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### Understanding Historical Literacy and Thinking Skills through the Lens of Social Studies: Perspectives of In-service Teachers

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#### Abstract

This study examined the historical literacy and thinking skills of in-service teacher candidates teaching social studies in Bhutan, focusing on the five interrelated historical literacy and thinking skills. The purpose of the study was to study the level of proficiency and ability of in-service teachers in social studies instruction using different thinking skill techniques. The research sample (N=238) consisted of in-service teacher candidates who taught social studies in schools and in-service teachers from Paro College of Education pursuing MEd in Primary Social Studies (years 1 & 2). For the investigation, a mixed method was employed. Data was collected through survey questionnaires, open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews from 10 in-service teachers. Key findings revealed that most participants had a strong grasp of historical literacy and thinking skills. The study also found that insufficient teacher preparation and resources prevented social studies teachers from effectively teaching historical literacy and thinking skills.

**Keywords:** history, historical literacy, historical thinking skills, in-service teacher, social studies

## Introduction

In Bhutan, the social studies curriculum comprises various academic disciplines, including history, geography, economics, civics and government, culture, and environment. One core discipline is history. Themes or topics under history subject (in social studies) include home and history of a family, spiritual figures and their contributions, places of worship, attitudes towards landforms and mountains, culture and traditions, sacred historical sites, national symbols and their significance, festivals and holidays, and the origin of the earth. The Centre for School Curriculum Development (CSCD, 2025) remarks that children are provided opportunities to apply inquiry skills through hands-on experiences such as exploration, observation, investigations, surveys, measurement and field trips with the goal to help them understand and live successfully.

According to Nokes (2011), historical literacy is to read, analyse, write, and gain knowledge from historical sources. Historical literacy is made easier by factual and conceptual understanding, which also increases as students engage in historical literacy activities. The research entitled, *“Understanding historical literacy and thinking skills through the lens of social studies, perspectives of in-service teachers”* studied students who are currently pursuing MEd in Primary Social Studies and a few in-service schoolteachers. The study focussed on the five interconnected dimensions (standards) of historical thinking skills: chronological reasoning skills, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research capabilities, and historical issue analysis and decision-making in social studies (NCHS, 1996; Brophy et al., 2013).

The focus of the study was to create awareness among Bhutanese in-service social studies teachers about the value of historical literacy and thinking skills. It also aimed at assessing the degree of proficiency and ability of in-service teachers through historical critical thinking techniques. Further, the research was expected to investigate challenges faced by in-service teachers in integrating historical knowledge, values, and skills, offering a framework for future studies on historical thinking in social studies.

## **Problem Statement**

Historical thinking skills in social studies teaching are essential cognitive abilities students develop to understand and analyse historical content. Through this, students can analyse, think critically, and become historians using these basic historical literacy skills right from the early grades in schools. In support of this, Nokes (2011) stated that history education allows students to understand the rationale behind historical figures' actions, considering their unique perspective and values.

It also develops and enriches an informed collective memory as part of the students' lifelong learning. The researcher observed that most of the in-service social studies teachers teaching the subject for the past many years (ranging from 3 – 10 years) do not have sufficient training in historical literacy, thinking skills and pedagogical skills although they had studied some general history lessons during their undergraduate studies. Teachers struggle to connect historical knowledge, values, skills, behaviours and events to students' lives and experiences, and have sketchy preparation to teach historical concepts. Inadequate access to resources like textbooks, sources, artefacts, oral histories, and technology in schools also hinders the ability to teach the subject.

One of the main aims of the Royal Education Council (REC, 2021) was to impart civic competence through historical and scientific information, abilities, and attitudes of students needed to take roles of decent citizens in a democratic society. As such, Wineburg (2001) revealed that teachers' inclination to teach social studies using historical concepts and values was mostly concentrated on helping pupils' memories of significant historical dates, figures' names, and key historical information that might not have any bearing on them (cited in Martin, 2012).

There is ample literature in the field of historical literacy and thinking skills, especially in the USA, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Australia. However, no research has been conducted in the Bhutanese context till date, and the literature on this study is limited. This problem impacts the quality of delivery and assessment of students' work in learning and teaching social studies. The study aimed at finding out the reasons behind this problem and exploring potential solutions to revitalise training, preparation and understanding of historical literacy and thinking skills.

## **Research Objectives**

The research aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Raise awareness among Bhutanese in-service social studies teachers regarding the significance of historical literacy and thinking skills.
2. Evaluate the extent to which in-service teachers integrate and teach historical knowledge and concepts in social studies classrooms.
3. Investigate challenges faced by in-service teachers when incorporating historical literacy and thinking skills into their social studies lessons.
4. Assess the proficiency and ability of in-service teachers in applying historical critical thinking techniques.
5. Provide a framework for future investigations and include stakeholders in integrating the principles and ideas of historical thinking in social studies lessons.

## **Research Questions**

The research key question, *“What is the understanding value of historical literacy and historical thinking skills among the in-service teacher candidates through the lens of social studies?”* is divided into the following sub-questions:

1. What are the values of historical literacy and thinking skills in teaching social studies?
2. How do in-service teachers perceive and utilise historical literacy and thinking skills in their social studies teaching?
3. What challenges do in-service teachers encounter when incorporating historical literacy and thinking skills into social studies lessons?

## **Significance of the Study**

The Royal Education Council (2021) aims to develop civic competency in students through historical knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Integrating several disciplines into the social studies curriculum and creating connections, interactions, and interdependencies in teaching students about people and their environment is intended to foster transversal skills and competencies (REC, 2021).

Learning historical skills better equips students to evaluate current affairs and make thoughtful decisions. Robinson (2019) also noted that thinking skills help students understand historical events and their relevance on a deeper level. This allows students to interact with complex historical narratives and consider multiple perspectives. Nokes (2011) stated that historical education aims to develop young people and adults who can navigate and write the complex texts of the Information Age, rather than necessarily turning them into mini-historians.

Children can develop hypotheses and assumptions and use them to find, assess, and synthesise data. Children in upper primary grades can learn historical senses and behaviours in social studies through historical concepts and thinking skills. Cooper (2013) upholds that children's creative talents in studying history are developed when they design their historical representations and critically assess historical facts (cited in Palacios et al., 2020, p. 96).

According to Hasan (2010), effective historical thinking involves guiding students to acquire the knowledge necessary for understanding the procedures used to explore historical aspects, reconcile conflicting interpretations, and grasp the construction of historical knowledge and values. Studies by NCSH (1996) and Brophy et al. (2013) reveal that equipping children with historical literacy and thinking skills fosters essential historical research abilities. These include the capacity to formulate questions, acquire, and critically examine historical data. Complementing this, Cooper (2002) argued that exposing elementary school students to historical sources builds their confidence to articulate ideas about the composition, content, origins, and functions of historical artefacts (Palacios et al., 2020, p.96), and can instil a robust historical understanding and disposition in children.

## **Literature Review**

### *Historical literacy*

Historical literacy is the ability to think historically, understand the chronology of events, recognise multiple perspectives, analyse primary sources and appreciate the complexity of the past (Wineburg, 2001). The American Historical Association (2016) has defined historical literacy as a set of skills and knowledge necessary to engage with and understand the past. This includes placing events and

ideas in their proper historical context, analysing primary and secondary sources, and constructing well-reasoned arguments about historical questions. Historical literacy means the capacity to understand, evaluate, and interpret historical sources and narratives (Jones, 2018; Smith & Brown, 2020).

### *Historical thinking skills*

Historical thinking skills are those skills which involve the ability to identify, evaluate, and use evidence to make historical claims and arguments (Wineburg, 2001). According to Jones (2018), historical literacy and critical thinking abilities are fostered to assist students in developing into knowledgeable and active citizens who can critically evaluate and discuss societal issues. In agreement with Taylor (2003), Haydn et al., (2003) also stated that time, evidence, causation and consequence, change and continuity, significance, and understanding events and issues from the perspective of people in the past, making moral judgments on people of the past are the key ideas that improve historical understanding (cited in Wassermann & Maposa, 2009, p.53).

The five interconnected dimensions of historical thinking skills, i.e. historical thinking skills, chronological thinking skills, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research capabilities, and historical issues designed by the NCSH (1996) and Brophy et al. (2013) are elaborated below:

1. Chronological reasoning skills tells the difference between past, present, and future time. It recognises historical narratives' temporal structure, measures and computes calendar time, deciphers data provided in timelines, constructs timelines, and elucidates continuity and change across time.
2. Historical comprehension reinterprets historical passages in their literal sense, figures out the main issues the story tackles, applies imagination to historical narratives, and creates historical viewpoints.
3. Historical interpretation and analysis creates questions to direct research or analysis, identifies the author or source of a historical narrative or document, contrasts and compares various ideologies, moral standards, characters, behaviours, and establishments, discerns

between reality and fiction, take into account various viewpoints, and examine historical occasions, deeds, and obstacles.

4. Historical research skills create historical queries, gather historical information, analyse historical information, and gather the necessary historical context information to create a narrative and historical narration.
5. Historical issue analysis and decision-making identify prior concerns and problems, contrasts values and interests of the many parties involved, proposes solutions, weighs alternative courses of action, and assesses the decision's effects.

### **Research Design**

For this study, a mixed-method approach was employed as this method strengthens the study by providing multiple perspectives on complex research problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach also enables data triangulation and balances different research approaches (Greene et al, 2005), allowing for a more comprehensive and authentic understanding of historical literacy and thinking skills among in-service teachers.

### **Data Collection Tools and Procedures**

First, data were gathered through a survey questionnaire that included both closed and open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted. The main purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews was to confirm and elaborate on the answers provided to the short-form Likert Scale question. Descriptive statistics (percentage, frequencies, means, standard deviations) were calculated for each dimension of historical literacy and thinking skills to compare groups by gender, comprehension of historical thinking skills, programme level, and teaching experiences of social studies in schools.

A quantitative survey questionnaire was administered to study the opinions of in-service teachers (MEd in Primary Social Studies, years 1 & 2) at Paro College of Education, and a few in-

service teachers teaching social studies in schools. Additionally, to gain a deeper understanding and triangulate findings from participant responses and experiences, qualitative interviews were conducted with MEd in Primary Social Studies and in-service teachers, employing convenience sampling based on their accessibility and willingness.

The data collection for this study comprises three phases:

Phase one involved distributing survey questionnaires to in-service teacher candidates from Paro College of Education and school teachers teaching social studies in eastern, central, southern, and western Bhutan. Of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 238 participants responded, making 79.3% of the total. The survey questionnaires included were mostly Likert-type Short Responses followed by open-ended questions. Data collected through survey questionnaires was analysed and interpreted using statistical tools, mainly descriptive statistics, supported by SPSS Software. The survey and interview items were informed by recognised standards/ dimensions for historical thinking skills (National Council for History Standards, 1996; and Brophy et al., 2013), ensuring that the tools accurately measured the intended constructs and reflected key principles and history education.

Phase two involved open-ended questions at the end of survey questionnaires using some form of content analysis, such as a colour-coding technique. This was done to cross-check the consistency and trustworthiness of the participants responding to the survey questionnaire.

Phase three involved interviewing a total of 10 in-service social studies teachers. These teachers were from various schools, and a few were from those who enrolled on the MEd in Primary Social Studies Programme at Paro College of Education.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the College Research Committee (CRC). Permission to collect data was subsequently secured from both the relevant school administration and the participating classes at Paro College of Education. Individual informed consent was obtained



from all study participants. Throughout the study, participants' time, rights, privacy, and confidentiality were respected, aligning with the principle articulated by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) that researchers must not put participants at risk or intimidate them. The study adhered strictly to the research guidelines and standards prescribed by the College Research Committee.

## Data Analysis

### Demographic details of the participants

Of the 300 questions distributed, approximately 238 (79.3%) were received. The detailed demographic information is given in Table 1 below:

*Table 1: Details of demographic information*

<b>Details of Demographic Information</b>		
<b><i>Gender</i></b>	<b><i>Frequency</i></b>	<b><i>Percentage</i></b>
Male	152	63.9
Female	84	35.3
Others	2	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><i>Age Level</i></b>		
25-29 years	33	13.9
30-34 years	34	14.3
35-40 years	46	19.3
40 years and above	125	52.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><i>Education Level</i></b>		
PTC	34	14.3
BEd Primary	149	62.6
BEd Secondary	5	2.1
MA general	5	2.1
MEd in Primary Social Studies	25	10.5
Others	20	8.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><i>Teaching Experiences of Social Studies in Schools</i></b>		
0-2 years	58	24.4

3-5 years	41	17.2
6-8 years	23	9.7
8-10 years	15	6.3
10 years and above	101	42.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 above displays the detailed demographics of in-service social studies teachers. Male participants (n=152, 63.9%) slightly outnumbered females (n=84) and others (n=2). The largest age group was 40 years and above (n=125, 52.5%), aligning with the most experienced category (10+ years, n=101). In terms of education, BEd primary graduates comprised the largest group (n=149, 62.6%), followed by PTC (n=34, 14.3%) and MEd in Primary Social Studies (n=25, 10.5%). BEd Secondary and MA general degree holders represented the smallest categories, each contributing 2.1% (n=5).

## Findings and Discussion

The overall findings and discussion regarding in-service teachers' understanding of historical literacy and thinking skills through different dimensions are discussed below:

### *Dimension 1: Understanding historical literacy*

Table 2:

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.0	1	.4
	1.3	2	.8
	1.7	1	.4
	2.0	2	.8
	2.3	2	.8
	3.0	6	2.5
	3.3	8	3.4
	3.7	14	5.9
	4.0	88	37.0
	4.3	59	24.8
	4.7	20	8.4
	5.0	35	14.7

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Total 238 100.0

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About 37.0% (n=88) of respondents had a clear understanding of historical literacy for teaching social studies, followed by 24.8% (n=59) and 14.7% (n=35) in agreed categories (Table 2). This data, which is aligned to research question 1, “*What are the values of historical literacy and thinking in teaching social studies?*”, proclaimed that most in-service teachers viewed historical literacy positively, stating that they can analyse historical concepts, values and ideas. Historical literacy, as defined by interviewees (Resp. 3, 5, & 6), involves fundamental historical writing and reading skills crucial for developing historical reading, writing and reasoning. This aligns with Nokes (2011), who states historical literacy involves the skills to read, reason, write and learn with historical evidence.

*Dimension 2: Chronological reasoning skills*

Table 3:

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.0	1	.4
	1.3	1	.4
	1.7	1	.4
	2.0	3	1.3
	2.3	4	1.7
	2.7	3	1.3
	3.0	7	2.9
	3.3	9	3.8
	3.5	1	.4
	3.7	24	10.1
	4.0	85	35.7
	4.3	43	18.1
	4.7	27	11.3
	5.0	29	12.2
	Total	238	100.0

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Table 3 indicates that 35.7% (n=85) of respondents valued chronological reasoning skills in social studies teaching. This was followed by 18.1% (n=43) and 12.2% (n=29) who valued chronological reasoning skills. The survey results suggested that most in-service teachers believe chronological

reasoning skills, such as creating a timeline, analysing historical periods, and identifying patterns of change over time, are essential for teaching social studies. This finding is consistent with NCSH (1996) and Brophy et al. (2013), both of whom state that children use chronological reasoning skills to interpret and construct timelines by identifying change and continuity over time. Moreover, an interviewee (Resp. 2) emphasised that historical reasoning is crucial in social studies because it involves utilising “living examples”, and analytical thinking is necessary to address contemporary societal challenges. Similarly, the study by Van Boxtel and Van Drie (2018) stated that chronological thinking is at the heart of historical reasoning. Students should be able to distinguish between past, present and future times.

*Dimension 3: Defining historical comprehension*

Table 4:

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.0	2	.8
	1.3	1	.4
	1.7	3	1.3
	2.0	4	1.7
	2.3	3	1.3
	3.0	9	3.8
	3.3	10	4.2
	3.7	23	9.7
	4.0	86	36.1
	4.3	38	16.0
	4.7	22	9.2
	5.0	37	15.5
	Total	238	100.0

Only 2.5% (n=6) of in-service teachers (frequencies: 2, 1 & 3, respondents) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the definition of historical comprehension (Table 4). The most frequent responses were 4.0 (36.1%, n=86), 4.3 (16%, n=38), and 5.0 (15.5%, n=37). With a mean of 4.05 (SD=0.75), the data indicated that participants largely perceived understanding sources and recognising historical patterns as significant aspects of historical comprehension.

*Dimension 4: Understanding historical analysis and interpretation*

Table 5:

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.0	1	.4
	1.3	2	.8
	1.7	2	.8
	2.0	2	.8
	2.3	5	2.1
	2.7	3	1.3
	3.0	12	5.0
	3.3	26	10.9
	3.7	24	10.1
	4.0	76	31.9
	4.3	41	17.2
	4.7	21	8.8
	5.0	23	9.7
	Total	238	100.0

Table 5 shows that 31.9% (n=76) of respondents most frequently selected category 4.0 when demonstrating their understanding of historical analysis and interpretation. Category 4.3 was the second most frequent choice, representing 17.2% (n=41) of respondents. This indicated that a significant portion of the population defined historical comprehension as the ability to analyse and interpret historical events or eras.

*Dimension 5: Historical research capability*

Table 6:

	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.0	2	.8
	1.3	1	.4
	1.7	2	.8
	2.0	2	.8
	2.3	5	2.1
	2.7	1	.4
	3.0	13	5.5
	3.3	11	4.6

3.7	30	12.6
4.0	81	34.0
4.3	33	13.9
4.7	28	11.8
5.0	29	12.2
Total	238	100.0

The data in Table 6 highlights the perceived importance of historical research skills among in-service social studies teachers, using a 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest) rating scale. The most frequent responses were 4.0 (34.0%, n=81) and 4.3 (13.9%, n=33). These results indicated that participants considered selecting and organising evidence, contextualising historical data, and evaluating sources as valuable aspects of historical research capability. The importance of historical research capability in social studies was highlighted by interviewees (Resp. 6, 7, & 9), who noted its role in facilitating studies that go deeper than what is presented in texts. This perspective is supported by the studies of NCSH (1996) and Brophy et al. (2013), which indicate that historical research enables individuals to acquire and examine historical data, to use knowledge of the relevant time and place to construct historical narratives.

*Dimension 6: Understanding historical issue analysis and decision-making*

Table 7:

	Items	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.0	1	.4
	1.3	1	.4
	1.7	2	.8
	2.0	4	1.7
	2.3	4	1.7
	2.7	3	1.3
	3.0	16	6.7
	3.3	15	6.3
	3.7	23	9.7
	4.0	80	33.6
	4.3	41	17.2

4.7	21	8.8
5.0	27	11.3
Total	238	100.0

Table 7 indicates that 70.9% (n=169) of participants rated their understanding of historical issue analysis and decision-making at 4.0 or higher, which demonstrated strong comprehension and application of these skills within the surveyed population. Another 22.7% (n=54) scored between 3.0 and 3.7, suggesting adequate proficiency. Only 6.3% (n=15) disagreed or strongly disagreed, highlighting a small segment of in-service teachers who required improved understanding of historical issue analysis and decision-making skills for social studies teaching. Similarly, CSCD (2025) highlighted that children are provided inquiry skills through hands-on experiences such as exploration, observation, investigation, survey, measurement and field trips that help them to understand and live successfully in the technologically changing world. Further, children are expected to acquire critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, which allow them to grow into active citizens to support humanity (CSCD, 2025).

### **In-service teachers' perspectives on integrating historical literacy and yhinking skills in the social studies school curricula**

Table 8:

	Items	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1.0	5	2.1
	1.3	1	.4
	1.6	2	.8
	1.7	1	.4
	2.4	1	.4
	2.6	1	.4
	2.7	1	.4
	3.0	4	1.7
	3.1	1	.4
	3.3	1	.4
	3.4	3	1.3
	3.6	6	2.5

3.7	5	2.1
3.9	7	2.9
4.0	53	22.3
4.1	8	3.4
4.3	19	8.0
4.4	13	5.5
4.6	25	10.5
4.7	15	6.3
4.9	22	9.2
5.0	44	18.5
Total	238	100.0

About 22.3% (n=53) of in-service teachers believed that integrating historical literacy and thinking skills into social studies significantly benefited students by enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and subject comprehension (Table 8). Further, 18.5% (n=44) of teachers strongly agreed with this integration (rated 5.0). Only 4.9% (n=12) of the total sample disagreed or strongly disagreed. Based on the above data, these skills were thought to help students develop critical thinking, problem-solving and a deeper understanding and learning of social studies curricula. The studies by Nokes (2011), Jones (2018), and Robinson (2019) confirmed that teaching social studies through historical concepts and thinking skills develops historical senses and behaviours in early-grade students. This is achieved by fostering their ability to discover, interpret, and synthesise information, as well as formulate hypotheses and make decisions. The details of the findings in relation to research questions are given below:

1. What are the values of historical literacy and thinking skills in teaching social studies?

Historical literacy and thinking skills equip children not just with knowledge about history, but with the ability to inquire, analyse, interpret, and engage with the past in a meaningful way that prepares them for informed and active citizens in society. Open-ended responses (Resp. 3, 5, 6 & 15) indicated that *“historical literacy and thinking skills are essential in social studies learning and teaching as they enable students to understand the experiences of the past towards shaping the future”*. Similarly, respondents (Resp. 12, 16, 21 & 22) noted that developing historical thinking is important because it allows children to connect with



changes over time, thus appreciating past improvements and anticipating future development. These open-ended findings aligned with the Centre for School Curriculum Development (CSCD, 2025) objectives, which state that the social studies discipline primarily aims to develop children's capacity for informed decision-making within a culturally diverse, democratic, and interdependent global context. Additionally, its curricula cultivate transversal skills and competencies, fostering the civic competence, knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for responsible citizenship in a dynamic world. The studies by Jones (2018), and Smith and Brown (2020) also supported these findings, stating that in social studies education, historical literacy, i.e. comprehending, analysing, and interpreting historical sources, and thinking skills, i.e. critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are highly valued.

2. How do in-service teachers perceive and utilise historical literacy and thinking skills in their social studies teaching?

A core goal of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) is to ensure that the 21<sup>st</sup> century education meaningfully prepares children for their future roles as citizens of the country. In line with this, social studies subject explores the relationships, interaction and interdependence between humans and their environment. This subject is specifically designed to foster civic competence through the scientific and historical knowledge, skills and attitudes children need to be effective citizens in a rapidly changing society. On this note, the study by Brophy, Alleman, and Halvorsen (2013) asserted that many elementary students can learn many aspects of history with understanding, but disagreements remain about how much history is to be taught in the elementary grades. A few social studies teachers minimise the role of history and focus on current events and issues, emphasising critical discussion and reasoned decision-making. This literature is strongly supported by open-ended responses (Resp. 9, 11, 12, 14 & 17), which assert that students equipped with historical literacy and thinking skills can think rationally and make informed decisions. These findings further indicate that historical literacy and education provide a crucial timeline of historical values,

customs, traditions, and events, fostering self-realisation about our world and enabling appropriate adaptation.

3. What challenges do in-service teachers encounter when incorporating historical literacy and thinking skills into social studies lessons?

Historically, history teaching, with its emphasis on rote memorisation of facts, often disengaged students. Today, however, the history curriculum integrates skills like chronological reasoning, investigation, interpretation, perspective-taking, inquiry, research, critical source evaluation, and cause-and-effect analysis. This shift cultivates historical literacy, knowledge, values, skills, attitudes, and behaviours, essential for both individual student development and broader societal aspirations.

When it comes to the challenges, first, teacher preparedness emerged as a significant barrier, with numerous in-service teachers (Resp. 1, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, & 17) citing insufficient training and educational backgrounds as contributing factors. Second, the complexity of historical concepts and skills (Resp. 1, 3, 7 & 13) complicates effective teaching. Third, limited access to resources and technology presents a substantial hurdle. Open-ended responses (Resp. 1, 2, 5, 9, 14, 15, & 16) consistently highlighted the difficulty in obtaining reliable resources for teaching historical literacy and thinking skills within Social Studies. As one respondent (Resp. 18) stated, "*We don't have access to a wide range of historical sources and materials in schools to teach the expected concepts.*"

Despite these resource challenges, Gyeltshen and English (2021) emphasise that digital technology is a powerful tool for the 21<sup>st</sup> century education, fostering communication, collaboration, and learning across distances, representing a source of innovation and expanded potential. Similarly, the Centre for School Curriculum Development (CSCD, 2025) aims to equip children with inquiry skills through hands-on experiences like exploration, observation, investigation, surveys, measurement, and field trips. These experiences are intended to help students understand and thrive in a technologically evolving world, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills essential for active citizenship and supporting humanity.

## **Conclusion**

This study found that most of the participants have a good knowledge and understanding of the concept of historical literacy and thinking skills. It was also found that the in-service teachers who had pursued MEd in Primary Social Studies Programme (since 2021) and those who are pursuing the MEd in Primary Social Studies Programme at Paro College of Education have a higher level of understanding of historical literacy and thinking skills to teach social studies in schools.

It was also found that teaching historical literacy and thinking skills can develop a historical sense, responsibilities, and habits of mind relevant to contemporary society. Similarly, studying historical maps, pictures, and artefacts helped children learn about societal values and changes by giving them a sense of responsibility, positive social ideals, and experiential learning. It also helped them find locations through different historical sites and artefacts.

However, there were also some challenges in teaching historical literacy and thinking skills through social studies. First, lack of teachers' competency and knowledge of historical literacy and thinking skills prove to be stumbling blocks in teaching historical concepts in social studies. Second, lack of reliable resources in schools becomes a challenge in teaching such literacies and thinking skills to school-going children. Third, the complexity and diversity of historical concepts can cause young students to become confused with contemporary cultures and advancements.

All in all, social studies should be considered the main subject as it teaches students the social knowledge, values, skills and behaviours needed to function in everyday life. Children look at the cause-and-effect relationships (historical thinking skills) of things that occur or appear in everyday life and understand the value of their existence in society. Finally, to promote meaningful historical education in Bhutanese primary schools, policymaking, teachers, parents, community and educational institutions should come together and collaborate to overcome the challenges.

## **Limitations**

First of all, different levels of teaching experiences among the in-service social studies teachers present potential bias, as less experienced teachers may have different perspectives and pedagogical approaches. This limits the representativeness of the findings across all social studies teachers, reducing their generalisability. Many in-service teachers rotate subjects and do not teach social studies consistently each year. This intermittent engagement may produce responses based on limited or temporary understanding rather than sustained pedagogical insight, complicating result generalisation.

The exclusion of social studies teachers from certain dzongkhags reduces geographical and experiential diversity. Given each district's unique educational context, resource availability, and cultural factors, the findings may not apply to these omitted regions or the country as a whole. Financial limitations prevented a nationwide study, notably excluding remote primary schools that face distinct challenges such as limited infrastructure and resources.

## **Recommendations**

In schools, social studies should be taught as a core subject in the upper primary grades as it is the only subject that teaches history, geography, civics and culture, spiritual, lifestyles, physical and social environments through the lens of social knowledge, values, skills and behaviours in society. Teachers with knowledge and educational experiences in social sciences should be given priority to teach the subject in schools. Social studies as a subject should not be taught as a substitute for the sake of teaching as compared to other subjects in schools. Enough resources should be given to teach historical literacy, concepts and thinking skills through the lens of the social studies subject. Future studies need to focus on a larger sample population, including primary school teachers teaching social studies.

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