
TEACHERS' HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS, INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY UTILIZATION, AND THE LEARNERS' ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL STUDIES

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Article Received: 25 February 2026

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Article Revised: 15 March 2026

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Published on: 05 April 2026

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.2944>

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between teachers' historical thinking skills, instructional strategy utilization, and learners' engagement in Social Studies among public elementary schools in Lantapan West District, Schools Division of Bukidnon, during the School Year 2025–2026. Anchored on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, the research examined how teachers' competencies in sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration, together with their use of direct, inquiry-based, technology-supported, and cooperative instructional approaches, influence learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The study aimed to determine the level of each variable and the significant relationships among them within the context of elementary Social Studies instruction. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed using complete enumeration of Social Studies teachers in selected public elementary schools. Data were gathered through an adopted questionnaire consisting of three parts: historical thinking skills, instructional strategy utilization, and learner engagement. Statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated high to very high levels of historical thinking skills and instructional strategy utilization, while learners exhibited very high engagement, particularly in behavioral and emotional dimensions. Furthermore, results showed significant positive relationships between teachers' historical thinking skills and learner engagement, as well as between instructional strategy utilization and engagement. These findings indicate that

teachers' cognitive competence and pedagogical practices play a vital role in fostering active participation, interest, and deeper learning among elementary learners.

KEYWORDS: *Historical thinking skills; Instructional strategy utilization; Learner engagement; Social Studies education; Elementary education; Behavioral engagement; Cognitive engagement; Inquiry-based learning; Teaching competence.*

INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of basic education, learner engagement in Social Studies remains a significant challenge, particularly in public elementary schools. Despite various reforms in the Philippine educational system aimed at fostering critical citizenship, students often find Social Studies unengaging and disconnected from real-life contexts. This study examines the relationship between the teachers' historical thinking skills and their use of instructional strategies, as well as the impact on the learners' engagement in Social Studies, among public elementary schools in Lantapan, Bukidnon. The primary purpose of this research is to investigate how teachers' competencies in interpreting, analyzing, and presenting historical content, combined with their chosen teaching approaches, affect learners' participation, interest, and cognitive engagement in Social Studies classes.

Teachers' historical thinking skills, the ability to critically examine sources, understand historical contexts, and make meaningful interpretations, are essential in transforming Social Studies from rote memorization to active inquiry. According to Seixas and Morton (2013), historical thinking empowers students to navigate past and present issues with informed judgment. In this light, teacher competence in historical thinking is not just a professional requirement but a pedagogical necessity. Empirical studies have reinforced that when teachers possess strong historical reasoning abilities, they are more likely to engage students in higher-order thinking tasks (Dolgova et al., 2020). This aligns with the goals of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum in the Philippines, which emphasizes the development of critical and analytical thinking through contextualized and meaningful instruction (Department of Education [DepEd], 2020).

Equally important is the strategic use of instructional methods that are responsive to learners' needs. The choice and effective use of instructional strategies ranging from storytelling and role-playing to inquiry-based learning play a critical role in cultivating student interest and motivation. A study by Ali and Ullah (2021) found that learners exposed to diverse and student-centered strategies in Social Studies demonstrated higher levels of participation and

academic performance. Local studies echo this finding; for instance, Magno (2021) highlighted those Filipino elementary teachers who employed active and integrative strategies reported better student engagement and comprehension, especially in historical topics.

Moreover, the integration of historical thinking and effective instructional strategies is reinforced by national education frameworks such as the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). These standards emphasize that content knowledge and pedagogy are inseparable competencies essential for quality teaching and learning (DepEd, 2017). Internationally, UNESCO (2021) advocates for competency-based and participatory approaches to history teaching, aiming to cultivate global citizenship, tolerance, and critical awareness among learners.

Learner engagement in Social Studies, when nurtured through well-planned pedagogy and deep historical understanding, contributes to the development of socially aware, participative, and critically thinking Filipino citizens. This emphasis is particularly crucial at the elementary level, where learners begin to develop foundational civic values and historical awareness. Early exposure to historical thinking not only nurtures critical inquiry but also instills a sense of identity, community, and responsibility that serves as the bedrock for active citizenship in later years. By exploring the correlation between teachers' historical thinking skills and instructional strategy utilization with learner engagement, this study hopes to provide empirical evidence that can guide teacher training, curriculum development, and classroom practices in Lantapan, Bukidnon, and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Engeström's Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which emphasizes that learning and human development occur through mediated activities shaped by social, historical, and cultural contexts. In this framework, teaching and learning in Social Studies are understood as complex, dynamic systems where teachers (subjects) interact with tools (historical thinking skills and instructional strategies) to achieve learning outcomes (learners' engagement).

Teachers' historical thinking skills, such as sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration, serve as cognitive tools that mediate their understanding and delivery of historical content. These tools influence how they interpret curriculum standards, plan lessons, and respond to learners' needs. At the same time, instructional strategies such as inquiry-based learning, cooperative tasks, and technology integration represent external tools or methods that shape classroom interaction and learner participation. These strategies operationalize teachers'

knowledge into practices that can activate student engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains.

Within CHAT, the learner engagement is the outcome of this mediated activity. It emerges not merely from the individual efforts of the teacher or learner, but from the interaction between teacher cognition (historical thinking), pedagogical action (instructional strategy), and the classroom environment. When these components are aligned, the learning activity becomes meaningful, and students are more likely to be involved, motivated, and intellectually engaged.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study is anchored on the assumption that teachers' historical thinking skills and instructional strategy utilization significantly influence learners' engagement in Social Studies. These three core variables are interconnected in the process of delivering effective instruction and fostering active participation among elementary learners.

Teachers' historical thinking skills, which include sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, close reading, historical significance, and understanding cause and consequence (Seixas & Morton, 2013), serve as the cognitive foundation for meaningful history instruction. When teachers demonstrate strong competencies in these areas, they are better equipped to present history not as a fixed narrative, but as an inquiry-based discipline. This approach encourages critical discussions, analysis of multiple perspectives, and relevance to present-day issues, all of which are essential in capturing learners' cognitive and emotional engagement.

Complementing this is the utilization of instructional strategies, such as direct instruction, inquiry-based learning, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, technology integration, and constructivist approaches (Marzano & Heflebower, 2020). These strategies operationalize the teachers' content knowledge into classroom practice. For instance, a teacher proficient in contextualization may apply inquiry-based learning to guide students in exploring primary sources or historical events from various viewpoints. This alignment between thinking skills and strategy enhances classroom dynamics and makes lessons more interactive and inclusive.

The effectiveness of these two independent variables is reflected in the level of learner engagement, measured across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004). When teachers use strategies grounded in sound historical thinking, students are more likely to demonstrate active participation (behavioral), show interest or curiosity (emotional), and invest in deeper understanding (cognitive). In essence, the synergy between

and consequence), instructional strategy utilization (direct instruction, inquiry-based learning, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, use of technology, and constructivist strategies), and learners' engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement).

The study is delimited to public elementary schools within the Lantapan West District, Division of Bukidnon, and it does not include private institutions or learners from kindergarten to Grade 3, as Social Studies teaching in lower grades is integrated with other learning areas. Only teachers currently handling Social Studies classes and pupils enrolled in those classes are included as respondents. The study employs a descriptive-correlational research design utilizing self-report questionnaires, which confines data collection to teachers' and learners' perceived levels of engagement and instructional practices rather than directly observed classroom behaviors.

One noted limitation of the study is the potential social desirability bias, wherein respondents, especially teachers, may tend to provide answers they believe are expected or favorable rather than those that reflect their actual practices or competencies. This may affect the accuracy of self-reported data on historical thinking skills and strategy utilization. To mitigate this bias, the study ensures respondent anonymity and uses clearly worded, non-leading items in the research instruments.

Review of the Literature

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of local and international literature and studies that support the investigation of the relationship between teachers' historical thinking skills, instructional strategy utilization, and learners' engagement in Social Studies. It explores key concepts, theories, and empirical findings that inform the variables of the study. The review is organized thematically to provide a clear understanding of how these variables interact in the context of public elementary education in Lantapan, Bukidnon. Relevant frameworks and research findings are also discussed to establish the foundation and direction of the present study.

Research Methodology

This chapter presented the methodology used in conducting the study on the relationship between teachers' historical thinking skills and instructional strategy utilization to learners' engagement in Social Studies. It outlined the research design, research locale, respondents of the study, sampling procedure, research instrument, administration of the questionnaire, research ethics, scoring procedure, and statistical treatment of data. The study was conducted

in selected public elementary schools under the Lantapan West District, Division of Bukidnon. Each component of the methodology was designed to ensure the reliability, validity, and ethical soundness of the research process.

FINDINGS

The first research question assessed the level of teachers' historical thinking skills in terms of sourcing. The findings revealed that teachers in the selected public elementary schools generally demonstrated a high level of sourcing practices in Social Studies instruction. Teachers commonly guided learners in identifying the origin of historical sources, examining the credibility of information, and recognizing the author's perspective. These practices indicate that teachers regularly integrate activities that encourage learners to evaluate historical evidence and question the reliability of information presented in instructional materials.

The second research question examined the level of teachers' historical thinking skills in terms of contextualization. The results showed that teachers manifested a high level of contextualization practices in their Social Studies lessons. Teachers often helped learners understand historical events by relating them to specific time periods and explaining the background conditions surrounding historical developments. However, certain practices, such as integrating timelines and other contextual tools, appeared slightly less emphasized compared with other contextualization strategies.

The third research question assessed the level of teachers' historical thinking skills in terms of corroboration. The findings indicated that teachers demonstrated a high level of corroboration practices in Social Studies instruction. Teachers frequently encouraged learners to examine multiple historical sources and compare different accounts when discussing historical events. These practices enabled learners to analyze diverse perspectives and develop more balanced interpretations of historical issues.

The fourth research question determined the level of instructional strategy utilization among Social Studies teachers in terms of direct and differentiated instruction, inquiry-based and constructivist strategies, and technology with cooperative learning. The results revealed that teachers exhibited a generally high level of instructional strategy utilization. Inquiry-based and constructivist approaches were most evident, followed by technology integration and cooperative learning strategies, while direct and differentiated instruction remained widely practiced. These findings suggest that teachers regularly employ various teaching approaches to support meaningful classroom instruction.

The fifth research question examined the level of learners' engagement in Social Studies in terms of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The findings showed that learners demonstrated very high levels of behavioral and emotional engagement, while cognitive engagement was observed at a high level. Learners actively participated in classroom tasks, expressed interest in Social Studies topics, and showed enthusiasm during learning activities. However, deeper analytical thinking and reflective responses appeared slightly less evident compared with observable participation and emotional involvement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers in the selected public elementary schools demonstrate a high level of historical thinking skills in terms of sourcing in Social Studies instruction. This indicates that teachers can guide learners in examining the origin, credibility, and purpose of historical sources, which contributes to the development of critical thinking and historical inquiry among learners.

Teachers in the selected public elementary schools demonstrate a high level of historical thinking skills in terms of contextualization. This suggests that teachers are capable of helping learners understand historical events by situating them within their proper time, place, and social context, thereby strengthening learners' comprehension of historical developments.

Teachers in the selected public elementary schools demonstrate a high level of historical thinking skills in terms of corroboration. This implies that teachers effectively encourage learners to examine multiple perspectives and compare different historical accounts, which supports balanced interpretation and a deeper understanding of historical issues.

Teachers demonstrate a high level of instructional strategy utilization in Social Studies instruction, particularly in the use of inquiry-based and constructivist approaches, technology integration, cooperative learning, and differentiated teaching practices. These strategies contribute to the creation of interactive and engaging classroom environments that support effective learning experiences.

Learners in the selected public elementary schools exhibit very high levels of behavioral and emotional engagement and a high level of cognitive engagement in Social Studies learning. This indicates that learners are actively involved in classroom activities and demonstrate a strong interest in the subject, although further opportunities may be needed to strengthen higher-order thinking and deeper analysis of historical concepts.

Recommendations

Teachers may continue strengthening their sourcing practices by incorporating more activities that involve evaluating historical documents, analyzing primary sources, and guiding learners in examining the credibility of historical information. Professional development programs focusing on historical inquiry strategies may further enhance teachers' ability to cultivate critical thinking among learners.

Teachers may further improve contextualization practices by integrating more contextual learning tools such as timelines, historical simulations, and situational analysis activities. These strategies may help learners better understand the relationship between historical events and the social conditions in which they occurred.

Teachers may expand the use of corroboration strategies by providing learners with more opportunities to analyze different historical sources and compare contrasting perspectives. Classroom activities that involve debates, document analysis, and collaborative interpretation of historical evidence may further strengthen learners' analytical skills.

School administrators and instructional leaders may continue supporting teachers in implementing varied instructional strategies through professional development programs, mentoring initiatives, and collaborative lesson planning. Providing access to instructional materials and digital resources may further enhance the effectiveness of Social Studies teaching practices.

Teachers may design learning activities that promote deeper cognitive engagement among learners, such as inquiry projects, reflective discussions, and analytical writing tasks. Future researchers may also examine other factors influencing learner engagement in Social Studies, including classroom environment, learner motivation, and teacher beliefs, to further enrich understanding of effective teaching practices.

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