



Teachers' Perception of Challenges in Teaching Social Studies and Life Skills Education in Secondary Schools at Melamchi Municipality

Keshav Raj Dhakal

Associate Professor

Tribhuvan University, Central Department of Education, Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Email: keshav.dhakal@cded.tu.edu.np

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9335-8371>

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges in teaching social studies and life skills education in secondary schools within Melamchi Municipality, Bagmati Province. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from four secondary-level teachers through semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling technique was used to select schools. An interview guideline was applied to the participants in this study. After collecting data, an analysis of the data was made through the interpretation of the raw data by the interpretative method. The results reveal that the challenges of teaching social studies and life skills education are overloaded and outdated curriculum, teaching and learning resources, teacher capacity and training programs, lack of field-based and experiential learning, assessment and evaluation issues, societal and cultural barriers, and school and administrative support, selection and teaching current events and controversial issues in the classroom. The findings indicate that there are necessary improvements in the curriculum, including better training for teachers, a more interactive approach that focuses on field-based and experiential learning, improved assessment, and supplements to instructional resources.

Introduction

Social studies is an integrated field of knowledge taught to students to help them develop the qualities of an ideal citizen. Ezegbe (1994) claims that social studies is added as an integrated field to increase the

relevance of education. Social studies is an important part of the school curriculum because it explores morals and values and helps students understand and internalize the values of good citizenship. Social studies and life skills education is one of the important

subjects in the field of secondary education. According to CERID (2005), experience-based social studies content helps young people to better understand and appreciate, and to practice, democratic relationships among mankind. Social studies is the interdisciplinary integration of social science and humanities concepts for problem-solving and decision-making to develop citizenship skills on critical social issues (Barr et al., 1997). Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 1994, p. 3)

The Social Studies curriculum is designed to help pupils attain relevant knowledge and understanding of these issues, develop critical and reflective thinking skills, and appreciate multiple perspectives (Cogan, 2000; Engle, 2003). Social studies in basic school generally focuses on the family and local community; however, in secondary school, the social studies curriculum becomes more discipline-based and content-specific. Concepts in social studies start at home in the community or area and extend globally. Life skills are essential for preparing students to face real-world challenges, and teaching them in school can help prepare learners for the challenges they will face in the future. By teaching life skills education in school, learners will gain valuable skills to help

them make better decisions and lead more productive lives. Social studies and life skills education in school play an important role in shaping a learner's understanding of society, citizenship, responsible citizenship, personal development, and essential life competencies. Life skills refer to the ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life. This topic shall help the pupils learn to deal with success and failure, and personal and practical challenges in the best possible way (NDET, 2017, p. 13). Life skills-based education emphasizes developing personal life skills like self-reflection, critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills.

The curriculum development center has implemented the secondary level (Grade 11 and 12) curriculum, as well as revised curriculum details for all compulsory subjects (CDC, 2019), with social studies and life skills education being compulsory but optional, with mathematics having a weekly 5 hours and 100 full marks, with 25% internal evaluation and 75% external evaluation. Teaching social studies and life skills education is essential for preparing students to become informed, responsible, and capable citizens. Effective teaching in this area requires interactive, student-centered, and activity-centered methods. Teachers encounter several challenges in teaching this subject in Nepal.

Teaching this subject at the secondary school level is a challenging profession. Teachers are facing numerous challenges that can affect the teaching process. Melamchi Municipality was selected as the study area due to its diverse sociocultural context and representation of both urban and rural school settings. Few empirical studies explore the challenges faced by teachers at the local level. The

research question is related to the challenges of secondary school teachers' experience in teaching social studies and life skills education in community schools. The social cognitive theory and sociocultural theory, emphasize the interaction between environmental factors, educational institutions, curricula, cultural contexts, behaviors, teaching learning strategies, individual traits, beliefs, attitudes, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and relating classroom material to students' cultural background, experiences, and social situations (Vygotsky, 1978) while teaching social studies and life skills education. This study tries to explore the challenges experienced by school teachers in teaching social studies and life skills education at the secondary level at Melamchi Municipality.

Methods and Materials

This qualitative study employed a narrative inquiry design to gather information on teachers' views about the challenges they face in teaching this subject in secondary schools. This approach was employed to obtain a detailed description of how teachers experience the challenges. Narrative inquiry is popular in social science (Adhikari, 2021). According to Connelly & Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry is increasingly used in studies of educational experience (p. 2), which explores the lived experience (Kim, 2016). The study population consisted of four teachers from the Melamchi Municipality, who taught this subject in secondary schools in the current year, from the purposive sampling technique. The primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews with teachers. The researchers established rapport with the participants by having a brief, informal conversation before the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews were used as a method for data collection because they are an appropriate,

guided, but flexible means through which the views of participants can be comprehensively explored (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Data were analyzed using an interpretative approach, involving the identification of themes based on teachers' responses and patterns emerging across interviews.

Results and Discussions

In analyzing interview data, thematic analysis was conducted. The survey showed that a curriculum is the major challenge in teaching social studies and life skills education in Nepalese secondary schools, according to four teachers in different sampled secondary schools in Melamchi Municipality. Social studies and life skills education in Nepal face challenges overloaded curriculum, a lack of teacher training, inadequate instructional resources, a lack of field work and experiential learning, assessment challenges, selecting and teaching current events and controversial issues, and cultural and contextual relevance that affect students' engagement and learning outcomes.

Curriculum-related challenges

The outdated and overloaded curriculum is the major challenge in teaching this subject in Nepalese secondary schools. Social studies education in Nepal faces several challenges that impinge on its effectiveness and relevance. One of the major challenges is the outdated curriculum, which often does not address contemporary global issues (Giri, 2017). This reflects an environmental constraint that limits teachers' ability to exercise effective teaching behaviors, thereby lowering their self-efficacy. One teacher analyzed the overloaded curriculum. *A teacher explained that completing the curriculum was difficult due to limited time and insufficient subject expertise. I find it challenging to*

teach learners effectively and complete meaningful project work due to limited time. Another teacher noted, the social studies and life skills education curriculum is broad, vague, and too heavy. There's little guidance on developing critical and creative thinking, decision-making, democratic participation, and social skills practically. The teacher's inability to complete the whole curriculum due to time constraints.

Teachers express that the curriculum is filled with outdated theoretical content. In this context, a teacher said that *the social studies and life skills education curriculum tries to integrate too many areas: geography, population, history, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, different skills, and contemporary issues within a limited time. Because of the breadth, topics are often taught superficially, which hampers deeper understanding and critical thinking for learners.* Social studies and life skills education teachers are under pressure to cover all resources, which might lower the standard of teaching and reduce possibilities for interactive learning. The limited time for teaching makes it difficult to address all units and sub-units of the curriculum. The curriculum may prioritize breadth over depth, where learners receive a broad overview of the topic without truly teaching them. Social studies and life skills education curricula should be reformed based on learners' needs and reflect modern trends in education.

Teacher professional development and training

A significant challenge to effective teaching of this subject is the lack of content, pedagogical, and technological training for teachers. Due to the subject's emphasis on integrating several social sciences, including political science, history, geography,

sociology, anthropology, demography, current events, in social studies, and life skills education, teacher preparation is important in Nepal. Training, workshops, seminars, and mentoring can empower teachers to deliver lessons. The lack of integration of technology in classrooms significantly limits the learning experiences in social studies and life skills education. It develops digital literacy abilities for the next coursework and employment. Traditional teaching methods reduce students' involvement and engagement.

Social studies and life skills education teachers agree that limited training access hinders effective teaching in classrooms. Teachers' perceptions of the necessity of teacher training vary based on their experiences, educational context, and access to resources. One teacher said that *training often boosts our self-confidence, especially when handling diverse classrooms, integrating ICT tools, or teaching new content. I appreciate that teacher training introduces me to modern pedagogical methods, new technologies, updated curriculum, and contemporary educational research.* Another teacher said that *training improves my teaching strategies, classroom management, and content knowledge, making me more effective in the classroom. I need interactive, collaborative, continuous, and needs-based training. Training makes me feel like a professional.*

Teacher training empowers teachers to improve life skills in learners, like teamwork, active listening, respectful communication, empathy, tolerance, conflict resolution, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), effective professional development is sustained, collaborative, and focused on content, yet such opportunities are rare for many social

studies teachers (p. 8). Training is necessary to stay current with educational reforms and digital tools. Teacher training upgrades self-esteem and reinforces the value of teaching as a profession. **Teacher training empowers teachers to use ICT tools** effectively in the classroom, making teaching more engaging and informative. In this context, a teacher said that *the curriculum and technologies of social studies and life skills education are always changing. Training helps me stay updated and confident using new strategies and technologies. Some trainings are too general or theoretical. I need training that fits our real classroom needs. most of the teachers are also not trained in learner-centered teaching methods. The training should be practical and context-specific.* A lack of teacher training can reduce the quality of teaching and its impact on learners' learning and development. This issue is multifaceted, encompassing content and pedagogy delivery, use of ICT tools, planning, assessment, and classroom management, etc. In the study area, teachers reported lacking confidence in using interactive, activity-based methods due to inadequate training.

Teaching and learning resources

The instructional resources are important tools for achieving the educational objectives of the country. Inadequate instructional resources refer to the lack of necessary resources, tools, and infrastructure for effective teaching (Dhakal, 2019). The absence of teaching and learning resources represents an environmental barrier that reduces opportunities for observational and experiential learning. Teachers widely express concern about inadequate resources in teaching social studies, which affects the quality of teaching, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes. Teachers report a lack of adequate instructional resources, such as maps, charts, globes, multimedia,

internet access, or digital equipment. As UNESCO (2015) highlighted, the availability and quality of teaching and learning resources directly influence the effectiveness of the instructional process (p. 58). One of the teachers shared that *teaching social studies is difficult because we don't have enough supplementary resources, maps, audio, and visual resources to understand social studies and life skills in our schools. The textbooks are often the sole teaching material available in secondary schools.*

When the resources are not properly utilized and well managed, they pose challenges to teaching social studies and life skills education. Edinyang and Effiom (2017) argue that instructional resources can be used by the teacher and learners during the lesson to facilitate the achievement of objectives. Another teacher said that, *lack of instructional resources in teaching social studies and life skills education makes it hard to teach effectively. The textbooks of social studies and life skills education need instructional resources like maps, charts, and visual aids, but without these, teaching becomes difficult. I made instructional resources using local or low-cost resources.* The teachers expressed many concerns about the lack of instructional resources for teaching this subject in secondary schools. When instructional resources are not adequately available, it affects the overall system of teaching and learning. In the study area, teachers reported lacking confidence in using interactive, activity-based methods due to inadequate teaching and learning resources.

Lack of field-based and experiential learning

Field-based learning, including field trips, community interactions, resource persons, and hands-on activities, is crucial in teaching this subject. It helps students to observe and understand societal structures, cultural

practices, human nature interaction, and historical contexts in real-world settings. Learning is the process by which knowledge is generated through the transformation of experience, according to Kolb (1984). highlighting the critical role of hands-on engagement in education. The lack of field-based and experiential learning reduces learners' interest, skill development, and makes it harder for them to see the relevance of this subject in their daily lives. Field-based learning reinforces textbook knowledge through real-world observation. In this context, one teacher said *that field trips help learners see real-world applications of what they learn in class. Learners become more active, curious, and excited when learning outside the classroom.*

Field-based learning is considered an effective strategy for teaching social studies and life skills education, but teachers face many challenges in field-based learning and experiential learning. As Wade (2007) stated, students who engage in community-based and experiential learning demonstrate stronger critical thinking skills (p. 27). Another teacher said *that field-based learning helps learners connect classroom lessons to real-world situations. I want to take learners on field visits, but schools often don't have the budget for field visits. Because of resource constraints, the school cannot provide field-based and experiential learning.* The teachers expressed their experience on challenges about field-based and experiential learning for teaching social studies and life skills education in secondary schools.

Assessment and evaluation issues

Assessment is an indispensable component of the teaching-learning process aimed at evaluating students' understanding, knowledge, attitudes, and skills. The

assessment system faces **pedagogical and contextual challenges** that affect its effectiveness of the goals of the social studies and life skills education curriculum. Traditional tests frequently neglect the skills and reasoning processes central to disciplines like history and civics (Shepard, 2000, p. 6). Social studies and life skills education is primarily assessed through **written examinations** at the secondary level. In this context, one of the teachers shared, *assessment in social studies and life skills education is equated with written exams and final marks, and emphasis is on recalling textbook facts. I feel that the examination is overloaded by administrative work and large class sizes.* Another teacher said *that assessment is exam-oriented; students are evaluated by how well they memorize social studies content, not how they apply different skills. Social studies and life skills education includes areas like emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and teamwork, but we are unsure how to measure these aspects.*

Nitko & Brookhart (2014) argue that the absence of clear performance criteria results in subjective grading and reduced reliability in assessment outcomes (p. 132). Another teacher said *there is a lack of training and teaching materials for assessing life skills in social studies and life skills education. Poor infrastructure also limits assessment variety. I have no rubrics to assess the personal or interpersonal competencies of learners. I assess learners' participation in group work, but I must submit marks that can be added to report cards.* Assessing student learning in this subject has a unique challenge due to the integrated nature of the subjects. Teacher faces challenges in designing assessments that reflect the learning outcomes of the curriculum.

Societal and cultural barriers

Societal and cultural barriers refer to aligning social studies content with the cultural backgrounds, traditions, beliefs, and values of learners, and connecting curriculum, teaching methods, and assessments to real-life experiences and socio-economic conditions of students. If the social studies and life skills education curriculum is not relevant, students cannot connect observational learning to their lived experiences. As Gay (2010) notes, standardized curricula often neglect the cultural experiences of diverse student groups, leading to disengagement and underachievement (p. 23). One of the teachers shared that *social studies and life skills education play a vital role in preparing students to become responsible, empathetic, and capable citizens being a multicultural and multiethnic society like Nepal. The content must be culturally and contextually relevant, rooted in the real-life experiences, values, traditions, languages, and environments of learners. Another teacher said that social studies and life skills education curricula lack relevance to learners' experiences, limiting their engagement and ability to connect learning to real-life situations.* Most of the content does not represent the learner's own social and cultural norms and values.

Nepal is a country of immense cultural and geographical diversity. In this context, teaching this subject plays an important role in shaping responsible, informed, and capable citizens. Another teacher said that *the social studies and life skills education curriculum often generalizes cultural content, failing to reflect the **diversity of cultures**, languages, and indigenous knowledge. Students from non-Nepali-speaking backgrounds may struggle to relate to the lessons. Lack of localized teaching resources, social and cultural resistance to teaching, and urban-centric curriculum design are other*

challenges for teaching social studies and life skills education in cultural and contextual relevance. The teachers expressed many concerns about the cultural and contextual relevance of teaching this subject in secondary schools. The teacher faces the preparation for diverse learner needs, curriculum limitations, awareness, and understanding of diverse cultures that hinder effective teaching of this subject in secondary schools. Social Studies and life skills education teachers in the study area indicated that sociocultural diversity and barriers shaped their teaching strategies, highlighting the interdependence of environmental and personal factors in teaching.

School and administrative support

School administrators and the school management committee may not focus more on this subject. This subject often receives less emphasis from school administrators. Schools may not provide essential resources like maps, charts, projectors, or internet access for teaching social studies and life skills education. Inadequate equipment and infrastructure of the schools and crowded classes led to problems in implementing the curriculum (Shah, 2023). Students cannot get field-based and practical experiences that deepen their understanding of the subject. It is difficult to integrate textbook information with real-world difficulties without updated maps of Nepal and current event-related resources (Sharma, 2020). One teacher said that *I don't have enough teaching resources, like maps, charts, or digital tools. Most of the time, I have to make teaching resources or just read from the textbook. The school administration does not prioritize this subject when it comes to resource allocation.* Another teacher said that *the school administration and school management focus less on social studies and life skills education. I rarely receive encouragement from the school*

administration. *I've proposed field visits multiple times, but the school says there's no budget or time.* Field visits are rarely approved due to budget constraints or lack of interest from school administrators (Ghimire & Subedi, 2022). The school prioritizes exam-focused subjects. School administrations were regarded as the most contributing factors to educational progress at an average level across all dimensions, but there was no full support from school administrations for teaching social studies and life skills education at the secondary level.

Teaching contemporary and controversial issues

Teaching contemporary issues means preparing students to understand and engage with current events and controversial issues involve exploring debatable questions that generate disagreement, engaging students in inquiry and dialogue, and fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, it also presents several challenges for social studies and life skills education teachers. Teaching controversial issues necessitates consideration for student diversity, which can complicate classroom discussions. Addressing current events and controversial issues not only enhances students' awareness of societal dynamics but also prepares them to become active and responsible citizens in a democratic society (Oulton et al., 2004). One teacher said that *controversial issues are necessary in class, but they are risky to teach in classrooms. Discussing political or religious issues in the classroom often makes students uncomfortable. Students enjoy debating real-world issues, but the curriculum doesn't give us enough time to explore them properly. I wasn't trained for this. I need more support on how to teach sensitive issues properly.* Current events make learning up-to-date and relevant. Current events connect curriculum content to see how social, political, and economic issues impact their lives and communities. Another

teacher said that *students enjoy debating on controversial issues, but the curriculum doesn't give us enough time to explore them properly. Classroom management and maintaining respectful dialogue are the major challenges for me in teaching controversial issues in a diverse classroom.* In conclusion, selecting and teaching current events are major problems in teaching this subject in secondary schools.

Conclusions

The study explored social studies and life skills education teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching this subject at Melamchi municipality. Teachers' challenges in teaching social studies and life skills education are shaped by both internal factors, such as beliefs, confidence, skills, and self-efficacy, and external factors such as curriculum relevance, cultural diversity, and sociocultural conditions. As regards the challenges that teachers face while teaching social studies and life skills education, overloaded and outdated curriculum, teaching and learning resources, teacher capacity and training programs, lack of field-based and experiential learning, assessment and evaluation issues, societal and cultural barriers and school and administrative support, selecting and teaching current events and controversial issues were the major challenges identified from teachers' responses. The teacher's responses indicated that field-based and experiential learning should be integrated into the curriculum to enable students to acquire first-hand experience. There should be organized teacher training programs, workshops, and seminars to encourage the teachers. The curriculum should be revised according to the demands of a changing society and to reduce overloaded content and policy-level changes. The findings of this study have several implications for education policy,

curriculum development, teacher preparation, and classroom practice in the context of rural and semi-urban areas. This study provides insights into the teachers' perceptions of the challenges of teaching social studies and life skills education in secondary school, but the findings, therefore, are context-specific and exploratory in nature, offering localized insights rather than generalizable conclusions. Further research with a larger and more diverse sample is recommended to validate and expand upon these findings.

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