

Developing Critical Thinking Skills through Social Studies Education in Thai Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of social studies education in developing critical thinking skills in Thai classrooms. The study emphasizes the importance of encouraging students to analyze, question, and evaluate diverse perspectives on historical events and social issues. By incorporating inquiry-based learning, collaborative activities, and modern teaching methods, social studies can foster an environment that promotes critical thinking. Despite challenges such as traditional teaching practices and lack of resources, integrating critical thinking into the curriculum is crucial for preparing students for the complexities of the 21st-century world. The study also discusses the benefits of project-based learning, digital storytelling, and metacognitive strategies, which enhance students' analytical abilities and engagement in social studies. Recommendations for curriculum reforms and teacher training are provided to support the integration of critical thinking skills in Thai education.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Social studies, Thai education, Inquiry-based learning, Curriculum reform

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-changing world, teaching students to think critically is very important.

Social studies education, especially in Thai classrooms, plays a key role in developing these important skills. By looking at different viewpoints, historical backgrounds, and current issues, students learn to analyze information instead of just accepting it without questioning. This subject helps them to challenge social norms, assess evidence, and make well-informed decisions, so they are ready to engage in a democratic society. Additionally, as Thailand finds its place in Southeast Asia, social studies teachers can use local stories that connect with students, making learning more relevant and meaningful. In the end, adding critical thinking to social studies lessons not only boosts academic success but also fosters informed, responsible citizens who can tackle various problems in their communities and beyond.

Good critical thinking skills mean being able to look at, judge, and combine information in a way that helps make smart choices and solve problems. In Social Studies classes, these skills are very important for students to connect with the subject matter and use what they learn in real-life situations. When teachers promote learning through questions, they can encourage critical thinking, leading students to challenge common stories and think about different viewpoints. This agrees with the results of (Fuhrman-Petersen et al., 2013), which show that questioning and looking critically at things are key to getting students involved and helping them learn languages in a bilingual environment. Additionally, as students deal with complicated social and cultural issues, they gain a better understanding of who they are and their roles in society. Therefore, building these skills in Social Studies not only helps students face academic hurdles but also gives them the abilities they need to be active and informed members of society.

A focus on social studies education is very important for building critical thinking skills, especially in Thai classrooms. This subject includes historical events and encourages involvement with current social issues, which helps students deal with a complex world. As educational changes increasingly aim for a shift away from old behaviorist methods, adding metacognitive strategies to social studies can greatly improve students' learning experiences (Coleman et al., 2016). By prompting students to think about their thinking and discuss different viewpoints, social studies becomes a useful tool for creating well-informed and critical citizens. Additionally, understanding academic practices in this area shows how crucial it is to recognize the institutional expectations that influence how knowledge is developed and shared, making social studies an important part of connecting academic needs with student involvement (Kettle et al., 2011). This educational approach ultimately prepares a generation of students to thoughtfully engage in society.

The education system in Thailand has many problems, especially in teaching students how to think critically. Recent studies show that a concerning number of Thai Mathayom Suksa 3 students do not meet basic skill levels, with about 20% not passing tests. This highlights the critical need for changes in teaching methods, especially because traditional rote learning often limits thoughtful participation. Additionally, creating collaborative networks, like the Collaborative Network Management Model (CNMM), appears to help improve the learning environment in secondary education by allowing teachers to share knowledge and manage their work better (cite6). Improving these networks and using new teaching tools, like Case Study Online (CSOL), can help make classrooms more engaging and focused on active learning. Tackling these problems as a whole could result in better educational results and prepare Thai students more effectively for the challenges of today's world.

A strong way to put critical thinking in social studies education helps students improve their analytical skills and be ready to handle the difficulties of today's world. Different ideas about intercultural understanding can work well with critical thinking, creating a space where students can learn to look at various viewpoints carefully, which deepens their grasp of global

issues (Ambele et al., 2023). Also, using modern teaching methods like flipped classrooms and inquiry-based learning has shown significant benefits for analytical thinking skills, as shown by positive results in Thai classrooms (Kantathanawat et al., 2022). When teachers involve students in activities that encourage questions and discussions, they can build a classroom environment that supports careful thinking about the material. In the end, an education focused on critical thinking equips students to not only achieve academic success but also face real-life problems with assurance and understanding, thus meeting the needs of a 21st-century job market.

II. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING

In education, especially in Thai classrooms, social studies is an important way to help students build critical thinking skills. Unlike traditional memorization methods, social studies encourages students to look at different viewpoints, examine historical events, and think about the social and political aspects of their environment. This method supports the findings in (Kettle et al., 2011), which highlight the need for practical experiences that are socially relevant in schools. Additionally, social studies helps students understand citizenship better, prompting them to think carefully about their roles in society. By discussing current issues, teachers can use ideas from (Chanthala et al., 2017) to motivate students to think creatively while also gaining factual knowledge. In the end, using critical thinking skills in social studies not only improves school performance but also helps students actively participate in their communities.

Looking at the social studies curriculum in Thailand shows both problems and chances to help students think critically. The Thai education system usually focuses on memorizing facts and uses old teaching methods, which often does not support analytical thinking or deeper involvement with complicated social topics. This comes from a strong preference for traditional ways, even though the Ministry of Education suggests using cooperative learning methods to create better learning experiences (Lynch et al., 2017). Also, using new teaching techniques, like Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) and digital storytelling, appears to help boost students' critical thinking skills. For example, a study on the LIFD ATS instruction model found that students' analytical thinking improved a lot when they participated in interactive learning settings (Kantathanawat et al., 2022). Therefore, looking again at the current social studies curriculum and bringing in new teaching methods could better prepare Thai students with the crucial skills they need for a fast-changing world.

Social studies education is important as it links what students learn in class to important real-life problems, helping them think critically. By looking at current social issues, students build skills they need for good citizenship. For example, combining STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) with social studies helps improve grades and develops students' abilities to have democratic conversations, like those of Thai first-grade students who excelled in a bilingual, inquiry-focused program (Fuhrman-Petersen et al., 2013). This teaching style encourages students to challenge rules and think about their world in a deeper way, showing that social studies is not just a class but a way to understand complicated social issues. In addition, using models like the PPICE framework in learning environments shows how organized problem-solving can help students address real-world problems using the analytical skills they gain from social studies (Moto et al., 2022). Therefore, the link between social studies and real-life situations better prepares students to engage with and shape the world around them.

To improve critical thinking skills in Thai classrooms, using inquiry-based learning strategies is very important. This method changes old learning styles by focusing on students exploring and solving problems on their own. For example, global K-12 partnerships let students work with peers from around the world, using the engineering design process to tackle real-world issues. These joint projects not only increase students' engineering skills but also help build important 21st-century abilities, like critical thinking and communication (Hite et al., 2019). In addition, using inquiry-based techniques in the classroom, especially through digital storytelling and flipped learning, creates an environment where students actively participate. Research on Thai students shows that these approaches effectively improve analytical thinking skills, leading to better grades and innovation (Kantathanawat et al., 2022). In the end, using inquiry-based methods can lead to a more engaging learning experience, equipping students to be skilled problem-solvers in a complex world.

Teaching critical thinking skills in social studies needs to focus on different viewpoints and understanding cultures. This approach not only makes students' learning better but also prepares them for a world that is more connected. Exposure to various perspectives helps create a space where students can question what they assume and gain a deeper insight into being global citizens, which, as recent studies show, goes beyond just identifying with one nation (Thanosawan et al., 2012). In Thailand's classrooms, adding stories from various cultures into lessons can clarify the complicated nature of global issues and help students feel empathy. For example, by looking at how international students react to academic practice in diverse educational settings, teachers can see how different viewpoints affect learning methods and results (Kettle et al., 2011). This all-encompassing method is necessary to raise a generation that values cultural differences and actively contributes to the global community.

III. TEACHING METHODS THAT PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING

Good teaching methods that help with critical thinking are very important for building students' analytical skills, especially in social studies classes in Thailand. One main method is using metacognitive strategies, which make students think about how they think, leading to better understanding and ongoing learning (Coleman et al., 2016). By using methods like inquiry-based learning (IBL) and digital storytelling, teachers can make engaging classroom settings that push students to think critically about material, question beliefs, and connect past events to current issues. Studies indicate that these techniques not only boost students' analytical skills but also enhance their academic success and creativity (Kantathanawat et al., 2022). Thus, using a variety of teaching methods in social studies can help Thai students think more critically, preparing them for the challenges of today's workforce.

Using project-based learning (PBL) in social studies helps students be more engaged and develop important critical thinking skills. This teaching method gets students to work on real-life problems, which improves their analysis as they look into historical events and current issues. According to the LIFD ATS instruction model, combining PBL with digital storytelling has noticeably enhanced students' analytical thinking skills and their learning success (Kantathanawat et al., 2022). Also, the PPICE learning model includes major steps like problem investigation and research, making sure students take an active role in their learning experience (Moto et al., 2022). This practical, team-based approach not only makes learning feel more important but also gives students a sense of responsibility and ownership as they deal with complicated social topics. In the end, using PBL in social studies helps students gain the skills they need to think critically about the world, preparing them for active citizenship in a more complicated society.

Doing collaborative learning activities is really important for helping students think

critically, especially in subjects like social studies. When students work in groups, they get different viewpoints and can look closely at complex problems together, which helps them understand better. This method is similar to teaching styles used in other countries where practice is key to school success. For example, (Kettle et al., 2011) shows that academic practice focuses on actions connected to social contexts that make students engage more with their learning surroundings. Additionally, global teamwork benefits, as mentioned in (Hite et al., 2019), show that working across different disciplines helps students develop 21st-century skills, which boosts their ability to think critically and solve problems. Thus, by carefully adding collaborative activities in Thai social studies classrooms, teachers can greatly enhance students' critical thinking skills, providing them with important skills for their academic and career futures.

Looking at how technology and digital resources fit into Thai classrooms shows it helps important thinking skills. The Thai Ministry of Education has stressed the need for good online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic, making the use of digital tools a must. Methods like the online active learning model based on Multiple Intelligence Theory have shown clear improvements in students' thinking skills, as noted in the PPICE model assessment which got a high effectiveness rating from experts (Moto et al., 2022). Additionally, studies on the flipped classroom method paired with digital storytelling show that this mix boosts students' ATS and improves learning results overall. The good outcomes from these new teaching methods confirm that technology not only involves students but also builds the key thinking skills needed to succeed in the 21st century (Kantathanawat et al., 2022).

Good assessment methods are very important for checking critical thinking skills in social studies education. One way is to use group activities; research shows this improves critical thinking results in students. For example, when students work together, they gain a better understanding of the topic and improve their skills in analyzing, evaluating, and combining information. In a research project with 32 students, those in groups scored the best in content and analysis compared to those working alone or in pairs (Kaweera et al., 2021). Furthermore, using technology like corpus analysis tools to look at collocation in academic writing can be a new way to assess students. This method helps students think critically about language and content, which boosts their analytical skills (Yu et al., 2018). In summary, using different assessment methods is essential for effectively assessing and developing critical thinking in Thai classrooms.

IV. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING CRITICAL THINKING IN THAI CLASSROOMS

In Thai classrooms, many problems stop good use of critical thinking skills, especially in social studies. The old focus on memorizing facts makes it hard for students to ask questions, which is important for thinking analytically. Also, teachers often do not have the training needed to lead discussions on critical topics. Many teachers lack the teaching methods that support group work and reflective learning, which are necessary to help students think better. The research shows that adding 21st-century skills, like teamwork and problem-solving, to lessons is still hard. For example, (Hite et al., 2019) points out that teamwork is vital for building these skills, but many Thai teachers find it hard to set up interactive classrooms. Thus, fixing these ongoing problems is important for helping Thai students think critically and get more out of their education.

Curriculum updates often face a lot of pushback from teachers, mainly because of established teaching habits and worries about new methods. Many educators, especially in

regions like Thailand, feel uneasy about moving towards student-focused learning—this type of learning is meant to improve critical thinking skills that are important for engaging with social studies material. According to (Jivaketu et al., 2016), even with many government-funded training sessions aimed at helping this change, teachers tend to go back to traditional, teacher-led methods, which stops real educational change from happening. Moreover, addressing each teacher's biases and cultural background—as discussed in (Pereira et al., 2020)—makes it even harder to put new curricula into action. If we don't tackle these root problems, including lack of support and insufficient professional development, initiatives meant to promote critical thinking in innovative social studies methods could fail, keeping a cycle of resistance alive that blocks both teacher progress and student learning.

The success of social studies education in building critical thinking skills largely depends on the resources and training available for teachers. In several developing countries, such as Thailand, many teachers do not have access to adequate in-service training or professional development opportunities, which limits their ability to encourage critical thinking among their students. As mentioned in (Di-Ibor et al.), the level of classroom supervision greatly influences the quality of instruction and student performance. This highlights the need for strong leadership and support systems in schools, which are frequently insufficient due to a lack of resources. Additionally, the entrenched behaviorist educational models pointed out in (Coleman et al., 2016) make it harder to change teaching methods, as they constrain teachers' ability to promote metacognitive strategies necessary for critical thinking. Without a focused effort to enhance teacher training and supply needed resources, the capacity of social studies education to develop essential critical thinking skills may not be fully realized.

When looking at cultural views on education and authority in Thai classrooms, it is important to see how traditional education systems that focus on conformity and passivity affect students. These deep-rooted beliefs often hinder critical thinking and make students less likely to question authority, which limits their development of independent thinking abilities. As (Stone et al., 2017) indicates, the absence of an interactive, student-focused method in classrooms plays a major role in students' low motivation and interest in learning English. Additionally, the pushback against new teaching methods stems from a wider cultural background that values respect for authority figures and following traditional norms. This presents challenges for educators aiming to introduce new practices since they must balance cultural expectations with the need to create spaces that encourage critical thinking. Therefore, a thorough reassessment of these cultural views is essential for making educational improvements in Thailand.

The big focus on standardized tests in schools often makes learning just about memorizing facts and basic skills, which hurts students' critical thinking growth. In Vietnam, for example, teachers know it's good to encourage critical thinking but feel the need to focus on getting students ready for tests instead of trying new teaching styles (Ngoc Du et al., 2015). This difference makes it hard for students to build the important skills they need to truly engage with what they are learning. In Thailand, many teachers do not fully understand student-centered teaching methods because they are too committed to exam-based assessment, causing traditional teaching methods to stay common even when there are better practices that promote active thinking (Namwong et al., 2020). This focus on standardized testing makes it harder to build a more thoughtful and analytical student group, keeping a cycle going that does not adequately prepare students for a complicated and changing world.

V. CONCLUSION

In the end, adding critical thinking skills to social studies education is not just about improving grades; it is essential for adapting to the complicated nature of our global world. The changing international labor market, especially in developing nations like Thailand, shows that education should go beyond simple memorization and help students develop analytical skills for a changing future. The move towards a cognitive international division of labor emphasizes the need for knowledge and critical involvement in a more connected economy (Bruno Jetin). Additionally, promoting academic practices that encourage personal initiative and learning within a social context can have a significant positive effect on international students as they face their academic challenges (Kettle et al., 2011). Thus, teaching critical thinking in Thai classrooms is crucial for providing students with the necessary skills to succeed in a rapidly changing and complex world.

A main part of the talk focuses on how important teaching methods are for improving critical thinking skills in Thai classrooms, especially in social studies. It is important to move away from traditional teaching to more student-centered styles. This change is supported by findings showing that teachers do not agree on how to use these new methods, and they often do not work well in real life (Namwong et al., 2020). Also, there is a strong need to change teaching strategies to enhance analytical thinking skills that match today's educational goals. Looking into new teaching methods like the flipped classroom along with digital storytelling and inquiry-based learning highlights this necessity. Studies show that these methods can greatly improve students' analytical thinking and academic performance, making it clear that teaching approaches must change to fit the needs of 21st-century education (Kantathanawat et al., 2022). Therefore, using these methods is crucial to developing critical thinking in Thai students.

Teaching critical thinking skills, especially in social studies, has important benefits for students in the long run. When students look at different viewpoints and tricky social topics, they learn to think about information carefully, which helps them make better choices. This skill is very important in today's fast-changing world, where being able to analyze and understand data is crucial for doing well in school and jobs. The experiences of Thai women who gained from development scholarships, discussed in (Scheyvens et al., 2012), show how critical thinking helps increase emotional independence and cultural awareness, allowing them to succeed in diverse settings. Additionally, the link between online learning and critical thinking, as noted in (Ann My Thai et al., 2009), shows that hands-on learning can boost engagement and help students remember information better, leading to better academic results. Therefore, teaching these skills in schools not only gets students ready for current learning challenges but also helps them adapt and succeed in the future.

The education field is changing fast, and it is very important for teachers and decision-makers to use new methods that help students think critically. In Thai classrooms, especially in social studies, using technology well can really boost critical thinking. Instead of just sharing information, teachers should get students involved in activities that encourage them to explore and assess information (Sathaphon Rungsawang, 2023). Also, adding global citizenship ideas to the curriculum can make learning more valuable. Teachers point out that qualities like cultural awareness and social responsibility are key to shaping student views (Supitsara Sornsansuk, 2023). Thus, both educators and policymakers need to work together to emphasize the training and resources necessary to develop these skills. This way, Thai students will become not only information users but also critical thinkers ready for a complex world.

Focusing on inquiry-based learning in social studies education can greatly improve critical thinking skills for Thai students. By creating a space where students can ask questions,

look at sources, and talk about past and present issues, teachers can help them gain a better understanding and empathy. Changes in the curriculum should emphasize real-life applications and connect students with their communities, providing them with the tools to be well-informed citizens. Also, using technology and group projects can make learning more interesting and relevant, making sure that students not just gain knowledge but also use it in different situations. In the end, the goal for social studies education in Thailand should aim at building responsible individuals who can handle a complicated world, able to evaluate and help society. This method will not only improve the learning experience but also get students ready for active roles in a democratic society.

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