



## Visiting the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum in Perilous Times

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**Abstract.** *In such perilous times and unabated marginalization, it is pivotal to pay a visit to the secondary social studies curriculum. This article will decipher the status of the implementation and academic location of secondary social studies in the emergency curriculum (MELCs). This study adopted the multiple case study design, where several units of analysis had been examined to elucidate raw data from each unit. Data collection in this study includes: Focus Group Discussion and literature studies, The results of the analysis of data will be presented in the form of themes accompanied by theories and literature studies. Through a careful examination of the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), developed self-learning modules (SLM), and field notes collected from the curriculum gatekeepers (secondary social studies teachers), the researcher was able to generate exhaustive and perplexing findings in remote teaching-learning of social studies.*

**Keywords:** *Secondary social studies curriculum, Social studies education, Emergency curriculum*

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### A. INTRODUCTION

The Philippine educational system is undeniably heavily influenced by the American democratic system of education. As part of their benevolent mission, the Americans helped the development of equitable formal education (Casambre, 1982). As such, the curriculum framework and instruction were copiously designed on the existing curriculum of the United States. The location of social studies education in the post-war curriculum was obscure and unformidable, for it lacks the foundation, and the 1916 Report on Social Studies was still not yet in full swing. Without its deep and firm definition, the recognition of social studies as a core subject and common purpose becomes a point of controversy in curriculum development. Nonetheless, social studies in the Philippine context started from the teaching of citizenry and values among young learners by the Thomasites (American Teachers-soldier deployed in the Philippines) and later on by certified teachers. In 1911, though not yet called to be social studies,

in secondary education, the social sciences entered the curriculum (history, geography, economics, and government) (Acierto, 1980).

In the contemporary curriculum framework, social studies had been established to be part of the core curriculum, incorporated in standardized testing (National Achievement Tests), and recognized as a field of discipline that instills civic competence, social efficiency, democratic values, disciplined thinking, and conservative knowledge in history, geography, culture, government, and economics necessary for active participation in a democratic society. In the BEC curriculum, secondary social studies sustained its disciplinarian aspects where history, geography, and economics are facilitated as exclusive social science discipline. The interdisciplinary nature of social studies remained in the elementary curriculum (also called as “Makabayan” which means a person who loves his/her country). The main goal of secondary social studies is to develop a learner equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills,

and responsibility to be able to participate in a democratic, developed, and peaceful nation and the world (DepEd, 2002). Following the expanding horizon approach, the curriculum starts with the study of the personal history of the individual (1<sup>st</sup> Year High School/Grade 7- Philippine History and Geography), to exploring its neighbors' history and topography (2<sup>nd</sup> Year High School/Grade 8- Asian Studies and 3<sup>rd</sup> Year High School/Grade 9- World History and Civilization) to understanding how the country where he/she belongs developed and prosper (4<sup>th</sup> Year High School/Grade 10-Economics). In this discipline-based curriculum, the social science disciplines taught in the secondary curriculum (history, geography, and economics) are the distinct structure of concepts, theories, and models (Ross, Mathison, & Vinson, 2013). Likewise, the pedagogical approach in presenting new knowledge must be rooted in how traditional social scientists from their specific discipline elaborate the content.

Moving forward, the Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC) made no significant development on uplifting the status of secondary social studies and diverting its approach to social education. Though the educational aims illustrate the social need for empowering learners to be capable of self-development in the life course, instill patriotism and nationalism, and the integration of indispensable ideal values. The subjects are still taught distinctively and principled based. The internationalization of the Philippine educational system yielded an extensive revision and benchmarking for the social studies curriculum. With the implementation of RA 10533, otherwise known as the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum, a new discipline (Contemporary Issues) was added to the curriculum framework, and a constructivist approach (Inquiry-based teaching and Outcome-based approach) was adopted for social studies teachers to follow when implementing the recommended curriculum. The allocated time for social studies instruction had immensely decreased. With only 3 hours per week, the social studies teacher must design a learning plan that corresponds to the time frame per topic at the same time, assuring that learners will be able to achieve the intended learning

outcomes. Barton (2012) stressed his concern about the rubber-necking of curriculum content for social studies, especially history, where teachers resort to teaching particularistic stories (Dunn, 2010), which focuses on rote memorization of historical dates authorities involved, and historical sites. Evidently, the increasing dominance of STEM in the curriculum paired with the economic development goals of the nation on science and technology justifies the profound marginalization and slack of social studies. It is imperative for social studies teachers to exalt the timely significance of studying social studies in an interconnected global world.

When the COVID-19 pandemic strikes, schools are forced for temporary closure, and classrooms are made empty. The school community shortly implemented safety measures to combat the deadly virus and safeguard the safety of the school stakeholders. There had been planning and involvement of leading experts in education for learning to continue by designing a school system that will cater to learner's needs and address the demands of the striving economy. (Re)designing an emergency curriculum (Hodkin, 2007) requires methodical planning for meaningful learning despite the constraints while considering the teaching and learning adaptations necessary for independent-remote learning. Furthermore, it is imperative for curriculum developers to directly consult the teachers as curriculum implementers and as someone tasked in dispensing learning and involving students since they are the recipient and product of the curriculum standards. Due to the overwhelming pressure for education to pursue, the DepEd initiated the planning for a curriculum revision, resulting in the implementation of Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) as an emergency curriculum. As an emergency curriculum, the MELCs will be temporarily adopted by the compromised school system as the nation recovers from the pandemic.

This exploration will pay a visit to the status of the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum of the Philippine Educational System. Perceived to be a backburner subject (Blanchette, 2010), Educators and researchers have been apathetic in conducting researches on social studies curriculum and instruction. Thus,

the results of this study will significantly diagnose the status of the social studies curriculum and ignite interest, especially for social studies educators, to examine and experiment in their respective classrooms on the purpose and pedagogy of social studies. Specifically, this study will expound on the following inquiry:

1. What is the status of secondary social studies in the emergency curriculum?
2. What is the purpose of secondary social studies amidst the pandemic?
3. How is secondary social studies being implemented and evaluated in the emergency curriculum?

## B. METHODS

This study adopted the multiple case study design (Yin, 2014), where several units of analysis had been examined to elucidate raw data from each unit. The curriculum guide, self-learning modules, and secondary social studies teachers were all rich data sources for this study. The curriculum guide serves as the primary source of analysis, while the self-learning modules produced by DepEd and the secondary social studies teachers will serve as supplementary sources of data in producing an exhaustive account of the status, purpose, and framework of the secondary social studies in the emergency curriculum. The self-learning modules will be reviewed thoroughly adjacent to the curriculum guide to evaluate its alignment, content structure, instructional methods used, and assessment tools. After the review, a focus group discussion (FGD) commenced validating the curriculum and module findings. As curriculum implementers, teachers play the significant role of curriculum gatekeepers (Thornton, 2005). This is why it is crucial for teachers to be interviewed as part of this study. The FGD comprises ten secondary social studies teachers in the junior high school equally representing each of the year levels and subject disciplines (Grade 7=Asian Studies, Grade 8= World History, Grade 9= Economics, and Grade 10= Contemporary Issues).

The interview transcripts from the FGD will either amplify or discredit the treated data from the curriculum guide and self-learning

modules. Furthermore, the obtained data from the documents (curriculum guide and self-learning modules) will be treated through systematic content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018), while the data collected from the in-depth interview will be analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019). The results of the analysis of data will be presented in the form of themes accompanied by theories and literature studies

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Secondary Social Studies Curriculum under the MELCs*

Through the implementation of DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020, also called the Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020-2021 in Light of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, schools must ensure that they still uphold a safe and secure space for school stakeholders by adopting precautionary measures against the lethal virus. To provide a clear plan and sustainable learning community centers, the school's implements the Learning Continuity Plan, which contains a package of educational interventions that will respond to the challenges brought by the pandemic among learning institutions. The plan revolves around redesigning instruction for an alternative and remote learning delivery that will still produce competent learners and quality education. Policy guidelines to facilitate safe operation of schools, ensure learning continuity, capacitate teachers, consideration of learner's well-being, and the promotion of compassion are the key components of the LCP.

Part of the LCP is adopting the Most Essential Learning Competencies, commonly known as MELCs, for educators. The MELCs supplants the recommended curriculum guide (Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum K to 12) as the emergency curriculum that will respond to the predicaments of the global pandemic. The MELCs is a curriculum framework consisting of practical and relevant competencies necessary to prepare learners to become productive members of the democratic, civil society and adapt to the industry's influx demands. Based on the recommended curriculum, the MELCs is a succinct version of the curriculum guide that guides teachers on developing intended learning

outcomes, designing learning experiences, selecting appropriate instructional media, and utilizing assessment tools without jeopardizing the delivery of quality education. This framework does not reduce the delivery of quality education. Instead, it supports the flexibility of educators in supplementing learner's demands and withstanding the discordant educational system brought by the global pandemic. In this curriculum framework, the teacher's role as curriculum gatekeepers is augmented, and as curriculum implementers, they possess the course of action in designing the learning experiences for successful learning. Since most students prefer remote learning through a modular approach (Hernando-Malipot, 2020), teachers are instructed to develop self-learning modules to guide students in learning skills and knowledge offered by each discipline. Thus, the MELCs also serve as the basis for the development of contextualized and localized self-learning modules that are delivered on a unit basis to the student's doorsteps. Each module topic/unit is enclosed with a set of essential learning outcomes that learners must achieve, produce, possess, and/or perform before the next delivery of self-learning modules for another set of skills and knowledge to learn.

As a discipline-based curriculum, the secondary social studies is exceptionally focused in developing discipline-based skills and concepts. Evident in the MELCs, there are certain instructional setbacks that occurs in the implementation itself.

### ***The Significance of Secondary Social Studies amidst the Pandemic***

The Association of Middle-Level Education (AMLE) identified three major characteristics of the middle grades social studies curriculum. An instructional process where students and teachers are engaged in active and purposeful learning; a curriculum that challenges students' critical minds, exploratory, integrative, and relevant; and the adoption of multiple teaching-learning approaches that capitalize on students' diversified backgrounds (Homana & Passe, 2012). The organization stressed the vital role of social studies teachers in the civic development of learners. As a multidisciplinary

and interdisciplinary field (NCSS, 1994), the curriculum is filled with history, geography, economics, government, citizenship education, contemporary issues, and the humanities, each having their own disciplinary knowledge, set of particular skills, cognitive processes, and actual values for students to master (e.g., the development of historical empathy in history (Perrotta & Bohan, 2018; Levstik & Barton, 2004), financial literacy in economics (Lucey, 2016), ethical responsibility in contemporary issues (Berson & Berson, 2003), etc.). The breadth of studying social studies legitimizes its place in the core curriculum and its indispensable role in building a nation with citizens who perform their duties and responsibility in a democracy. The pandemic had even brought enormous opportunities and innovations to advance social studies in the curriculum arena despite of its underinvestment for the past years. The pandemic had escalated the level of the social studies curriculum to be even with the rest of the disciplines in the playing field of standardized education. This is augmented by Maguth (2020) claims, where he enlisted curriculum innovations that supported the teaching and learning of social studies amidst the pandemic. In this historic pandemic where people are distressed globally, social studies is the "first civic responder". Drawing from the annals of history, economic crash, social problems, and conflict/crisis management learned from the social studies, learners can understand the current situation brought by the lethal virus. This addresses the problem of the relevance of social studies in the height of market-oriented and machine-like schooling. To achieve deep learning, social studies teachers must establish a culture of inquiry and reflective thinking in connecting past lessons to the current news to have an effortless lesson delivery. Also, the pandemic revamped our attention on promoting the learner's well-being. The emphasis on justice-oriented citizenship in social studies had been augmented due to the overwhelming inequities and human suffering in the battle against the pandemic (e.g., health accessibility, realignment of funds, prioritized groups, etc.). Another curriculum innovation altered by the pandemic is presenting social studies in the real-world context. If there is

a specific point in time where teachers are able to present social studies concepts in an authentic and direct context, it would be during the zenith of the pandemic. However, Ferlazo (2020) cautioned us to practice trauma-informed teaching in spite of the waves of innovative teaching techniques. In times of extreme isolation and distancing, psychological trauma, and critical health issues, a powerful social studies (Brophy et al., 2016) teaching and learning is even more completely necessary.

### ***Self-Learning Modules***

The pandemic had partially impaired the delivery of the conventional teaching-learning process in social studies. However, the effectiveness of facilitating learning does not greatly depend on the learning modality, rather on the critical planning of the learning experiences and the teacher's resilient drive that makes learning surpass the school structure. Depending on the school's resources and capability, the prevalent instructional method being utilized in implementing the emergency curriculum is remote learning through self-learning modules or learning packets. Self-learning modules are first introduced by de Tornyay & Thompson (1987) as a teaching strategy, a self-contained instructional tool that guides the learner through a step-by-step process in achieving educational objectives. This type of teaching strategy propagated in nursing and medicine education, where students are trained to become responsible and independent learners through interactive learning modules that undergone quality assurance and are evaluated by curriculum developers. Candy and Brookfield (1991) further explore the effectiveness of self-learning modules and explicates its four dimensions: (1) personal autonomy, (2) self-management, learner control, and independent learning approach. Originally talking about self-directed learning, Candy and Brookfield warned teachers on the surrounding problems when using self-learning modules, such as work authenticity and access to learning resources. The contextualization of self-learning modules enhances the learning percentage of learners to its social environment that eventually leads to acquiring civic knowledge and democratic practice. That is why

Anggreani et al. (2020) stressed the importance of training social studies teachers in designing learning manuals or modules that will carry out innovative social studies learning in a contextualized and recognizable learning and environment. At the same time, Fajarini et al. (2016) call for a problem-based instruction of social studies in self-learning modules to enhance learner's analytical and problem-solving skills by engaging in real-world problems and solving divergent and convergent questions. The implication of technology had markedly transformed the production of self-learning modules. Instead of generating a print-based module, the application of technology had made it possible for modules to be even interactive and experiential. The level of flexibility of this strategy will fit multiculturally diverse learners with varying learning needs. This claim is supported by the study of Kaliyadan et al. (2009), where they underscored the potential of developing a stimulating teaching-learning process through interactive information technology-based self-learning module. Following the dogmas of technological innovation, Zerger et al. (2002) developed a self-learning multimedia approach in learning GIS. Having in mind the archetypal characteristic of technology, the level of engagement among learners is remarkable. Nevertheless, social studies teachers must continue to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of self-learning modules as part of the process in instructional design and identify the frailty for improvement.

Though the SLM we're designed to suit the existing conditions of schools. The achievement of learning competencies must not be jeopardized. The self-learning modules were crafted juxtaposed with the MELCs to solidify the objective-orientedness and expected outcomes for the learners. The chunk of topics is converted to an SLM, which contains essential parts of instructional design intended for independent learning. The learning experiences are well written to deliver formal and unequivocal instructions that will guide learners in accomplishing the task since there is limited contact with the teacher. Depending on the year level, learners are instructed to write their work in the module or organize their work in a separate

answer sheet. For young learners (K to 6), learners are directed to place their answers in the provided space. The purpose is for extension of learning, where the SLM serves as a document for learning resources for future use of knowledge. In contrast, middle learners (Grade 7 to 10 Secondary Learners) are exhorted to submit a separate sheet for their work in order for schools to reutilize the SLM for the next school year. This instruction justifies the learner’s knowledge, resourcefulness, and ableness to validate the information. Learners are given ample time and instructional support to accomplish the guided and independent learning tasks per module. Paredes (2011) in her work on parental involvement as an instructional strategy, indicated that the higher the level of parents involvement as an instructional companion, the higher the level of parents involvement as an instructional companion, contributing to the students' increase in school performance. However, the parent's commitment to their children’s academic success must be monitored to prevent them from crossing the threshold of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). In this case, social studies teachers are challenged to monitor student’s learning while guiding parents on assisting their children to learn.

**Table 1.** The number of MELCs and self-learning modules per quarter in each grade level (secondary) in the social studies curriculum.

Grade Level	Quarter	Number of Learning Competency based on the MELCs	Number of Self-Learning Module
7	I	6	6
	II	6	6
	III	8	8
	IV	9	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>
8	I	6	6
	II	7	7
	III	6	6
	IV	6	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>
9	I	6	6
	II	5	5
	III	6	6

	IV	9	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>
10	I	6	6
	II	4	4
	III	4	4
	IV	4	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>

Commonly, a week is allotted for each SLM to be accomplished and submitted by the learners before acquiring the next SLM for the week. This equates the level of social studies in the rest of the discipline in terms of time allotment for learning. However, as curriculum gatekeepers (Thornton, 2005), teachers have the academic freedom to decide whether students will devote more time to learning specific knowledge and skills. Nonetheless, social studies teachers must strictly adhere to the recommended academic calendar, especially when learners are candidates for moving up.

There are also some features of the SLM that downplays the delivery of experiential learning in social studies. First, it confines the teachers to design conventional learning experiences for learners to accomplish in a compiled units. Cornett (1990) explains that secondary social studies teachers must balance the tension between an organized and systematic presentation of curriculum materials and the learner's interest in learning. However, if the measures and standards of testing will frame the SLM, it will deliver disparity in Cornett’s instructional equation. Second, the teaching of social studies requires interaction in a multiculturally diverse setting. Although SLM can offer perspective-taking tasks and dilemmas that will assimilate learners in taking sides, it will never equate to the corporeal experience in the actual setting. If we also want our learners to build cultural relativity, foster tolerance, and appreciate diversity, we need to engage them with real-world experiences. Third, the social studies discipline itself demands to be taught through experiential learning. To improve historical empathy (Levstik & Barton, 2004), we need to let learners explore the historical phenomena and its affective connection to the learner’s personal experience. If we want our learners to enhance their spatial skills, we must present mapping

skills activity that will allow them to navigate places and landscapes, and if we want them to become responsible citizens, we must simulate them in learning conditions where they can politically participate and involve. Finally, the work authenticity is subject to skepticism which will be discussed further.

### ***Assessing Learners in the MELCs***

Drawbacks of implementing remote learning include student's work authenticity, diminishing human touch, and resource accessibility (Gil, 2021). The conventional process of assessing a learner's knowledge and skills follows a formal and informal means of collecting data. Planning for valid and reliable assessment tools requires a series of configurations on the triangulation of the standard learning competencies, learner's diversity, and appropriate assessment variation. The broadening purpose of social studies in the core curriculum adds up the complexity of developing a developmentally-appropriate assessment and evaluation tools that will address distinct skills, discipline, and expectations among learners. As Egan says in 2003, "This expanded view of the purposes of social studies education is reflected across the curriculum and requires a much more sophisticated approach to assessment and evaluation.". This statement still holds true until today. The problem of developing appropriate assessment tools in social studies had even been aggravated due to an abrupt capitalization of an emergency curriculum. The participants valued the meaning of developing an assessment tool that is differentiated but bears the recommended learning standard. However, due to the unforeseen obstruction, they are unable to consult their students for inputs, establish means for feedback and report, and decide on a better assessment experience. The assessment tools were designed by curriculum experts, prepared for distribution, and developed for the teacher's disposal. For every learning competency, a corresponding formative assessment is required for the learner's to answer. Likewise, the SLM follows an outcomes-based framework where learner's are expected to gain mastery of the subject by showcasing their newly acquired skills and knowledged through an output or

performance (Killen, 2000). Most of the learner's are able to submit on time however, few submit with a complete output. Learners, like teachers, struggle to manage their tasks and accomplish tasks with insufficient learning materials, as mentioned by the participants. Though open for skepticism, social studies teacher's evaluate their learner's work with integrity and honesty.

Unlike the elementary social studies curriculum that dives into the heart of propagating civic responsibility (Gil, 2021), in the secondary, the social studies are disciplined-based. Still being interdisciplinary, an overarching discipline dominates the learning standards, content, skills to be developed, and purpose. Each grade level has a corresponding overarching discipline with predispositions to acquire disciplined-based concepts and skills (e.g., history aimed at developing historical thinking, geography enhances spatial thinking). Thus, the planning for an objective-oriented and skill-based assessment tool is strenuous and stressful. Another problematic thing in framing an assessment for remote learning is when assessing deep values of social justice, citizenship education, and democracy unless applied with technological innovations for a dynamic learning experience. In the height of standardized and market-oriented curriculum, we are reminded by the words of Myers (2004) that "no single instrument, no matter how carefully constructed, can collect all the information needed for a comprehensive evaluation of student progress or be completely valid and reliable."As broad as it can be, social studies teachers must offer vicarious and multidimensional assessment tools to gather relevant data to generate a sound judgment on the learner's learning status.

### **D. CONCLUSION**

The present state of affairs of the secondary social studies in the emergency curriculum paints a picture of the future of social studies and the rest of the discipline in the core curriculum. If acclimatized further through remote learning, the collective effort of social studies scholars in voicing out the marginalization of social studies is on the verge of its demise. Social studies teachers are inept with the sudden alterations of learning delivery.

They had become foreigners of their academic territory. Notwithstanding the constraints imposed by schools closing, the facilitation of powerful social studies demands extensive interaction with the key components- teachers, learners, and the community. Applying concerted teaching strategies that seek to initiate critical discussion, perspective taking, informed decision-making, and reflection are restricted to be in the course of an independent learner. This undermines the etymology of “social” in the social studies. The essence of building a resilient community that operates on the values of democracy, cooperation, social justice, and civic responsibility is diminishing as the school regulation continues. Are we ready for a new breed of citizens to lead society on its callow decision-making and sheer ignorance in the face of democracy?

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