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## RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE 21ST-CENTURY SOCIETY: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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### **Abstract**

*Social Studies is a key tool in this changing world. It serves as the foundation of social development across the country and acts as an agent of change that transforms an individual into an effective citizen of the nation. Moreover, the Philippine K to 12 curriculum accentuates the role of social studies in developing the learners' literacy and effective engagement as a citizen of the country. This study aims to elicit the junior high school students' perspectives on the significance of social studies in 21st-century society. It involved 25 Grade 7 students enrolled in a public secondary school in Zambales, Philippines. This study used a qualitative descriptive design with a semi-structured interview guide as the primary gathering tool. Five major themes emerged from the categorized statements of the participants. Social studies is still relevant today as it encourages community participation, enhances critical and creative thinking, fosters cultural sensitivity, broadens global perspective, and promotes values formation. Moreover, participants claimed that social studies promotes cultural heritage, fosters economic efficiency, serves as a source of meaningful information, and brings people back to the past. The study recommends that teachers should enhance their technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) in Social Studies to keep abreast with the demands of 21st-century society. Further, teachers are encouraged to make the teaching of Social Studies contextualized, indigenized and localized to make it responsive and relevant in the current setting.*

**Keywords:** *21st-Century Society, Social Studies, Students' Perspectives, Qualitative Research, Zambales, Philippines*

## INTRODUCTION

Social Studies is a discipline in which it deals with the human relationship and the way society works. It has a wider scope in different sub-disciplines in which many teachers struggle with the lack of student's interest in the content. This lack of interest translates into a lack of motivation to learn and so students seem uninterested and perceive it as a boring subject. Additionally, the changing educational landscapes and the Education 4.0 add up to the challenges faced by the present social studies curriculum (Rogayan & Villanueva, 2019).

The recent socio-political and economic transformations in the world and within countries have brought about changes in educational thrusts and greater challenges for social studies (Egharevba & Iyamu, 2020). Students are being equipped with the 21st-century skills such as life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills to brace the challenges of the landscapes in education. Through social studies, learners acquire civic competence and understanding of the world they live in and facilitate them to become productive and responsible citizens of the country. It also allows the students to be more conscious and aware of the community issues and problems and engages them to take the right action towards a better and more inclusive society.

Previous researches have mainly focused on the cultivation of 21-st century skills in social studies (Farisi, 2016; Sugiyanto et al., 2018), internationalizing social studies education (Boonying, & Chatruprachewin, 2017; White 2018), 21-st century teaching strategies in social studies (Egharevba, & Iyamu, 2020), and learning in the 21-st century environment (Sunarno et al., 2020; Wahyuningtyas, 2019). However, very little scholarly attention has been given to the relevance of social studies in the 21st-century.

Hence, the researchers are interested to know the students' point of view on the relevance of Social Studies in 21st-century society. It is interesting to document how students see social studies and its role in social transformation and societal development. Hence, this study aimed to elicit the students' perspectives on the relevance of social studies in the 21st-century learning landscape.

## METHOD

### 1. Research Design

This study is qualitative descriptive research. The study is designed to reveal a target audience's range of behavior and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues. It uses in-depth studies of small groups of people to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The results of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive. A qualitative descriptive approach does not necessitate the investigator to move as far from the information and does not necessitate a highly abstract interpretation of data compared with other qualitative approaches (Lambert & Lambert, 2012) but does result in some explanation (Bradshaw et al., 2017). The results from these investigations can often be of utmost significance to practitioners and policymakers (Sandelowski, 2000). The present revealed vital contributions of Social Studies in 21st-century society.

### 2. Participants and Sampling

The study involved a total of 25 Grade VII students purposively selected from a state-owned secondary school in Zambales, Philippines. Seven (7) of the participants are females, while 18 are males. The study was conducted from November 2016 to February 2017. The study used the

purposive sampling technique, a non-probability sampling method, and it occurs when the judgment of the researcher chooses elements selected for the sample. Purposive sampling method may prove effective when only limited numbers of people can serve as primary data sources due to the nature of research designs and its aims and objectives. Mainly, this research was a heterogeneous or maximum variation sampling as a category of purposive sampling technique.

### 3. Research Instruments

To identify the current relevance of Social Studies in the 21st century society, the researchers devised a semi-structured interview guide that does not require any further validation. The researchers asked the key question: is Social Studies still relevant in 21st-century society.

### 4. Data Gathering Procedure

After constructing a semi-structured interview guide, the researchers sought the school's approval through its principal. The researchers also sought parental consent and participant's assent prior to data collection as part of the ethics protocol. The conduct of the interview took place at the participants' most convenient time in the school. Before the interview ended, clarifications were made by the researchers in some statements which are unclear and need further elaboration. The responses of the participants were translated from Filipino to English for better analysis and interpretation. An interview lasted five to 10 minutes per participant.

### 5. Data Analysis

The responses of the students from the open-ended questionnaire were individually encoded. In terms of analyzing the data, the responses were subjected to thematic analysis to cull out the underlying themes and code the significant statements, and the resulting significant statements were clustered into underlying themes (Rogayan, 2018). A phenomenological reduction was used for the extended text through a repertory grid. This is to enable the researchers to observe both the cool and warm analyses of the information collected from the participants. The cool analysis part consisted of the participants' significant points or statements. These statements were the basis in the conduct of the warm analysis stage wherein the categorization of data were formulated and that the themes were evolved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2013) mentioned that the validation in a qualitative investigation is an effort to gauge the truthfulness of the discoveries, as best defined by the investigator and the subjects. Hence, in this study, an informant feedback was made to ensure the trustworthiness of the collected data.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Social Studies students' perspectives on the relevance of Social Studies in the 21st-century society are presented in the text table.

The students reported various perspectives on the relevance of Social studies in the 21st century. Five major themes emerged from the categorized statements of the participants. They cited that Social studies is still relevant today as it provides knowledge, promotes values formation, fosters cultural sensitivity, encourages community participation, and broadens global perspective.

**Table 1***Perspective of Social Studies Students on the Relevance of Social Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Society*

<b>Emerging Theme</b>	<b>Categorized Significant Statement</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Encourages community participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important because it encourages us to take part in social issues and contribute to the solution of different societal problems [P22, Male].</li> <li>• It gives us a sense of community as it teaches us the principles of civic engagement [P25, Female].</li> <li>• Provide opportunities on how can we help the community in our own little ways [P1, Male].</li> </ul>	22
Enhances critical and creative thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social studies molds the minds of the youth based from the lessons we learned from it. In this subject, we learned how our ancestors fought against the oppressors and gave us insights on how we live and act in the present [P23, Female].</li> <li>• It is important because it broadens our way of thinking and makes us more critical about what is happening around [P16, Female].</li> </ul>	20
Fosters cultural sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social studies is still very relevant in today's society as it provides us better understanding of our own identity as a nation and other nations' identities [P17, Female].</li> <li>• It gives us a better understanding of our rich cultural heritage, traditions, and belief systems despite the technological advancement [P13, male].</li> </ul>	18
Broadens global perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It provides awareness on the different events that are happening not only in the country but also in the different parts of the world [P20, male].</li> <li>• It helps me understand how different countries support each other and how different global movements work [P10, Male].</li> </ul>	16
Promotes values formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social studies is still relevant today because we learn to appreciate our value system as Filipinos and apply them in our lives [P5, Female].</li> </ul>	13

- It teaches us to be more responsible member of the society [P24, Male].
- It helps us remember the different values that are important for us to grow and develop as one community [P14, Male].

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\*P-Participant

### 1. Encourages community participation

Social Studies promotes civic competence. It encourages students to take part in social issues and discussions. It serves as a catalyst to enable students to initiate actions for community-centered development. One male participant shared that, social studies is “important because it encourages us to take part in social issues and contribute to the solution of different societal problems (P22).” It accentuates the people's role in solving societal problems and issues towards building a more humane, inclusive and just community. Another participant stated that social studies is still relevant in the 21st-century because it “gives us a sense of community as it teaches us the principles of civic engagement (P25, Female).” This connotes how the subject teaches the students the rudiments of civic engagement and societal participation.

Several studies affirm that social studies has a significant impact in developing students' community participation or civic engagement (Kenna, & Hensley, 2019; Maguth, & Koskey, 2019; Matto et al., 201; Stefaniak et al., 2017). High social studies environment have the power to increase the negative reality by vigorously promoting civic-mindedness regarding political engagement in students before students enter the real-world (Parker & Lo, 2016).

Furthermore, Dewey as cited in Kenna & Hensley (2019) stated that the core objective of social studies is to prepare the young people with the necessary foundational and skills essential to address and deliberate community issues confronted by the society and encourage political participation and societal engagement, and this objective remains relevant for today's Generation Z.

### 2. Enhances critical and creative thinking

Social Studies provides knowledge about the current and past events in which students reflect on and think critically and creatively. The past events being discussed in social studies subject are connected to the present situation of the country. Hence, social Studies helps in molding the 21st-century learners to be critical and creative thinkers.

“Social studies molds the minds of the youth based from the lessons we learned from it. In this subject, we learned how our ancestors fought against the oppressors, and that gives us insights on the way we live and act in the present (P23).” This statement from a female participant mirrors how social studies influence her to think beyond borders and to reflect critically on how the past circumstances can shape the present and the future. Social studies, therefore, is a good avenue to cultivate one's sense of thinking that can transcend beyond limitations.

Yilmaz-Ozcan, and Tabak (2019) mentioned that having certain high-level thinking skills such as critical thinking, deliberation skills, judgment making, and systematic thinking are necessary for people to formulate solutions to the societal upheavals that they encounter at present. Previous researches also revealed that learners who have higher levels of self-efficacy in social studies subject could be assumed to have a higher critical thinking skills (Lee et al., 2016; Meral, & Tas, 2017).

### 3. Fosters cultural sensitivity

Social Studies promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity in the 21st-century milieu. Through the subject, the students get to know more about their own culture and the culture of other races, thus contributing to their awareness and holistic development. Schools should also make sure that learners are given the best avenue for their holistic development (Rogayan, 2019).

Students are being exposed to become stewards of cultural heritage. Social studies also enhances the learners' attitude towards promoting the Philippines' rich culture as they become proud Filipinos. As mentioned by one participant, social studies "gives us better understanding of our rich cultural heritage, traditions, and belief systems despite the technological advancement that is happening (P13, Male)." This suggests that amid the 21-st century environment, social studies is still relevant in fostering awareness among people on the different cultural traditions and belief systems.

The idea of cultural sensitivity necessitates making sense of culture (Volckmar-Eeg, 2020). Cultural sensitivity fosters consciousness of personal cultural philosophies and practices and sharing open-minded and respectful interactions with people of other cultures (Anonson, 2014). Hence, social studies is essential in fostering cultural awareness, socio-cultural belief systems, and cultural heritage.

### 4. Broadens global perspective

The relevance of social studies in the 21st-century is that it contributes in the broadening of one's global perspective. Since, the social studies subject does not only focus in the Philippines but also in other neighboring countries, it gives the impressions to the learners that they need to think globally not just locally. This is manifested in the different topics in the subject that includes Asian studies, world history, economics and the current trends and issues in the contemporary world. Therefore, social studies is an essential element in developing learners who are globally ready and globally conscious. A male participant shared, "social studies provides awareness on the different events that are happening not only in the country but also in the different parts of the world (P20)." This implies that through social studies, people are becoming more aware of the global issues and trends and influence them to take action and take part in the different global movements. In this way, the people uphold the traits of being global citizens.

Previous studies revealed that global citizenship can be developed in social studies through various pedagogical strategies such as critical media literacy (Harshman, 2018), videoconferencing (Krutka, & Carano, 2016), and critical knowledge (Myers, & Rivero, 2020). Moreover, due to the nature of the progressively different and universal 21st-century society in which the students live, it is pivotal to enhance and develop students' global citizenship capabilities (Homes, 2019).

### 5. Promotes values formation

Social Studies likewise promotes values formation in 21st-century society. Learners can learn the past lessons and process these values towards contributing to the nation's greatness. As claimed by one participant, "social studies is still relevant today because we learn to appreciate our value system as Filipinos and apply these values in our lives (P5, Female)." This implies how critical social studies in cultivating the Filipino values such as malasakit (empathy, sympathy, compassion), utang na loob (norm of reciprocity), lakas ng loob (courage), pakikisalamuha (act of mixing), and pakikisama (being united with the group), among others.

Another participant (P24, male) also stated that social studies teaches people to be more responsible member of the society. This bespeaks of the role of social studies to develop

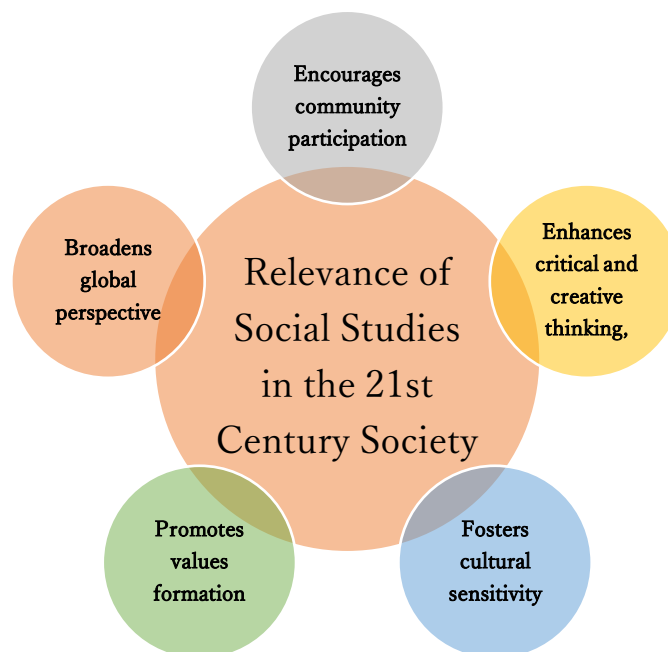
responsible, law-abiding and community-oriented individuals.

Norms, values, and behaviors are changing in a given society (Valeeva et al., 2016). With social studies, these values could be preserved and further embodied by the people despite the changing times brought about by new industrial era and age of digitalization.

In summary, the social studies subject is very relevant in the 21st-century landscape as reflected in the students' perspectives. Based on the study results, the researchers crystallized a conceptual framework that shows the relevance of social studies in 21st-century society.

Figure 1 shows the extracted themes from the interview transcripts on the relevance of social studies in the 21st-century society. Social studies encourages community participation, enhances critical and creative thinking, fosters cultural sensitivity, promotes values formation, and broadens global perspective. It can be deduced that the relevance of social studies in the current era is undeniably present.

Several studies conform to the results of this qualitative inquiry. Nwankwo (2016) studied the role of social studies as antidote against corrupt practices in the 21st-century. Unimna & Ameh (2018) reiterated that the knowledge of Social Studies promotes economic development and national progress to brace the 21st-century challenges. Social studies is relevant to the society because it helps students learn about societal values and different cultures (Kudawe et al., 2020) and contributes to developing a good societal value system (Eduviere, 2018).



**Fig 1.** *Relevance Social Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Society*

The crystallized conceptual framework may inform the curriculum developers and education policymakers on the relevance of social studies in 21st-century society.

## CONCLUSION

The study explored the students' perspectives on the relevance of social studies subject in the 21st-century milieu. Based on the findings, social studies remains a relevant discipline in the 21st-century society as it encourages community participation, enhances critical and creative

thinking, fosters cultural sensitivity, broadens global perspective, and promotes values formation. Moreover, participants claimed that social studies promotes cultural heritage, fosters economic efficiency, serves as a source of meaningful information and brings people back to the past. The study also revealed positive contributions of the subject to societal development, cultural preservation, values regeneration and civic participation.

The study has important implications to policy and pedagogy. First, the study recommends that teachers should enhance their technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) in Social Studies to keep abreast with the demands of 21st-century society. Second, teachers are encouraged to make the teaching of Social Studies contextualized, indigenized and localized to make it responsive and relevant in the current setting. Third, social studies students may be given authentic learning experience in the social studies classrooms to be equipped with the foundational knowledge and technical know-how in the 21st-century workplace.

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