



From Citizenship Transmission to Transformative Pedagogy: The Evolving Traditions of Social Studies Education

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Abstract

This systematic literature review analyzes the global evolution of Social Studies Education traditions through thematic analysis of 59 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2016 and 2026. Framed by four traditions Citizenship Transmission, Social Science, Reflective Inquiry, and Social Transformation. The study examines how globalization, mass migration, and political polarization reshape the field. It maps shifts in traditions, identifies pedagogical innovations, diagnoses barriers to transformative practice, and proposes a cohesive scientific framework. Findings show a movement from transmission-centered models toward integrative and critical pedagogies, although a gap persists between transformative rhetoric and classroom practice. Key themes include critical citizenship, curriculum decolonization, the affective turn, civic reasoning, and teacher education reform. The review recommends integrative approaches, including the C3 Framework, with a stronger emphasis on affective dimensions and decolonization to prepare empowered global citizens. Its novelty lies in its cross-national synthesis and unified foundation for social studies as a transformative discipline.

Keywords: Social Studies Learning Traditions; Citizenship; Social Transformation; Integrative Curriculum

Abstrak

Tinjauan literatur sistematis ini menganalisis perkembangan global tradisi Pendidikan IPS melalui analisis tematik terhadap 59 artikel terindeks Scopus yang diterbitkan pada 2016–2026. Kajian ini berpijak pada empat tradisi utama, yaitu Citizenship Transmission, Social Science, Reflective Inquiry, dan Social Transformation, untuk menelaah bagaimana globalisasi, migrasi massal, dan polarisasi politik membentuk arah perkembangan bidang ini. Studi ini memetakan pergeseran tradisi, mengidentifikasi inovasi pedagogis, mendiagnosis hambatan praktik transformatif, serta menawarkan kerangka ilmiah yang terpadu. Temuan menunjukkan adanya pergeseran dari model berbasis transmisi menuju pedagogi integratif dan kritis, meskipun masih terdapat kesenjangan antara retorika transformatif dan praktik kelas. Tema utama mencakup kewarganegaraan kritis, dekolonisasi kurikulum, dimensi afektif, penalaran sipil, dan reformasi pendidikan guru. Kebaruan studi ini terletak pada sintesis lintas negara dan fondasi ilmiah terpadu bagi Pendidikan IPS sebagai disiplin transformatif.

Kata kunci: Tradisi Pembelajaran IPS; kewarganegaraan; Transformasi Sosial; Kurikulum Integratif

A. Introduction

Social Studies Education occupies a central position in the formation of civic consciousness, critical thinking, and democratic participation among students. As a multidisciplinary field drawing from history, geography, economics, sociology, and political science, Social Studies serves a dual purpose: transmitting shared national values and equipping students with the analytical tools to interrogate and respond to complex social realities (Banks 2017; Evans 2018). Despite its transformative potential, research consistently shows that classrooms in many countries remain dominated by passive, transmission-based approaches, in which students memorize facts and teachers function as the primary source of knowledge. This enduring gap between theoretical aspiration and pedagogical practice constitutes one of the most persistent problems in the field (Evans 2018).

The intellectual history of Social Studies has been characterized by the tension among four major competing traditions: Citizenship Transmission, Social Science, Reflective Inquiry, and Social Transformation (Carano 2019; Evans 2018; Herrmann-Israel and Byram 2023). The Citizenship Transmission tradition positions Social Studies as a vehicle for instilling loyalty, national values, and civic norms. The Social Science tradition emphasizes disciplinary concepts and methods borrowed from history, geography, economics, and sociology. Reflective Inquiry centers the learner as an active problem solver engaging real-world social issues. The Social Transformation tradition, most closely aligned with critical pedagogy, seeks to develop in students the capacity and will to challenge injustice and advocate for structural change. These traditions have not evolved in isolation; rather, they have been continuously recontextualized in response to global forces such as migration, digitalization, economic inequality, and political polarization (Banks 2017; Veugelers 2021).

Several contemporary developments have added new dimensions to this debate. Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education (CMCE) has emerged as a framework that pushes beyond cultural celebration to address power, inequality, and discrimination (Ramirez, Salinas, and Epstein 2016). The affective turn in Social Studies scholarship highlights the role of emotion, empathy, and moral consciousness in shaping civic identity (Helmsing 2014; Parker 2024). Curriculum decolonization has challenged the dominance of Western epistemologies by demanding that indigenous, minority, and Global South perspectives be recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge (Miles 2021; Sabzalian 2019). Together, these developments signal a growing consensus that Social Studies must become more

inclusive, critical, and transformative. Nevertheless, previous reviews of the literature have not provided a systematic cross-national synthesis of these developments, nor have they proposed a coherent integrative framework. This represents a significant research gap that the present study addresses.

Despite the growing scholarly discourse on transformative Social Studies, no systematic cross-national review has synthesized these developments or proposed an integrative scientific framework for the field. This constitutes the research gap that motivated the present study. The objectives of this research are (1) to map the evolution of Social Studies traditions from an international perspective, (2) to identify emerging pedagogical innovations and new paradigms, (3) to diagnose barriers to critical and transformative Social Studies education, and (4) to recommend a more cohesive and integrative scientific framework for the field. The novelty of this study lies in its cross-national synthesis drawn from 59 Scopus-indexed articles (2016–2026) and its proposal of an integrative framework that bridges competing traditions to prepare reflective, justice-oriented, and globally competent citizens.

B. Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design with a thematic analysis approach. The SLR method was selected because it enables a systematic, replicable, and transparent synthesis of existing research across multiple outlets, providing a comprehensive picture of scholarly trends and developments within a field over time (Creswell 2018). (1) Research Type and Approach: This study is qualitative in nature, employing a systematic literature review design combined with thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns and conceptual categories across the reviewed articles. (2) Data and Data Sources: The data consist of 59 peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus, published between 2016 and 2026. The ten-year publication window was selected to capture contemporary developments while ensuring sufficient scholarly depth. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies were included. (3) Data Collection Technique: Articles were retrieved from the Scopus database using a structured keyword search strategy. The search terms used were “competing traditions in social studies education,” “citizenship education,” “social studies pedagogy,” and “civic education.” Inclusion criteria required that articles be written in English, published in peer-reviewed journals, and directly address pedagogy, curriculum, or policy in Social Studies or citizenship education. Articles that were editorials, book reviews, or conference abstracts were excluded. (4) Data

Analysis Technique: All selected articles were subjected to inductive thematic analysis following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (as adapted in (Creswell 2018): familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Themes were cross-validated through peer discussion among the research team to ensure consistency and credibility.

C. Result and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the 59 reviewed articles yielded four key patterns that characterize the evolution of Social Studies Education traditions across national contexts. These findings are discussed below and compared with existing research and theory. The first finding is the persistent gap between rhetorical aspiration and classroom reality. Despite decades of scholarship advocating for critical, reflective, multicultural, and transformative Social Studies pedagogies, classroom practices across many countries continue to be dominated by transmission-oriented approaches. Students in K-12 settings are still frequently taught through rote memorization, fact delivery, and socialization into values deemed politically safe (Evans 2018).

The existence of this phenomenon shows that progressive changes in academic discourse do not necessarily lead to corresponding changes in pedagogical practice. This situation is hardly new, with Evans (2018) pointing out that little has changed since the late 1970s. It matters here because it highlights an issue with the structure of Social Studies education. If for nearly 50 years the notion of critical learning has been talked about with pedagogical approaches that are still largely transmissive, then clearly the issue does not concern teaching models alone. Instead, it is found within the larger context of the surrounding system that shapes the curriculum (what is taught), assessment (how students are measured), teacher education (who teaches it), school culture and climate, and world political-applied learning education (education as a system). Put another way, Social Studies reform is not simply a rebranding exercise; it requires redefining the education ecosystem.

The second common pattern is a demand for a more inclusive curriculum. Research indicates that a Social Studies curriculum that focuses on the traditional national narratives overlooks minority experiences. This type of curriculum can

lead to the illusion that only a few groups are at the front and center of history and citizenship, or they somewhat disappear, such as an afterthought. Thus, decolonizing and multicultural approaches are necessary to foster truly inclusive and effective citizenship education (Falkner and Payne 2021; Sabzalian 2019).

Even more importantly, the requirement for a systemic curriculum is not simply one of symbolism. The problem is not simply whether or not minority groups are included in the textbooks, but whether their experiences, ways of knowing, experiences of suffering and struggle, contributions count as credible elements of social knowledge. To create an inclusive curriculum means the shift between students from Knowing Diversity to Understanding Injustice within Diversity. Thus, inclusion is more than a celebration of culture; it must advance towards structural awareness.

The third pattern is that integrative models work. The research from different countries suggests that the integration of other traditions of Social Studies is better than focusing on one tradition only. For example, Social Studies education can be structured to continue imparting basic knowledge and citizenship values while at the same time creating an opening for active engagement, dialogue, discourse and critical reflection (Dingili and Kefa Simwa Lidundu 2024) as illustrated by the Transmission Transactional Reflection model employed in Kenya. This is an important finding because it means that social studies have an issue of a false dichotomy (transmission vs. transformation), not a real one, and should be making choices about how to design interrelations between both.

It provides an opportunity to steer clear of both extremes with respect to an integrative model. The first extreme is an overly transmissive approach to Social Studies instruction, where students become passive consumers of knowledge. The other extreme is critique without due caution in reliance on knowledge. Mastering content, applying thinking skills, knowing values around civic life, and engaging in social action require even more room than what we wish forces us into to make good Social Studies. Therefore, the inclusion of traditions is one of the key developments for Social Studies education in the future.

The fourth trend is the influence of politics and polarization on Social Studies learning. With an increasingly polarized political environment, teachers say their autonomy in teaching controversial issues suffers, research reveals. As a result of conservative criticism, public pressure, state policies, and fear of parental or institutional reactions, teachers often opt for safer strategies. Teachers may modify,

restrict, or even abandon important educational objectives (Stitzlein 2024; Waller 2025) in these contexts.

This finding illustrates how Social Studies education is always politically situated. Social Studies educators do not only teach society; in many cases, they interact with a society influenced by clashing values, interests, and ideologies. If society is divided, then the classroom gets impacted. Hence, handling of controversial issues by teachers becomes imperative. Educators must be pedagogically deft in designing dialogical spaces that are safe and available, evidence-laden yet not breeding grounds for either indoctrination (see the example above) or false neutrality (a place where real disagreements cannot happen).

1. The Development of Traditions in Social Studies World Wide

The 125-year history of Social Studies education can be repeatedly conceptualized through the conflict between four classical traditions: citizenship transmission, social science, reflective inquiry, and social transformation. Like the local commercials, though, these traditions have not existed in isolation in a 21st-century world. Multiple studies demonstrate that Social Studies traditions have been recast based on the unique social, political, historical and cultural contexts of each respective country.

For instance, in Kenya, an integrative model of “Transmission, Transactional, and Reflection” emerged that seeks a balance between engendering civic knowledge along with students’ active participation. Under this model, Social Studies education does not have to make a binary choice between training disciplined citizens or critical citizens. A learning design for integrated citizenship education, where students are both receivers of values and reflective subjects enabling them to understand their social reality (Dingili and Lidundu 2024), can help integrate the two.

Instead, in Chile, the transition from a theoretical civic education to citizenship education that considers historical thinking demonstrates the society-directedness of Social Studies. Historical thinking was not just used to understand history but to also have a perspective on civic issues happening in the moment. It follows, then, that history within Social Studies does not merely die with chronology; it likewise serves as a form of social and political reflection (Mayorga 2024).

On the other hand, in states with deep internal conflicts, as is the case today between Israel and Hamas, citizenship education can be an ideological battleground. The transmission tradition is usually employed to shape an esoteric sectarian

national identity that helps enforce a particular model of political stability (Cohen 2019). This condition illustrates that citizenship transmission is not tetra-tomically neutral. It may serve as the basis of national unification, but it might also become an instrument for reproducing hegemonic accounts that exclude others.

In contrast, Canadian curriculum reform has been significantly shaped by a culture of reconciliation or redress. Here the work of social change and critical pedagogy is employed to confront historical harms, most notably with Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism (Miles 2021). This variation demonstrates that Social Studies stays embedded in collective memory and wounds of history and the nation-building projects each country follows. Thus, while the four traditions framework is universal in nature, its application with respect to empiricism in-depth depends heavily on social reality including reconciliation needs, political scenarios, and globalization (Banks 2017; Veugelers 2021).

2. Instructional Innovation and New Paradigms

This review also highlights different pedagogical innovations that enhance the face of current Social Studies education. Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education (CMCE) is the most famous among them. This technique does not involve a basic presentation of culture, which includes native attire, food, language, or festive occasions unique to an ethnic settler. CMCE encourages students to think beyond this and understand diversity in the context of power, inequality, access, and social justice (Ramirez et al. 2016; Vickery 2016).

The second is Black Critical Patriotism. This concept puts an end to the blind patriotism narrative, which asks of citizens their full love of country without exception, without questioning its injustices. Critical patriotism is that realization, namely, that loving your country means being critical of injustices and fighting for a more equitable common life. Epistemologies of marginalized peoples are acknowledged as valid forms of knowledge in citizenship education within this setting (Busey and Walker 2017).

For example, Pedagogy of Difference emphasizes dialogue among conflicting positions. In an increasingly polarized society, this approach becomes all the more critical. Schools are not spaces where difference must be resisted (Alwi and Syauqi 2025); rather, they can become classrooms in which schools for democracy weave critical thinking, critical listening, and democratic maturity into the fabric of our social reality (Alexander 2018). But teachers will need to monitor sensitive, evidence-based discussions in a manner that does not replicate the power relations of the classroom where some groups enter into privilege.

The importance of the affective turn is also noted in this review. Social Studies does not only work on the cognitive level but also on an emotional level. Pride, shame, fear, and anger are emotions that shape social and civic identity, empathy and care. Helmsing (2014) provides an important reminder when he states that feelings should not be seen as intrusions on rationality in Social Studies learning but rather as resources of social understanding requiring and benefiting from critical reflection (Parker 2024). The idea of relationality and care, for example, has surfaced as an argument against procedural or apolitical models of citizenship education. Education and Social Studies education need to embody humane relationships, care, and intersubjective connectedness (Shehneh 2024).

3. Implementation Barriers: The Mismatch Between Rhetoric and Reality

Despite the momentum towards transformative Social Studies education, this review concludes that implementation is not without multiple challenges. A primary roadblock is the prevalence of market logic-based education policy. In the context of Chile, for instance, when sharing experiences, we urgently need issues that stem from efficacy, performance, and accountability to not take over reflective inquiry (Cavieres-Fernández 2017) If education is more concerned with narrow, measurable learning outcomes, it becomes challenging to develop dialogical, critical, and socially issue-based Social Studies learning.

Institutionalized respect for authority, together with the emphasis on students' performance in discipline-oriented classrooms, serves as another gatekeeper, as order, obedience, and content delivery remain the Achilles' heel of traditional school culture. In this culture, teachers who want to engage in transformative pedagogy typically contend with institutions, some colleagues, , and even students resistant to two-way learning (Weinberg and Flinders 2018). However, this situation demonstrates that Social Studies learning does not change on the basis of effective teaching practices alone but needs a school culture to enact progressive changes.

Political hurdles are also very nearly apparent. Conservative condemnations of critical learning often render teachers feeling unsafe discussing issues related to race, relations of power, colonial and contemporary exploitation or inequality (imperial, local, or national), gender, or war and civil political conflict (Stitzlein 2024; Waller 2025). In this context, teachers may well steer clear of potentially sensitive issues in order to protect their security as professionals. But avoiding this can diminish the primary role of Social Studies as a site for democratic education.

It has been noted that new teachers frequently have difficulty in dealing with classrooms that are complex and polarized, as they have important ideals but not enough conceptual tools (pedagogical experiences and institutional support) (Martell, Martinelle, and Chalmers 2024). Consequently, when it comes to Social Studies reform, it ought not be limited to curricular reformation. Teacher motivation must then reinforce teacher education, professional mentoring, teacher learning communities, and pedagogical protection policies to ensure critical social issue teaching qualifications for teachers.

4. The Role of Technology and Information Literacy

As we get deeper into the digital age, information and technology literacy has been a vital component of Social Studies education (Wijaya, Nugraha, and Khomarudin 2024). Students today are immersed in an open and rapid information ecosystem prone to disinformation, manipulation, hate speech, and algorithmic polarization. As such, Social Studies education has to assist students in learning not just how to seek information but how information is produced, shared, and used as a means of creating influences on the public (Cuenca 2021; Liao and Yuan 2024).

But this review also demonstrates that the notion of critical thinking in teacher education is prototypically limited. In particular, Miller et al. (2023) elaborate that "critical thinking" tends to be perceived only as a means of evaluating information, instead of it being an instrument to comprehend social inequality and advocate for justice. In the field of Social Studies education information literacy is more than just recognizing real news versus fake news. Which needs to be widened out into a capacity to read power shapes in both the making of knowledge and algorithmic bias and epistemic injustice and construct common knowledge democratically.

And so this challenge is linked to the epistemic crisis in liberal democracy. It's hard to identify a shared truth in polarized societies. Inevitably, facts are set against opinions, scientific results are politicized, and digital platforms create echo chambers. This also complicates the goals of Social Studies education in a world where teachers are not expected only to teach social knowledge but rather help students learn to trust evidence-based truth-seeking (Parker 2024).

It is especially true for students from marginalized backgrounds who lack interpretive tools. Having little access to good-quality information, academic language, discussion spaces, and critical guidance to help make sense of the social reality puts them at risk of experiencing epistemic injustice (Merzifonluoglu and Hamarat 2022). So, following this definition, technology must be integrated into

Social Studies not only by means of digital devices. This must be focused on augmenting students' ability to inquire philosophically, dialogue democratically, and collaboratively construct knowledge.

5. Recommendations: A Unified Science of Social Studies

The research findings from this review imply that the future of Social Studies education calls for a much stronger, more cohesive, and more integrative foundational science. Essentially, this structure needs to connect the different traditions, which we see so often in opposition with each other. Citizenship transmission needs to be retained as the basis of our constitution as a pool of shared identity and values. The social science tradition in this regard holds particular importance to establish a conceptual and methodological foundation. The importance of reflective inquiry for educating thinking as a formative tool of decision-making. On the other hand, social transformation contributes to critical consciousness and action in relation to justice-oriented citizenship.

The C3 Framework is one example of such a reference website because it promotes an inquiry-based learning approach that is relevant to academic readiness, career preparedness, and civic life. Social Studies learning can only go beyond the mere embedding of curriculum content by utilizing a framework that incorporates questions, inquiry, evidence analysis, and communicating conclusions as well as social action (Cuenca 2021; Ojala et al. 2025) consistent with this approach. Nevertheless, these frameworks should be carefully and reflexively adapted to the local context so they do not turn into technical tools, separating students from their social reality.

Civic reasoning should be the singular centerpiece of this new Social Studies education framework. Civic reasoning allows for mature understanding of public issues, evidence weighing, cross-listening, and some well-heeding of the commons (Lyiscott, RÃ-os, and Clark 2023). This is particularly important in a democratic context because citizens need opinions, but they also need to be able to justify them both ethically and rationally. Also, we need to place you as laboratories of democracy. This implies that schools should not only teach democracy but also live it every day. Students need authentic experiences of dialogue, deliberation, differences of opinion, cooperation, responsibility, and social participation. To that end, Social Studies education needs to build cognitive and non-cognitive skills vital for engaging citizens (Hillygus and Holbein 2023).

Finally, this review argues for curriculum policies that facilitate intercultural dialogue and reframing in the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty within local

contexts while also seeking to valorize other international frameworks amidst literacy learning experiences in Social Studies so that all students can see themselves represented despite their diversity (Chan, Sivane Hirsch, and Hicham Tiflati 2024; Miles 2021; Sabzalian 2019). Social Studies education needs to transition from teaching society knowledge toward forming students who critically understand the importance of society, humanely care for diversity, and responsibly take part in social change.

So, the trend in the evolution of Social Studies learning traditions is evident: from transmission to reflection, from memorization to inquiry, from singular to pluralistic accounts, from passive citizenship (or non-citizenship) to active citizenship, and from neutral social learning overall to critical and transformative social learning. Yet that change is more pronounced in academic writing than at the pedagogical level. Consequently, for the future of Social Studies education, the most pressing challenge is to prevent critical, inclusive, and transformative ideas from becoming simply academic rhetoric rather than learning experiences for students.

D. Conclusions

Based on a systematic analysis of 59 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2016 and 2026, this study concludes that Social Studies Education has shifted from prescriptive and transmission-centered approaches toward more integrative, critical, and transformative pedagogical models. The findings show that no single tradition is sufficient to address the complexity of contemporary civic life. Instead, Social Studies Education needs to integrate Citizenship Transmission, Social Science, Reflective Inquiry, and Social Transformation to develop students' civic knowledge, critical reasoning, democratic values, and social agency. This study also highlights the growing importance of critical citizenship education, curriculum decolonization, affective engagement, civic reasoning, and critical information literacy. Inclusive curricula that recognize minority experiences, indigenous knowledge, and marginalized perspectives are essential for creating equitable learning environments. At the same time, empathy, care, and moral consciousness should be treated as core pedagogical competencies in democratic education. However, political polarization and institutional conservatism remain major barriers to transformative practice. Therefore, teacher education must prepare educators to address controversial issues responsibly through culturally responsive teaching, controversial pedagogy, and strong institutional support. This study recommends adopting integrative frameworks such as the C3 Framework, reforming teacher education, protecting teachers' professional autonomy, and

expanding cross-national research, particularly in non-Western and post-colonial contexts. Overall, bridging the gap between transformative rhetoric and classroom practice remains the most urgent challenge for Social Studies Education. This requires coordinated reform in curriculum, assessment, teacher education, policy, and school culture.

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