

Relevance of Social Studies Curriculum in the 21st Century: Exploring the Experiences of Secondary Level Learners

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore secondary school learners' experiences with the relevance of the social studies curriculum in Nepal in the 21st century. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed for the study. In this study, the semi-structured interview technique was used as a method of data collection. Four secondary-level social studies learners were interviewed. Data were analyzed by developing themes or categories from the raw data. The themes were divided into seven groups, and analysis was conducted through the interpretative method. The results showed that the study explored the secondary-level learners' perspectives on the relevance of the social studies curriculum in the 21st century. The findings indicate that learners perceive social studies as highly relevant in the 21st century because it fosters global citizenship, encourages civic participation, enhances cultural awareness, develops critical and creative thinking, promotes financial literacy and conflict resolution, and supports moral and ethical development among learners.

Keywords: Social studies, global citizenship, critical thinking, conflict resolution, secondary school

Introduction

Social Studies is an interdisciplinary teaching subject in schools that integrates concepts from different social sciences to prepare learners to work effectively in society. Social studies integrates the systematic study of the subject matter from geography, history, economics, civics, sociology, anthropology, and population, and appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. Social studies deals with human relationships and the way society works. Across the world, it has been included in the school curriculum. In secondary schools, social studies aim to develop responsible citizens by teaching the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for societal integration. Social studies is the

integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence, as stated by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS, 1994, p.3). Dhakal (2021), stated that social studies form that part of the school curriculum which includes subject matter and activities that enable the students to acquire an understanding of human relationships, a knowledge of the environment, principles, and values of society, and a commitment to participate in the process of changing society (p. 89).

Social studies is an integrated or interdisciplinary subject by the mode at which its contents are drawn from a certain number of subject disciplines (Babatunde, 2016, p. 2). According to Ezegebe (1994), social studies was therefore introduced as an integrated discipline to make education real to life. Social studies gives students a better understanding of the world and helps them make decisions that impact their lives and society. The general objective of social studies is to assist young people in crafting informed and well-thought choices for the public welfare as citizens of a multicultural, democratic community in a codependent society (NCSS, 1994, p.4). Social studies prepares students for the challenges of the 21st-century educational environment by fostering learning and innovation skills, life and career skills, and information, media, and technology skills. (Rogayan et al., 2021).

The main objective of this study is to explore grade 10 social studies learners' perceptions on the relevance of social studies in the 21st century in Nepal in terms of fostering global citizenship, encouraging civic participation, enhancing cultural awareness, developing critical thinking and creative thinking, promoting conflict resolution, promoting financial literacy, encourage moral and ethical development.

Methods and Materials

This study presents qualitative descriptive research exploring learners' experiences with the relevance of the social studies curriculum in the 21st century. The research population consisted of learners studying social studies at secondary schools in Tokha Municipality, Kathmandu. Four learners from grade 10 were selected based on purposive sampling. To identify the relevance of social studies in the 21st century, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide for data collection. After creating the semi-structured interview guide, the researchers obtained the school's approval to conduct the study. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' convenience in their school. The researcher established rapport with the learner participants by having a brief informal conversation before the formal interview. The learners' responses were transcribed and coded individually. The themes were categorized into seven

groups: fostering global citizenship, encouraging civic participation, enhancing cultural awareness, developing critical and creative thinking, promoting conflict resolution, fostering financial literacy, and encouraging moral and ethical development. The analysis was conducted through interpretative thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

Participants noted that social studies is relevant in the 21st century because it fosters global citizenship, encourages civic participation, enhances cultural awareness, develops critical and creative thinking, promotes conflict resolution and financial literacy, and encourages moral and ethical development among learners.

Fostering Global Citizenship

Social studies foster global citizenship. Global citizenship encourages learners to learn about cultural diversity, social justice, and global issues through global citizenship education. Learners learn to appreciate cultural diversity and recognize the significance of ethical decision-making in a globalized society (UNESCO, 2014) and this helps to understand their role in the world, preparing them to tackle problems like poverty, conflict, and environmental sustainability (Schattle, 2008).

Through the interview, the learners were positive about fostering global citizenship in the 21st century from the social studies curriculum. Global citizenship in the social studies curriculum is a practical framework for how we interact with others in the world and address global social issues [P1&P4]. Research indicates that this type of education prepares learners to behave as knowledgeable global citizens by fostering empathy, critical thinking, and social responsibility (Banks, 2008, p. 46).

Learning global citizenship in social studies, we express a sense of responsibility for addressing issues like climate change, human rights, and social inequality, recognizing that solutions require collective action across national boundaries [P2]. Learning global citizenship in social studies, we emphasize the importance of understanding global issues from multiple perspectives, which makes us become global citizens [P3]. Integrating global citizenship into the social studies curriculum equips learners with the tools to understand complex global issues and the responsibilities they have in contributing to the present and future. Hence, the social studies curriculum helps foster global citizenship for social studies learners.

Encouraging Civic Participation

The social studies curriculum encourages civic participation among learners. Learning social studies is essential for training learners to actively engage in civic life, as civic participation is a fundamental component of a democratic society. Promoting civic participation among social studies learners is crucial for creating responsible and knowledgeable citizens. By studying historical events, governmental structures, and societal issues, learners gain insight into how their activities might impact the world. Geboers et al. (2013) found that this instruction inspires them to engage in civic activities, fostering a sense of empowerment and accountability. Activities such as debates, simulations, and project work develop practical skills for participation in democratic processes.

In the interview, learners expressed their enthusiasm for promoting civic participation in the 21st century through the social studies curriculum. The study of social studies highlights the importance of civic participation in society. By exploring historical, civic, and economic concepts, we cultivate the skills of active participants in democratic processes, whether at the local or global level. Social studies inspire learners to see themselves as active contributors to society, equipping them with the knowledge, values, and skills needed for meaningful civic engagement. Social studies play a vital role in encouraging civic participation by shaping our understanding of our roles as active citizens. Through this course, learners acquire knowledge of governmental systems, social issues, and global historical movements. This awareness empowers them, motivating them to engage with their communities and society as a whole.

Enhancing Cultural Awareness

Social studies play an important role in enhancing cultural awareness by broadening learners' perceptions of diverse societies, traditions, cultures, values, and beliefs. Banks (2008) noted that through studying different cultures, learners gain insights into the values, beliefs, and practices that shape the world. This understanding fosters respect for diversity, preparing learners to engage in an increasingly interconnected global community. Activities like cultural simulations, local case studies, and collaborative community work enable them to analyze different perspectives from their own. Through studying geographical, historical, sociological, and cultural concepts, learners discover the depth and diversity of human experiences. They also learn to embrace diversity and identify commonalities.

The interview revealed that learners support enhancing cultural awareness within the social studies curriculum in the 21st century. Social studies is important since

it helps us better understand our national identity and how cultural variations impact contemporary global concerns and appreciating diversity is fostered by this understanding [P1]. Social studies contents enhance our attitude toward promoting the Nepalese-rich culture [P2 &P3]. Another participant [P4] also stated that this knowledge encourages them to respect diversity and understand how cultural differences influence current global issues. By fostering an appreciation of cultural richness, learners are better equipped to navigate and contribute positively to our multicultural society. This knowledge encourages them to respect diversity and understand how cultural differences influence contemporary global issues. By fostering an appreciation of cultural richness, learners are better equipped to navigate and contribute positively to a multicultural world. Social studies learners can understand how cultural exchanges have influenced cultures from ancient civilizations to contemporary globalization through learning social studies.

Developing Critical Thinking and Creative Thinking

Social Studies provides knowledge about critical thinking and creative thinking. Social studies is essential for helping learners improve their critical and creative thinking abilities because it pushes them to think critically, evaluate many viewpoints, and come up with original solutions to challenging problems. Through studying historical occurrences, social issues, and cross-cultural relationships, learners develop their ability to critically consider the reasons behind and effects of choices and behaviors (Paul & Elder, 2021).

The interview revealed that learners support developing critical thinking and creative thinking within the social studies curriculum in the 21st century. Social studies broadens our perspective and increases our critical thinking about the world. Social studies equips us to approach problems with curiosity, flexibility, and confidence through critical and creative thinking [P1&P4].

Critical thinking and creative thinking are fostered in us to evaluate primary and secondary sources, identify biases, draw connections between historical events and contemporary issues, imagine alternative solutions to societal challenges, and envision possibilities for the future [P2 & P3]. VanSledright (2013) has found that these activities nurture critical thinking by fostering skills such as problem-solving, logical reasoning, and ethical decision-making. Social studies prepares learners to navigate an increasingly complex world by integrating critical and creative thinking into the curriculum. These skills empower learners to contribute thoughtfully and innovatively to their communities and the global society.

Promoting Conflict Resolution

Social studies fosters conflict resolution because it gives learners the information and abilities they need to resolve conflicts positively. Historical concepts, civic

concepts, and socio-cultural studies classes teach learners about the origins of disputes in the past and today and how to resolve them peacefully and constructively. Social studies encourages learners to think about the underlying needs and interests of all parties engaged in a dispute, highlighting the need for diverse perspectives. These experiences build communication and listening skills while fostering a deeper understanding of fairness and justice (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Interview responses reflected learners' positive attitudes toward incorporating conflict resolution in the 21st-century social studies curriculum. Through debates, role-playing, and group discussions, the social studies course offers possibilities for experiential and hands-on learning. We may improve our communication, listening, and problem-solving skills in a nurturing setting with these kinds of exercises [P1, P2, P3 & P4]. This understanding foster empathy, collaboration, and problem-solving skills that are necessary for navigating interpersonal and societal challenges (Deutsch, 2006).

Promoting Financial Literacy

Social studies plays an important role in promoting financial literacy by helping learners understand economic concepts. Lessons on economic activities introduce learners to key financial principles and practices. Learners can get financial scenarios to promote practical skills that they may use in the real world, including evaluating case studies and debating financial problems. Social studies empower learners with the knowledge and skills to make financial decisions and contribute to financial stability, preparing them for financial independence and responsible citizenship in a complex economic world.

Through the interview, the learners were positive about promoting financial literacy in the 21st century in the social studies curriculum. Through studying economic concepts, government policies, and markets in social studies, we gain insights into how financial systems work and the impact of financial choices on our future [P1&P2]. Incorporating financial literacy into social studies equips us with the information and abilities necessary to make wise financial decisions, setting up for future financial independence and responsible citizenship in a complex global economy [P3&P4]. With this knowledge, learners can successfully negotiate the complexities of the modern financial landscape (Lusardi, 2019, p. 67).

Encouraging Moral and Ethical Development.

Social studies plays a vital role in encouraging moral and ethical development by helping learners critically examine social issues, historical injustices, etc. Social studies helps learners to analyze complicated societal issues, comprehend many points of view, and consider their own beliefs, all of which contribute to the

promotion of moral and ethical growth. Social studies empower learners to foster responsible citizenship and ethical decision-making.

Learners have diverse views on the role of social studies in encouraging moral and ethical development in the 21st century. We appreciate the way social studies exposes us to moral ethical development, and societal issues, fostering a feeling of fairness, compassion, and responsibility [P1]. Another participant [P2] also stated that in the study of geographic concepts, economic concepts, civic concepts, and historical concepts, we are encouraged to engage with moral and ethical development, the value of justice, and how our actions affect other people. We struggle to connect moral and ethical concepts to our experiences because we find them too academic or abstract [P3 & P4]. Through these lessons, learners are challenged to reflect on their values, understand the perspectives of others, and consider the ethical implications of their actions (Parker, 2006, p. 39).

Conclusions

The study explored the secondary level learners' perspectives on the relevancy of the social studies curriculum in the 21st century. The results show that social studies is a relevant subject in the 21st century because it fosters global citizenship and enhances cultural awareness among learners. Social studies is essential for encouraging civic participation because it helps learners understand their duties and responsibilities in a society and nation. Additionally, participants claimed that social studies develops critical and creative thinking, promoting conflict resolution and financial literacy knowledge and skills among the learners. The study also found that social studies develops moral and ethical development among the learners.

A series of capability-building activities may be crafted for the learners to build their positive perspective on the relevance of social studies in the 21st century. Workshops, forums, and outdoor activities that might extend their global perspective, stimulate their participation in community affairs, enhance their style of thinking, and foster cultural awareness may be highlighted in the aforementioned program.

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