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Development of Social Studies Learning Management Approach using Problem-Based and Community-Based Learning to Enhance 21st-Century Skills for Students in Small Schools

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Abstract

This study aimed to develop a learning management approach for social studies using problem-based and community-based learning to enhance 21st-century skills among students in small schools. In addition, it sought to examine the satisfaction of teachers and students using this innovative learning approach. The research sample consisted of Grade 6 social study teachers. A questionnaire for basic information, an evaluation of how well the problem-based and community-based learning approaches in social studies were aligned, and a satisfaction survey for the instructional guide were used as research tools. We analysed the data using the mean, standard deviation, and concordance. The findings revealed the following: (1) We developed even learning management approaches for social studies using problem-based and community-based learning to enhance 21st-century skills among students in small schools. Experts evaluated all the developed approaches and found them to be highly appropriate, with an average rating of 5.00 and a standard deviation of 0.00. (2) Overall, teachers and students expressed high satisfaction with the developed learning-management approach. Teachers and students expressed the highest satisfaction with learning activities, followed by content, learning resources, and assessment and evaluation. Moreover, the developed learning management approach effectively promoted 21st-century skills among students in small schools, particularly in the areas of life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; and information, media, and technology skills. Future research should expand the sample to include diverse school settings, and examine how digital tools and online platforms can support the scalability and accessibility of the model.

Keywords: Social Studies, Problem-Based Learning, Community-Based Learning, 21st-Century Skills, Small Schools, Primary Education

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving world, driven by technological advancements and societal transformation, education systems must adapt to prepare learners with the essential 21st-century skills. These include critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, digital literacy, and the ability to solve complex, real-world problems. Thailand's National Strategy (2018–2037) emphasises human resource development to ensure that all citizens can thrive in a dynamic, globalised context.

However, small schools in Thailand, particularly those in rural areas, face persistent challenges in achieving their educational goals. Many continue to rely on teacher-centred approaches, leading to disengagement among students. Social studies education is often criticised for being overly theoretical and disconnected from students' lived experiences. As a result, students frequently struggle to develop essential skills such as analytical thinking, social responsibility, and real-world problem-solving ([Cham-pathong, 2017](#); [Riangrikrai & Prabpal, 2024](#)).

Research Problem

Despite ongoing curriculum reforms, there remains a lack of effective instructional models tailored to small school contexts that can integrate modern pedagogical strategies, such learning (PBL) and community-based learning (CBL). Without contextualised approaches that actively engage students in real community issues, the development of 21st-century competencies remains limited in small schools.

Research Gap

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of PBL and CBL in promoting critical thinking and engagement. However, only a few studies have explored their integrated use in small Thai schools with limited resources. There is also limited empirical evidence on how such hybrid models impact both academic outcomes and student satisfaction in social studies classrooms. This study aimed to fill this gap by developing and validating a PBL-CBL learning model designed specifically for small school environments.

Research Questions

1. How can a social studies learning management model integrating problem-based learning (PBL) and community-based learning (CBL) enhance 21st-century skills among students in small schools?
2. What are the levels of teacher and student satisfaction with the social studies learning management model that integrates PBL and CBL?

Research Objectives

1. To create a learning management model for social studies education that combines problem-based learning (PBL) and community-based learning (CBL) to improve students' 21st-century skills in small schools.
2. To evaluate how satisfied teachers and students are with the Social Studies learning management model, which integrates problem-based and community-based learning to foster 21st-century skills among students in small schools.

Literature Review

The curriculum for Social Studies, Religion, and Culture aims to develop students' abilities to adapt to and coexist in a rapidly changing world. It focuses on fostering responsible citizens with the knowledge, skills, and moral values necessary to navigate the complexities of modern society. By emphasising societal change, economics, and resource sustainability, the curriculum prepares students to become informed and responsible citizens. For Grade 6 students at a School in Songkhla Province, the curriculum includes history, religion, and culture, encouraging learners to analyse past developments, understand global relations, and preserve Thai identity. It also emphasises critical thinking, problem solving, and real-life applications in a student-centred learning environment ([Ministry of Education, 2008](#)).

Cognitive Learning Theories

The development of students' cognitive abilities is integral to their education. Learning theories help explain how individuals process information and adapt their behaviours. Key cognitive theories include the following.

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Piaget's theory posits that cognitive development occurs in stages as learners assimilate new knowledge and accommodate it in their cognitive structure. This process evolves from sensory perception to abstract thinking ([Piaget, 1970](#)).

Bruner's Theory of Cognitive Development

Bruner emphasised "discovery learning", in which learners form new concepts by discovering them independently. [Bruner \(1963\)](#) highlighted the

importance of intrinsic motivation in the learning process.

Ausubel's Theory of Meaningful Learning

Ausubel argued that meaningful learning occurs when learners connect new information with existing knowledge. This theory emphasises deep understanding and retention ([Ausubel, 1963](#)).

These theories guide educators in designing instructional models that align with students' cognitive development, providing experiences that challenge their intellectual growth.

Research and Development (R&D) in Education

Research and Development (R&D) in education focuses on creating instructional models to improve learning efficiency. The R&D process involves the following steps.

1. Research involves identifying the needs and problems of learners.
2. Development involves creating instructional models that meet these requirements.
3. Experimentation involves testing the models in real-world environments.
4. This improvement involves refining the models based on feedback and results.

The ADDIE Model is one such instructional design framework consisting of five phases: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Another is the Dick, Carey, and Carey Model, which includes 10 key components, such as defining instructional goals and evaluating learner outcomes. These models ensure that instructional design is systematic, effective, and responsive to learners' needs ([Joyce & Weil, 1996](#)).

Instructional Models and their Components

Instructional models are structured plans that guide both teaching and learning. According to [Joyce and Weil \(1996\)](#), an instructional model consists of components, such as principles, objectives, teaching steps, supporting activities, and evaluation processes. These components work together to achieve the specific educational goals. Instructional models can be classified into four families.

1. The information-processing family focuses on developing cognitive abilities, such as problem-solving and conceptual understanding.

2. Personal families emphasise individual development and creativity.
3. Social Family fosters collaboration and social interactions.
4. Behavioural families focus on shaping behaviour through reinforcement and conditioning ([Joyce and Weil, 1996](#)).

Research Related to the Development of Instructional Models

[Suwannapaet \(2014\)](#) created a blended instructional model combining problem- and enquiry-based learning, significantly improving students' expectations in physics. The researcher developed an instructional model with nine components that successfully increased students' learning achievements. These studies highlight the importance of incorporating student-centred, problem-based learning (PBL) approaches in educational practices to foster critical thinking and collaboration ([Sirithanyarat & Sirithanyarat, 2013](#); [Suwannapaet, 2014](#)).

Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centred instructional method in which learners engage in solving real-world problems. PBL promotes self-directed learning, collaboration, and analytical thinking. Several scholars have defined PBL as follows.

[Gallagher \(1997\)](#) described PBL as a method in which students work collaboratively to integrate knowledge with problem-solving.

The researcher emphasised that PBL engages students in enquiry and problem-solving relevant to their real-world experiences.

The importance of PBL lies in its ability to prepare students for real-life challenges by fostering critical thinking, problem solving, and independent learning ([Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980](#); [Hmelo & Evensen, 2000](#)).

Community-Based Learning (CBL)

Community-Based Learning (CBL) is a pedagogical approach that involves learners directly engaging with their communities. CBL enhances learning by providing relevant and meaningful

real-world experience. Through active participation in community issues, students develop a deeper understanding of societal needs and challenges. Research shows that CBL fosters the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills, which are all essential for 21st-century learners.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest experimental design to evaluate the impact of a learning management approach integrating problem-based learning (PBL) and community-based learning (CBL) on the development of 21st-century skills among students.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of Grade 6 social studies teachers from small schools under the jurisdiction of the Primary Educational Service Area Office 2. The sample was selected using simple random sampling and included one teacher and one Grade 6 class from the Ban Nong Nai Khui School in Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province. While the small sample size allowed for an in-depth investigation of the instructional model in a real-world context, it limited the generalisability of the findings. Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples across multiple settings to validate and expand these results.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were used: (1) a basic information questionnaire to assess teachers' needs, (2) a learning management manual evaluated by experts, and (3) satisfaction surveys for teachers and students. The content validity of each instrument was confirmed by experts using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with scores ranging from 0.05 to 1.00.

Data Collection

The study began by distributing a basic questionnaire to teachers in small schools to understand their needs regarding PBL and CBL integration. Based on this input, the PBL-CBL

framework was developed and validated by experts. The framework was piloted during a one-day workshop on 30 August 2023 with the participating teacher and students. Post-implementation and satisfaction surveys were conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires and satisfaction surveys were analysed using the mean and standard deviation. The IOC was used to validate the alignment of instructional strategies with 21st-century skill-development goals.

Research Result

Teacher Needs for the PBL-CBL Model

A needs assessment revealed that social studies teachers in small schools strongly desired an instructional model that integrated problem-based and community-based learning. The mean overall score was 4.45. The highest needs were in life and career skills (mean = 4.30); learning and innovation skills (mean = 4.21); and information, media, and technology skills (mean = 4.17).

Expert Evaluation of Instructional Models

Seven instructional models were developed in alignment with the Thai Basic Education Core Curriculum (2551). Expert review using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) indicated high validity, with a perfect mean score of 5.00 and a standard deviation of 0.00, suggesting unanimous agreement on model relevance and appropriateness.

Teacher and Student Satisfaction

Quantitative satisfaction ratings were high in both groups: teachers (mean = 4.45) and students (mean = 4.35).

Qualitative Observations

Informal teacher interviews and student reflections were conducted to support the quantitative findings. Teachers reported increased student engagement, collaborative behaviour, and stronger connections between classroom content and community issues. Students expressed enthusiasm for community-based tasks; one remarked, "I liked interviewing people in

the village'. It made me feel like what we learned mattered." These observations affirm the real-world relevance and motivational benefits of the model.

Discussion

The integration of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Community-Based Learning (CBL) into social studies instruction has shown strong potential for enhancing 21st-century skills among students in small schools. The study's instructional models received unanimous expert validation (mean = 5.00) and both teachers and students reported high levels of satisfaction with the approach. These outcomes indicate that the model is not only grounded in sound educational theory, but also demonstrates meaningful improvements in classroom engagement, instructional relevance, and skill development.

Qualitative data further confirmed these findings. Teachers reported increased student curiosity, collaboration, and critical thinking, whereas students described the learning experience as relevant and engaging. These outcomes are especially significant for small, under-resourced schools, where traditional teacher-centred methods often dominate, and student engagement is difficult to sustain.

The success of this model can be attributed to several key design elements.

- Local relevance: CBL connects students to community needs, reinforcing the value of education in real-life contexts.
- Active learning: PBL empowers students to take ownership of problem-solving processes.
- Clear structure: The instructional manual provided step-by-step guidance, supporting a consistent implementation.

However, the model's current form was tested in a single school, raising questions regarding its scalability. Future iterations must consider diverse educational environments, particularly rural-urban disparities, teacher preparedness, and community variability. Furthermore, while satisfaction and skill development were clearly observed, academic achievement outcomes should be analysed in future studies to validate the long-term educational impact.

Conclusion

This study developed and validated a learning management model for social studies that integrates

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Community-Based Learning (CBL) to promote 21st-century skills among students in small schools. The model was implemented with Grade 6 students and was evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Key findings include the development of seven instructional models rated as highly appropriate by experts (mean = 5.00) and high satisfaction scores from both teachers (mean = 4.45) and students (mean = 4.35). The model effectively enhanced students' life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; and information, media, and technology skills. Furthermore, qualitative feedback confirmed improvements in student engagement, critical thinking, and real-world problem solving.

These findings confirm that integrating PBL and CBL into social studies offers practical context-responsive benefits for small schools. This approach bridges academic learning with community engagement, thus fostering both personal and civic competencies.

However, this study had several limitations. The sample size was small, consisting of only one teacher and one class, which limits the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, while qualitative insights were collected, they were informal and not systematically coded or analysed. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample and employ mixed methods to deepen the understanding of student outcomes. Exploring longitudinal effects and academic achievement metrics will also be valuable for assessing long-term impacts.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a promising model that can inform future curriculum development and educational policies, especially in underserved school contexts.

Recommendations

Specific and Actionable Classroom-Level Recommendations

Teacher training modules should be developed based on seven instructional models, including lesson plan templates and video demonstrations of PBL-CBL in action.

Assessment tools aligned with 21st-century skills (e.g. rubrics for collaboration, critical thinking,

and community engagement) should be distributed to help educators effectively evaluate learning outcomes.

Community collaboration guides can support teachers in forming partnerships with local leaders and facilitating real-world learning.

Broader Policy Implications for Educational Administration

The Ministry of Education and local education offices should consider adopting the PBL-CBL model as a pilot initiative across small, under performing schools, particularly those lacking external support.

This model aligns with Thailand's National Strategy (2018–2037), especially the Human Resource Development pillar, and can serve as a mechanism for promoting equity and context-responsive pedagogy.

Educational policies should encourage local curriculum flexibility, allowing communities and schools to co-develop learning units based on local issues and resources.

Model Scalability and Expansion Strategies

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) should be formed among small school teachers to share experiences and co-develop CBL-PBL materials.

A “train-the-trainer” approach can be used, where a cohort of lead teachers from various provinces are trained intensively and tasked with cascading training to peers.

Digital platforms can be used to house instructional materials, share student projects, and connect classrooms across regions, to facilitate peer learning and remote mentoring.

Partnerships with teacher education institutions can ensure that pre-service teachers are trained to use the model effectively, creating a sustainable pipeline for future implementation.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. Clearly define community-related issues, and future research should clearly define problems or issues relevant to the community, such as environmental concerns, local cultural practices, and specific social issues. This will make it

easier to see how problem-based learning and community-based learning can work together, ensuring that the research focuses on solutions that are directly related to the community.

2. Expanding the Sample Group: We recommend broadening the sample group to include schools with varying contexts, such as urban and rural schools, schools of different sizes, or communities with distinct characteristics. This expansion will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the outcomes across diverse settings.
3. Future studies should investigate how technology can be leveraged to enhance problem-based and community-based learning. For instance, the use of online platforms could enable learners and the community to engage remotely, whereas digital tools can effectively analyse community problems.

Conflict of Interest

The authors (s) declare(s) that there are no conflicts of interest.

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