquisition of positive attitudes, values, and skills for self-reliance (KIE, 2002). The instructional strategies should therefore involve activities that enable learners to discover their areas of interest and put into practice the pedagogical approaches that prepare learners to suit their careers. Aydin (2011) notes that methods used in geography lessons are generally inefficient for students to learn issues and to use what they have learned. Mostly teacher-centered methods are used and students are passive.

Kenyan society is faced with various challenges ranging from unemployment, environmental degradation traffic congestion, and drug abuse. For a country to enjoy socio-economic progress, education and training is paramount as the country strategizes to achieve the vision of 2030. Momanyi & Rop (2019), hold in their research that Kenya is vigorously pursuing vision 2030. To propel the impetus of achieving the vision requires a skilled workforce.

Employers have questioned the skills and capacity of university graduates in the past. The 8-4-4 system has been criticized as placing much emphasis on content recall and exam-oriented not putting into consideration if the knowledge attained in geography can assist learners to understand the societal problems and solve them. This is an objective of Competence-Based Curriculum having the same perspective with geography subject. Wanzala (2018), holds the view that the system taught the students to cram and pass examinations. Critics of the system felt that it doesn't allow students to identify their talents and exploit them early enough. Competency-based curriculum on the other hand places emphasis on the attainment of relevant skills as opposed to academic certificates. A major challenge of the current system is that it's too rigid and has limited opportunities to align basic education with children's career interests, aptitudes, and abilities (Njengere, 2017). It is projected that with an educated and well-trained manpower, Kenya will be able to become a middle-income economy by the year 2030, Vision 2030,(2007). Education and training should therefore consider the role of geography in instilling learners with basic foundation skills to tackle the various challenges faced in society. On completion of high school learners are expected to join college to study courses that will determine their career paths including understanding social problems.

## **2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

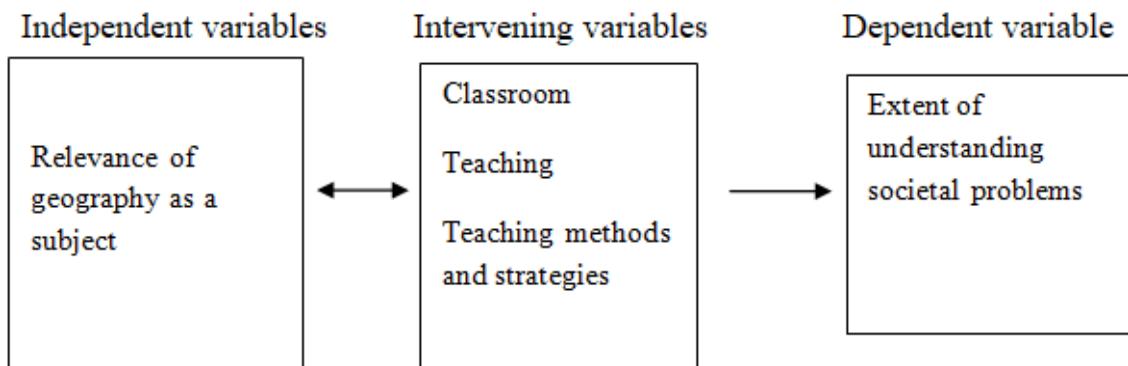
Geography is one of the subjects in the secondary school curriculum whose aims and objectives have been derived from the national goals of education one of which is that the learner should be self-reliant and productive in society. When the geography syllabus is covered well and its content taught according to the national goals of education, it is expected that the learner will be able to acquire knowledge and skills during classroom interactions and practical activities which enables him/her to be prepared for a career in life as well as pursue further studies which will prepare him for the world of work. The teaching and learning of geography have, however not met its objectives in terms of realization of national goals of education as stipulated in the geography syllabus due to the way it is taught.

According to the vision 2030, Kenya aims to be a nation that has a clean, secure, and sustainable environment by 2030. This vision hinges on the land cover and land use mapping initiatives, solid waste management system initiatives, securing the wildlife corridors and migratory routes initiative, the water catchment management initiatives, improving the capacity for adaptation to global climate change, and overall environmental sustainability. These initiatives would be possible through the application of knowledge and skills with a background in geography. Therefore, there is a need to explore the relevance of geography subject in addressing important societal issues and instilling basic knowledge and foundation skills to learners that will make them have positive contributions to society. Therefore, this study sought to establish the relevance of geography in understanding societal problems.

### **2.1 The objective of the study.**

The objective of the study was to establish the geography subject's relevance in understanding societal problems.

### **2.2 Conceptual Framework**

**Fig.1; Conceptual Framework**

The independent variable is the relevance of the geography subject. Classroom interaction and the teaching strategies influence the extent to which understanding of societal problems among the learners will be achieved. Which then forms the dependent variable.

### **3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

Research designs are plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis, (Creswell, 2009). The researcher used a descriptive survey design to determine the relevance of geography subject in understanding the societal problems in Uasin Gishu County by use of a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale to measure variables and then numerical values were assigned to the responses. In the qualitative paradigm, open-ended questions were used to obtain detailed information. Interviews were conducted to enable further exploration of views. The responses were then structured according to the themes and objectives of the study. This view is in line with (Kothari, 2014).

#### **3.2 Target Population.**

A population is any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common and that are of the interest of the researcher. The target population consists of the specific group to whom findings of the study are generalized, (Best and Khan, 2006). The target population of this study was drawn from 21 county schools in Uasin Gishu County. The researcher targeted Geography students in the 21 selected secondary schools.

#### **3.3 Sampling procedures**

Sampling is the process of selecting individuals for study. A sample is any group on which information is obtained (Fraenkel and Wallen 2009). The target population is generally too large for the study. The researcher got a sample from the target of 21 county schools from Uasin Gishu County which was used in the study. This makes up a target population of 868 from three geography students. The researcher used the target population from the checklist

to get a sample of 30 % of students from each school using a simple random sampling technique. This gave a total sample of 260 students. The findings of the sample were representative of the entire target population (Wiersma and Jurs, 2005).

### **3.4 Sampling grid**

The serial numbers in the grid below represent the schools as indicated

<b>Serial No.</b>	<b>Target population Form Three students</b>	<b>Sample size</b>
1	35	10
2	39	12
3	44	13
4	70	21
5	69	21
6	90	27
7	54	16
8	27	8
9	27	8
10	60	18
11	35	11
12	63	19
13	24	7
14	16	5
15	34	10
16	44	13
17	29	9
18	18	5
19	30	9
20	33	10
21	27	8
	868	260

### **4.0 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The study utilized the research instruments below;

#### **4.1 Student's Questionnaire**

The student's questionnaire was concerned with statements about the relevance of geography in understanding societal problems.

#### **4.2 Student's Interview Guide Schedule**

The interview guide schedule was administered to geography students. This information supplemented information gathered from the questionnaire.

#### **4.3 Validity**

Validity is concerned with whether the instrument used actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Content validity is concerned with determining if the content that the instrument contains is an adequate sample of the domain of content it is supposed to represent, (Suter, 2006). Content validity was achieved by ensuring the clarity of questions, adequacy of workspace, and appropriateness of language, and clarity of directions. Criterion validity was achieved by including questions on all the objectives of the study in the instruments. Construct validity was achieved by ensuring that the instrument restricts itself to geography subjects in preparing learners for a career.

#### **4.4 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of scores or answers from one administration of the instrument to another and from one set of items to another, (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009). To ascertain the reliability of the instruments, the test re-test technique was used. The technique involves administering the same test twice to the same group after a certain time interval has elapsed. A reliability coefficient was then calculated using the scores of the first test and the second test using the Pearson product-moment correlation formula to indicate the relationship between the two sets of scores. A reliability coefficient of 0.5 or more was accepted as being reliable.

#### **4.5 Data Collection Techniques**

The research instruments were the student's questionnaire and the student's interview guide schedule. The researcher asked for the appropriate time for the students to fill in the questionnaire. On the allocated time, the students were assembled in one classroom and guided on how to fill in the questionnaire and were given time to fill. On completion, the questionnaires were collected and the students thanked them for their cooperation.

#### **4.6 Student's Interview Guide Schedule**

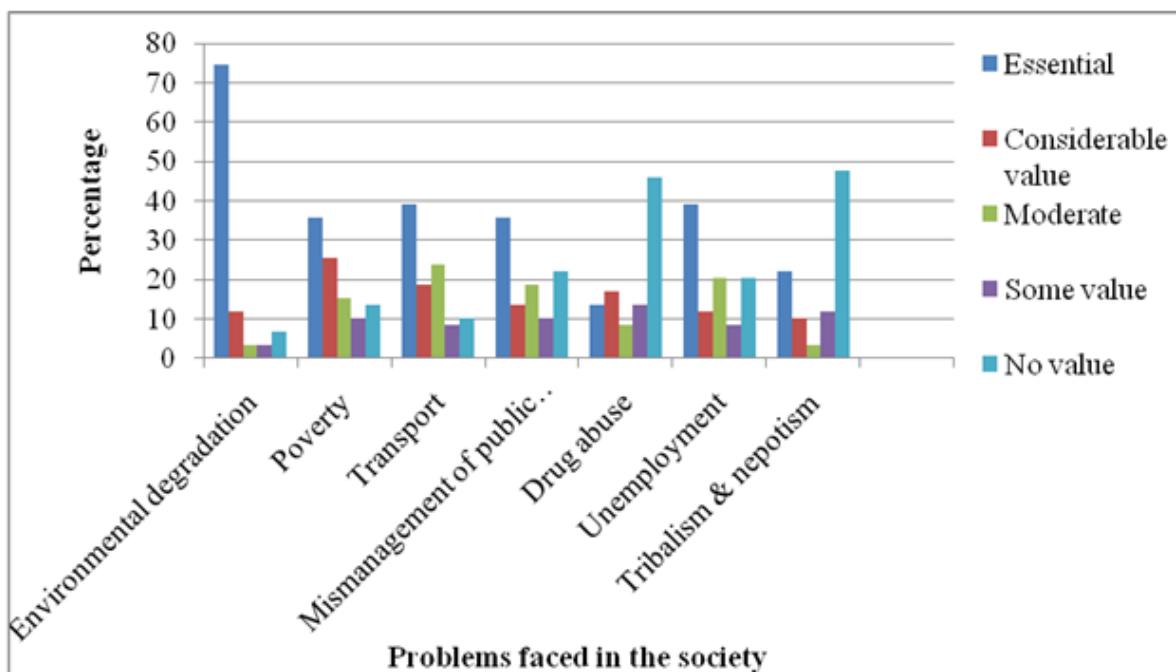
The interview guide schedule was used to get the opinion of geography students on the relevance of geography as a subject in understanding social problems. A categorical theme was made to be the topic of understanding the objective.

#### **4.7 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of looking at and summarizing data with the intent to extract useful information and develop conclusions, (Mwituria, 2012). Data analysis commenced in the field by ensuring that all the questionnaires had been filled appropriately. The data collected were then organized according to the objectives of the study. Qualitative data analysis was done by identifying the main themes and codes assigned. According to Mwituria, (2012) coding in data analysis is an interpretive technique that organizes the data and provides a means to introduce the interpretations. Responses were then classified under the main themes and analyzed using descriptive statistics, discussed and conclusions are drawn.

## **5.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS PRESENTATION INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

The objective of the study was to establish the relevance of geography subject in understanding societal problems. Respondents were given a list containing various problems that are faced in society and asked how learning geography has equipped them with knowledge and skills on how to tackle these problems. The findings are indicated in the figure below.



**Fig. 2; Relevance of geography in understanding societal problems, [Data, 2014].**

From the findings above almost three-quarters of the respondents concur that geography subject is essential in understanding environmental degradation. Less than 12% of the respondents felt that geography is of considerable value, 3.4 % felt it is of some value while 6.8% felt that geography is of no value in understanding environmental degradation.

This means that the respondents feel that geography subject equips learners with knowledge and skills to deal with environmental issues such as air pollution, toxic waste disposal, and proper maintenance of the environment. The geography subject syllabus comprises of various topics that deal with environment-related issues. Such topics are ecology, management, and conservation of the environment. It is for this reason that learners felt that the subject is really essential in enabling them to understand environmental degradation.

Poverty is one of the major problems facing Kenyan society today. This study sought to establish from learners the extent to which geography subject enables them to understand and tackle poverty-related challenges. From the findings, it is clear that 35.6% of the respondents felt that geography is essential, 25.4% felt it is of considerable value while 15.3% felt it is of moderate value, 10.2%, some value, and 13.6% no value.

This indicates that geography is relevant in enabling learners to understand poverty-related challenges and thus the subject addresses pertinent issues in the society. Geography subject also featured as being essential in understanding transport and congestion with 39.0% responding to the affirmative 18.6 % felt it is of considerable value, 23.7 moderate value, 8.5% some value and 10.2% no value. The fact that there are more respondents that felt that geography subject is essential in addressing transport and congestion may be due to the fact that there is a topic on transport and congestion that is covered in geography subject. The subject also featured as being essential in understanding drug abuse with 13.6% of the respondents responding to the affirmative, the subject also ranked as being essential in understanding unemployment with 39.0% of respondents.

From these findings it can be deduced that geography subject ranked as being essential in understanding environmental degradation, unemployment, poverty, transport and congestion, mismanagement of public funds, tribalism, and drug abuse; these have been ranked from the most essential to the least essential. The ranking of drug abuse and violence as being least relevant in understanding drug abuse and violence maybe because since geography subject covers various topics that are concerned with environmental degradation, the learners get to understand more about the environment, unlike issues that concern drug abuse where there are few topics that deal with these aspects and that could be the reason it is ranked as being least relevant.

These findings concur with the study carried out by Bardecki (1989) on Student' perceptions of geography in Ontario Secondary schools. One of its objectives was to establish the relevance of geography subject in understanding societal problems. The study findings indicated that there was consensus that geography contributes most to understanding the issues with a broad environmental content. Such areas included environmental deterioration, loss of wildlife, and toxic waste disposal.

Geography ranked as being essential in understanding problems that are related to the environment. This is particularly because geography subject is concerned with the study of the earth as a home of a man and the subject also deals with day-to-day activities that affect man. From these findings, the relevance of geography subject in as far as equipping learners with knowledge and skills to deal with various challenges that face the society cannot be underestimated. The findings can be interpreted to mean that geography is considered as

being relevant in understanding societal problems. Geography subject deals with day-to-day activities of man such as agriculture, trade, transport, and communication. These aspects make the subject to be familiar to the learner. The fact that geography makes young people to make sense of a complex and dynamically changing world (Garner,2011), makes it more essential in understanding day-to-day problems such as transport and congestion as well as unemployment. Although the subject is seen as not being favorable in ASAL areas (Koech Report, 1999) it still plays a significant role in tackling such problems as aridity and desertification which are covered in the geography syllabus. There are topics that deal with population and settlement in geography and this explains why learners feel that geography subject is relevant in understanding unemployment and poverty.

Geography subject, therefore, plays a significant role in equipping learners with knowledge suitable for solving day-to-day problems that face society. The world we live in is undergoing a lot of changes in political, social, and economic scenarios and geography subjects should equip learners with knowledge and skills to enable them to tackle the changes that we face. The findings of this study concur with CCGE (2001) which notes that geography enables researchers to understand the ways in which humans change the environment in which they live and determine long-term environmental impacts of social processes such as population growth and technological development. By the time they complete school, learners are expected to be fruitful and offer solutions to the various problems that they face.

The national goal of education that geography subject ought to instill on learners needs to come into place by learners putting into practice what they have learned and try to solve environmental problems. However, this view could be attributed to the view that geography teaching from a basic level should enable learners to solve problems but setting geography exams has not been to the standards of making a learner solve a problem. This view is the same as that of Momanyi & Rop (2019) who found that even at primary level, the majority of Early Grade Education teachers are challenged in designing and preparing a CBC test. Most teachers rely on commercial exams that are set by vendors. Most of these exams are set to cover topics not to test competencies. They are content-oriented. KICD 2018 in its report indicated that a majority of teachers have problems in evaluation.

The fact from the findings that geography enables learners to understand problems ranging from environmental degradation, poverty, transport, and congestion to understanding unemployment concurs with IGU (2007) which proposed that the paradigm of sustainable development should be integrated into the teaching of geography at all levels and in all regions of the world.

## **6.0 SUMMARY**

The objective of the study was to establish the relevance of geography in understanding societal problems. The study established that geography enabled learners to understand issues concerning environmental degradation as well as problems on transport and congestion. This may be because the subject has topics that deal with these areas in the curriculum. More than a quarter of the respondents felt that geography subject helps them to understand the problem of mismanagement of public funds in the society. The decline on this opinion could be because there are few areas in the geography syllabus that addresses issues that concern

public use of funds. In comparison, 38.8% of the respondents felt that geography is relevant in understanding the problems of unemployment. This could be because geography has topics that cover settlement which deals with issues of rural-urban migration and in this topic, issues of unemployment are addressed. Almost half of the respondents felt that geography has no value in understanding tribalism and nepotism while more than a quarter felt that drug abuse and violence was not addressed by geography subject. This could be an indication that topics in geography do not address these areas. The findings of the study show that geography subject enables learners to understand the various problems that face society. These problems range from social to economic-based. On this, geography subject's importance cannot be underestimated, thus the subject is important for every learner in secondary school.

The study concludes that Geography subject plays an important role in understanding societal problems. Problems concerning environmental degradation and congestion were noted as being addressed mostly by the subject. The subject addresses issues concerning unemployment and mismanagement of public funds. Problems such as tribalism and nepotism featured less as being addressed by geography. The curriculum of geography should therefore put in topics to address these areas. Also, the new Competence Based curriculum should give a lot of room to geography subject so that enrolment increases as it helps learners solve problems in day-to-day life.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Geography subject is relevant in understanding the major problems that face society today. The subject also contributes to a better understanding of environmental challenges. Geography should be made compulsory among all secondary school students because its importance in attaining a clean environment and sustainable development cannot be underestimated. The teacher should relate the problems faced in society to the content that is being taught so that learners can have a real-life experience on the aspects that they learn in class. This will boost the subject's importance in understanding the various problems faced in society.

### **7.1 Suggestions for Further Research**

A study should be carried out on the integration of competency-based curriculum and geography subject to mitigate the environmental challenges.

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