

Integrating Local Culture into Social Studies Curriculum: A Thai Perspective

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Abstract

This paper explores the integration of local culture into the social studies curriculum from a Thai perspective. It emphasizes the importance of aligning educational content with the cultural realities of the environment to enhance students' identity, belonging, and critical thinking skills. The study addresses the limitations of traditional curricula, which often prioritize global or Western ideas over local traditions, and argues for a curriculum that reflects Thailand's diverse cultural background. By incorporating local customs, histories, and values, the social studies curriculum can become more relevant, engaging, and meaningful for students. This approach fosters not only academic success but also a deeper understanding of cultural identity and social responsibility. Furthermore, the paper highlights the benefits, challenges, and strategies for successfully integrating local culture into the curriculum, offering case studies of effective implementations in Thai schools. The study concludes by advocating for a balanced curriculum that promotes cultural awareness and social cohesion in Thailand.

Keywords: Local culture, Social studies curriculum, Thai education, Cultural integration, Identity formation

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is important for changing society, especially when it matches the cultural realities of its environment. In Thailand, the globalized world requires a reconsideration of

how education is done, particularly in the social studies area. By including local culture in education, teachers can help students feel a sense of belonging and build their identity, while also encouraging critical thinking skills. The usual method often focuses on Western ideas and overlooks the rich local traditions, customs, and history. This difference can lead to feelings of disconnection among students, reducing their interest and involvement. Thus, including local culture in the social studies curriculum not only aligns education with national identity but also gives students the skills to understand their complex society. By emphasizing this inclusion, the curriculum can become a true reflection of Thailand's varied cultural background, improving both academic and social results.

Understanding local culture in education needs recognizing the complex mix of social values, traditions, and historical stories that shape a community's identity. Local culture plays a role in the educational experiences students go through, influencing not just what is taught but also how teaching is done in ways that connect with their real lives. By adding local culture into social studies classes, teachers can create a sense of belonging and importance for students, which boosts their engagement and learning results. For instance, the Thai social studies curriculum seeks to develop citizens who are morally responsible and value their heritage, in contrast to educational systems that focus on global citizenship and critical thinking, like those in New York State (Nanthawong N, 2024). Research shows that educational policies that include and respect local cultures help reduce achievement gaps, especially for groups that are underrepresented (S Johnsen, 2021). Therefore, acknowledging and including local culture in educational systems is crucial for creating culturally relevant and fair learning environments.

Putting social studies in school programs is very important for helping students learn about different cultures. This subject helps students look into various cultures, past events, and social systems, which expands their view of the world. Learning about local culture, especially in a place like Thailand, helps students see the rich details of their own background and understand the complicated connections between different places. By looking at local customs, histories, and community interactions, students can grow their empathy and respect for differences in culture, which is needed in today's connected world. Therefore, social studies not only help students understand their own identity but also promote a sense of global citizenship that is crucial for encouraging tolerance and harmony in diverse communities. This educational method makes social studies a key part of developing well-informed, culturally aware individuals.

The Thai education system shows a lot of cultural diversity that mirrors the country's history and population. Different ethnic groups, like the Karen and other lesser-known communities, have led to unique educational setups, including those in refugee camps that meet specific cultural and language needs (Holba C, 2023). This localized method is important for keeping these communities' identities while also working towards larger educational aims. Additionally, the involvement of non-Thai teachers in the English Program suggests that there is a growing awareness of the various language backgrounds affecting teaching strategies and how information is presented. However, issues still exist, especially when it comes to blending local culture with standard curricula, which tend to be shaped by national rules (Sukkhatpavara M, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to develop an education system that balances local cultural stories with national goals to offer a more inclusive and representative education for all students in Thailand.

2. THE ROLE OF LOCAL CULTURE IN EDUCATION

Bringing local culture into education is very important for getting students interested and making the curriculum relevant. By including the traditions, histories, and practices of local communities in education, students can feel a stronger sense of identity and belonging. This way of learning not only makes it easier to understand but also increases appreciation for culture and critical thinking, as students are prompted to connect their personal experiences with the academic content. Additionally, acknowledging local culture as a key part of education helps create a more inclusive environment, allowing students from various backgrounds to share their views and stories, which enriches the learning experience for everyone. As shown in several studies, adding local culture to the curriculum improves academic success and social unity, highlighting the need for its inclusion in educational policies and practices.

Historical significance of local culture in Thai education

Adding local culture to Thai education helps keep historical importance alive and gives students a sense of identity. By including parts of local culture, like the traditional customs of Miang in northern Thailand, teachers can make social studies lessons more meaningful, turning history into something students can connect with. Research shows that learning focused on the community helps promote responsible environmental behavior, showing this method's effectiveness (Mangkhang C et al., 2020). Additionally, looking at the current situation and challenges in the curriculum at Rajabhat universities shows there is a strong need to move towards teaching methods that are relevant to local culture, meeting the needs and goals of students more effectively (Sukaram A, 2020). In the end, including local culture in educational systems not only improves the learning process but also is key to shaping a generation that appreciates its cultural background while addressing modern issues.

Benefits of integrating local culture into the curriculum

Using local culture in lessons not only gets students more involved but also helps them understand their identity and background better. When teachers add culturally important content, they make learning more relatable and meaningful for students, helping them link schoolwork to their own experiences. This approach can boost language skills and overall academic success, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, as shown in studies about non-Thai teachers in Thailand (Sukkhatpattava M, 2023). Moreover, including local culture can improve lesson plans, giving real-life examples that students connect with, which promotes critical thinking and participation. Additionally, looking at cultural views helps students value different perspectives and develop intercultural skills, which are important in a globalized world and increasingly needed in education (Hayeesama-ae S, 2023). Therefore, these advantages show why it is important to have curricula that include culture to support complete education and cultural understanding.

Challenges faced in incorporating local culture in social studies

Involving local culture in social studies teaching has many problems that teachers face to make learning effective and important. A big problem is that teachers often do not have enough resources and training, making them feel not ready to add local cultural views into their classes. A study from Guangxi Arts University showed that students felt a gap between what they knew about local culture and how much it was in their classes, with only 42.3% saying that teachers included cultural parts well in the lessons (Chen X et al., 2024). This shows a need for more training for teachers focused on multicultural education and teaching methods that connect students to their community's culture. Also, as shown in research on

multicultural awareness in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, problems in schools can make it hard to use inclusive practices (Sulaiman M et al., 2023). To solve these issues, a complete plan is needed that includes redesigning curricula, training teachers, and involving the community to strengthen the understanding of local culture in social studies.

3. CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION

Looking at case studies of successful integration shows how much localized content can boost student engagement and comprehension. A key example is from a creative program in a rural Thai village, where teachers added local history and cultural practices to the social studies curriculum. This method helped students connect more deeply with their heritage and improved their critical thinking skills as they explored modern social issues using their local surroundings. Furthermore, a study in urban Thai schools found that including local cultural stories in wider historical contexts greatly enhanced student performance on tests, as students felt more motivated to learn when their identities were recognized and valued. These results suggest that the effective use of local culture not only makes education better but also enables students to be more active in their communities.

Examples of schools effectively integrating local culture

Schools that combine local culture into their lessons are good examples of building community ties and improving student involvement. For example, knowing local traditions, stories, and values helps teachers create lessons that connect well with students' identities. This method not only builds cultural pride but also motivates students to engage in learning. When it comes to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), non-Thai teachers in English Programs have seen good results by adding local cultural stories to their instruction. Their experiences show how important it is to link language learning with the richness of Thai culture, demonstrating that culture can help with language learning and boost students' confidence (Sukkhapatvara M, 2023). Additionally, schools that create a combined approach for these cultural aspects often notice better teaching practices and improved student outcomes, reinforcing the need for a curriculum that is more aware of cultural issues (Hayeesama-ae S, 2023).

Analysis of curriculum frameworks that include local cultural elements

Curriculum frameworks that include local cultural aspects are very important in shaping student learning experiences and building community identity. Good integration of local culture can make students more engaged and the material more relevant in social studies, especially in Thai education, as demonstrated by successful teaching models. These frameworks focus on giving students important life skills while also encouraging respect for local customs and traditions. For example, using local cultural elements in labor education shows not only improvements in academics but also helps develop civic responsibility and a connection to community heritage (Chen X et al., 2024). Additionally, looking at local wisdom in character education highlights how a curriculum can address not just academic subjects but also promote moral values and teamwork among students, which is necessary in today's education environment (Putra P et al., 2019). Therefore, this analysis shows a strong need for curriculum developers to focus on these culturally significant elements.

Impact of local culture integration on student engagement and learning outcomes

Putting local culture into school programs has been shown to help students get more involved and improve their learning results. When students see their own culture in their

classes, they connect better with what they're learning, which boosts their interest and participation. For example, in a study of non-Thai English teachers in Thailand, using Content-Based Instruction (CBI) not only helps students learn the language but also builds their confidence, indicating that including relevant cultural content can aid in academic success (Sukkhapatvara M, 2023). Also, in Cambodian schools, the growing focus on student-centered teaching shows that adding local culture can help fix issues in teaching methods, leading to better engagement and understanding of the material (Sreypouv O, 2022). These practices underscore the strong effect of local culture on enhancing educational experiences and improving learning results.

4. STRATEGIES FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

A comprehensive way to develop curriculum needs to include various teaching methods that fit with local cultures. First, it is important to do thorough needs assessments to identify the cultural stories, values, and historical importance that should guide curriculum content. Involving teachers, local historians, and community members in these talks helps create ownership and relevance in the curriculum, making learning more relevant for students. Additionally, using project-based learning can provide hands-on experiences where students actively engage with their local culture through research projects or fieldwork. This approach improves critical thinking and teamwork skills and also deepens students' ties to their heritage. To make sure these methods are effective, ongoing evaluation and feedback systems should be put in place, enabling continual improvements and timely updates to the curriculum. Such a flexible framework helps create a richer and more culturally relevant educational experience for students, strengthening their cultural identity in the learning process.

Collaborative approaches involving local communities and educators

Making good ways to work together with local communities and teachers is important for mixing local culture into the social studies classes. By creating partnerships between schools and community people, teachers can use valuable local knowledge to make the classes more interesting and relevant for students. Working with local historians, craftspeople, and community leaders helps schools build diverse learning experiences that show the unique heritage and customs of the area. This teamwork not only improves the educational material but also helps students feel more connected to their identity and community. Moreover, when teachers involve community opinions in making the curriculum, they help build respect and understanding between schools and local people. In the end, these joint efforts allow students to think deeply about their cultural background and help create a space where both learning in school and engagement in the community can grow.

Development of culturally relevant teaching materials and resources

Using teaching materials that relate to students' cultures is very important for creating good learning environments that connect with their backgrounds. Culturally relevant resources not only attract learners but also support their identities and experiences in education. For example, the study on intercultural skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs shows that not having culturally rich content makes it hard for students to connect with what they are learning, which slows down their ability to develop the intercultural skills needed for global communication (THIEU et al., 2024). Furthermore, even though teachers see the value of adding these resources, obstacles like lack of training and rigid curriculum structures often get in the way. Non-Thai EFL teachers in Thailand have mentioned serious difficulties related to language issues and lack of resources when trying to use content-based instruction, showing

a clear need for culturally relevant materials that fit both teaching goals and students' language skills (Sukkhatpavara M, 2023). These points highlight the urgent need for a focused effort in creating teaching resources that genuinely represent local cultures, enhancing the educational experience.

Professional development for teachers on local culture integration

Making teachers better at their jobs is very important for adding local culture to social studies classes. Teachers need the right skills, knowledge, and tools to include local cultural parts well, which makes learning better. According to (Chen X et al., 2024), students really want local culture in their education, so teachers have to change how they teach to meet this need. Also, (Nanthawong N, 2024) points out that the Thai education system needs to adapt to use more modern teaching methods that support critical thinking and community involvement, which are important for creating educated citizens. By offering specific professional development that focuses on local culture and new teaching techniques, teachers can boost student interest and help them understand and value local culture more, making the learning experience better for everyone.

5. CONCLUSION

Putting local culture into the social studies curriculum is not just an improvement; it is an important move to build knowledgeable and culturally aware citizens. By connecting social studies to Thai culture, teachers can help students better understand historical stories and current social issues, making their learning more genuine. This method supports the cultural identities of students and gives them the critical thinking skills necessary to thrive in a diverse environment. Changing the curriculum requires teamwork among teachers, policymakers, and community members to create materials that showcase local customs and values. In the end, successfully bringing in local culture will help students interact with their heritage and see its importance in the larger global society, leading to a more inclusive education system that values respect, understanding, and appreciation of diversity (Nanthawong N, 2024).

Important findings have come to light about adding local culture into the Thai social studies curriculum. This culturally relevant teaching approach boosts student engagement and creates a stronger link to national identity. The results show that when local cultural aspects are included, students show better critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of their roles in society. This indicates that a school system aware of cultural differences can help with the disconnection students often feel from standard curriculum materials, leading to improved academic success and social responsibility. Additionally, these results have serious implications for policymakers; they need to focus on developing inclusive curriculums that reflect Thailand's diverse cultures. Such actions could help build a more united society by improving civic involvement and national unity, ultimately leading to a more culturally aware education system in Thai schools.

Future studies need to look at making good plans for adding local culture into social studies classes, especially in Thai schools. Focusing on the need for thorough guidelines and teaching materials can make these classes better, as seen in other education systems that need support structures (Hayeesama-ae S, 2023). Moreover, non-Thai EFL teachers share experiences that show possible problems in this integration, like language issues and the difficulties of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in mixed classrooms (Sukkhatpavara M, 2023). These observations indicate that upcoming research could focus on training programs for teachers, which would aim to boost cultural knowledge and teaching methods. In the end, looking into these factors will not only help improve curriculum design but also encourage

students to value local culture more, helping them understand and engage better in their learning.

Bringing local culture into Thailand's social studies classes can really change how students connect with their heritage. It helps them think critically and builds a sense of community. By adding things like traditional customs, stories, and local histories, teachers can make a curriculum that shows the varied experiences of students and helps them understand national identity better. This kind of teaching can inspire students to look into and value the social and cultural changes in their neighborhoods, boosting their civic knowledge and involvement. Also, teachers can tap into local resources, like community leaders or cultural objects, to provide hands-on learning experiences that are directly relevant to students' lives. In the end, linking local culture with social studies can help students feel pride and a sense of duty as young citizens, giving them the knowledge and skills they need to engage in a more connected world.

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