Article

Efficaciora Aditus: The Lived Experiences of Social Studies Teachers in Teaching Emerging Issues

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Abstract: In the Philippine K–12 curriculum context, Social Studies teachers are increasingly tasked with addressing emerging issues such as gender identity, socio-political conflicts, and environmental crises to develop students' critical thinking and civic engagement. Despite integrating *Kontemporaryong Isyu* into the Grade 10 curriculum, many teachers face significant challenges due to outdated and limited resources, lack of student interest, and the sensitive nature of these topics. This study explored the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in teaching emerging issues in selected public high schools in Santa Rosa, Laguna, focusing on their challenges and effective approaches. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Grade 10 Social Studies teachers using a qualitative research design grounded in transcendental phenomenology. Thematic analysis, guided by Colaizzi's framework, revealed challenges such as student discomfort and disengagement, instructional difficulties, and external factors affecting learning. However, participants highlighted effective approaches, including active and interactive methods, encouraged critical thinking, practiced ethical and inclusive teaching, managed discussions effectively, and continuously adapted through professional growth. Anchored on the Social Representations Theory and Freire's Critical Pedagogy, the study underscored the need for capacity-building programs to equip teachers with the skills to navigate complex classroom conversations. Findings contribute to educational policy and teacher training, advocating for learner-centered approaches that make classroom discussions of emerging issues inclusive, critical, and transformative. Ultimately, the research emphasizes Social Studies educators' vital role in fostering informed, empathetic, and socially responsible citizens.

Keywords: Lived Experiences, Social Studies Teachers, Emerging Issues, Critical Pedagogy, Philippine K–12 Curriculum, Instructional Challenges, Capacity-Building

1. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in cultivating socially responsible and critically engaged citizens in an era shaped by rapid globalization. As globalization reshapes economic systems, cultural identities, and political landscapes, Social Studies education becomes increasingly vital in equipping students with the analytical and ethical tools to navigate complex contemporary issues. Emerging issues or controversial topics such as abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, and the death penalty can challenge societal norms and elicit diverse opinions rooted in varying personal beliefs. While these topics offer valuable opportunities to foster critical thinking and civic responsibility, Filipino students often encounter them first through social media, where exposure to misinformation and polarization is common. The Philippines' low ranking in international assessments like PISA underscores a broader need to strengthen students' analytical reasoning and media literacy. Although the Grade 10 curriculum under Republic Act No.

10533 includes teaching contemporary issues, Filipino Social Studies teachers often lack continuous support and resources to implement this mandate effectively. Previous international studies highlight common barriers to teaching emerging issues, but limited research focuses on the Philippine context. Thus, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in teaching emerging issues in the classroom, focusing on the challenges they encounter and the effective approaches they use.

Research Questions

The primary objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in teaching emerging issues, highlighting the challenges they encountered and effective approaches they used. This was addressed through the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in teaching emerging issues in the classroom?

2. How do Social Studies teachers face the demands and challenges when teaching emerging issues?

3. What capacity-building program do Social Studies teachers need to teach emerging issues effectively?

2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in teaching emerging issues. The research was conducted in selected public high schools in Santa Rosa, Laguna, with 10 participants who were Grade 10 Social Studies teachers with at least two years of experience. Purposive sampling was employed, using criteria to select teachers based on their ability to provide significant insights into teaching emerging issues.

The researcher obtained ethical clearance, and the study adhered to the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and all responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and the researcher ensured that the data would be securely destroyed after the required retention period.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, allowing participants to share detailed experiences. Follow-up questions were included to probe deeper into the participants' responses. Experts in research and Social Studies reviewed the interview protocol to ensure validity. The data was recorded via video or audio or typed if preferred due to scheduling conflicts.

Thematic analysis was conducted using Colaizzi's (1987) Analytical Framework. This process involved transcribing the recorded data, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and verifying the results with participants to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Through this analytical framework, the researcher could gather and provide significant themes supported by relevant explanations that helped attain the objective of this study.

3. Results

The results of the study were analyzed and discussed according to each research problem. Since the main objective of the study was to explore the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in teaching emerging issues, the researcher has developed superordinate themes based on the codes derived from the participants' responses. These superordinate themes formed the major themes that address each research question.

Table 1. Summary of the Superordinate Themes and Major Themes Emerged in the Study.

Superordinate Themes	Major Themes
Student engagement and discomfort with emerging issues	Teaching and Learning Dynamics in Emerging Issues
Teacher Challenges in Teaching Emerging Issues	
External factors affecting student's learning	
Active and Interactive Teaching Methods	
Fostering student engagement through critical thinking	
Ethical teaching for diverse opinions	Addressing the Demands and Challenges in Teaching Emerging Issues
Classroom management and structured discussions	
Professional growth and adaptation to challenges	

The first major theme, teaching and learning dynamics in emerging issues, highlights the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers in teaching emerging issues focusing on the challenges they face in the classroom. This theme explores teachers' difficulties with student participation, student discomfort, and the external factors that affect students' learning.

The second major theme, addressing the demands and challenges in teaching emerging issues, presents how teachers face to the demands and challenges driven by teaching emerging issues. This theme includes the teachers' use of active and interactive teaching methods, fostering student engagement through critical thinking, ethical teaching practices for diverse opinions, classroom management and structured discussions, and professional growth and adaptation to challenges in teaching emerging issues.

Table 2. Summary of Subordinate Themes, Superordinate Themes, and Major Theme for Research Question 1.

Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes	Major Theme
1. Student discomfort to emerging issues	Student engagement and discomfort with emerging issues	Teaching and Learning Dynamics in Emerging Issues
2. Student resistance to emerging issues		
3. Lack of student engagement with media and awareness to emerging issues		
4. Student disinterest		
5. Student disinterest to broad topics		
6. Students are more aware of pop culture than emerging issues		
7. Lack of depth in student responses		
8. Student's poor historical recall		
9. Initial anxiety in teaching	Teacher challenges in teaching emerging issues	
10. Adjusting to different educational levels		
11. Handling heterogenous classroom		
12. Struggling on getting students attention		

13. Difficulty in separating personal views from teaching emerging issues

14. Challenge in identifying credible sources and fake news

15. Limited class time

16. Rapidly changing nature of emerging issues

17. Lack of resources

18. Student reliance on social media information

19. Learning gap due to pandemic

20. Student reliance on AI

21. Distractions because of gadgets

22. Lack of parental involvement on student's learning

External factors affecting student's learning

Table 2 shows the themes that emerged on the qualitative data gathered. The themes are about the lived experiences of social studies teachers teaching emerging issues, highlighting the challenges they encountered, which are derived from the answers of the participants.

Table 3. Summary of Subordinate Themes, Superordinate Themes, and Major Theme for Research Question 2.

Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes	Major Theme
1. Assigning News Watching to Increase Student Awareness		
2. Use of Group Reporting		
3. Random News Reporting		
4. Use of Experience-Based Learning		
5. Use of Inquiry-based learning Approach	Active and Interactive Teaching Methods	
6. Use of Socratic Questioning/Method		
7. Use of Scaffolding		
8. Experiential Learning Through Field Trips		
9. Using Real-Time Examples and Social Media		
10. Using Gamified Activities		
11. Utilizing Reflection or Reflective essay		Addressing the Demands and Challenges in Teaching Emerging Issues
12. Encouraging Critical Thinking and Source Verification		
13. Encouraging Students to Justify Their Opinions with Evidence		
14. Encouraging Healthy Debates to Develop Critical Thinking	Fostering Student Engagement through Critical Thinking	
15. Developing HOTS Questions		
16. Use of Open-ended Questions		
17. Exposing Students to Multiple Issues and Views		
18. Presenting Both Sides of Issues		
19. Neutral Mediation of Student Opinions	Ethical Teaching for Diverse Opinions	
20. Promoting a Culture of Mutual Respect		
21. Validating Student Opinions		

22. Commitment to Integrity in Teaching
23. Avoiding Bias in Teaching
24. Avoiding Oversharing of Personal Opinions
25. Careful Selection of Words
26. Using Disclaimers to Before Discussion
27. Establishing Guidelines Before Discussion
28. Encouraging Respect and Understanding for Different Opinions

Classroom Management and Structured Discussions

29. Promoting Orderliness in Discussion
30. Balancing Classroom Authority
31. Enhancing Teacher Content Knowledge
32. Keeping Up with Emerging Issues
33. Peer Support and Collaboration with Colleagues
34. Updating Materials for Relevance and Accuracy
35. Ensuring Accuracy of Information by Cross-Checking References
36. Adapting Technology in Teaching
37. Expanding Teaching Strategies
38. Adjusting to Different Students' Learning Level
39. Preparing and Planning for Potential Challenges
40. Providing Remediation for Struggling Students
41. Providing Supplementary Materials
42. Reevaluating and Refining Assessment Methods
43. Adjusting Teaching Strategies Based on Assessment Results

Professional Growth and Adaptation to Challenges

Table 3 shows the themes that emerged from the qualitative data gathered. The themes presented highlight how teachers face the demands and challenges of teaching emerging issues. Despite the challenges and struggles teachers encounter in teaching emerging issues, educators continue to find ways to overcome these hurdles.

4. Discussion

Teaching and Learning Dynamics in Emerging Issues

Student Engagement and Discomfort with Emerging Issues

The findings highlight several barriers to student engagement and discomfort when dealing with emerging issues. A common challenge is the discomfort students experience when discussing sensitive emerging topics, particularly gender-related topics. More than half of tertiary science students find asking and responding to questions difficult, with women feeling significantly less at ease than men [1]. This hesitation is often rooted in self-confidence issues and fear of judgment. Resistance to discussions on LGBTQ+ topics is another prevalent concern. It found that individuals with strong religious beliefs are more likely to hold unfavorable views toward transgender individuals due to doctrinal teachings [2]. Educators face significant challenges in fostering inclusive classroom environments, especially when traditional gender norms are questioned. Teachers often feel vulnerable and may face backlash when addressing these emerging issues, highlighting the need for institutional backing and professional development [3].

Disengagement and a lack of awareness of emerging issues can also be attributed to students' limited exposure to current events. Many students lack the necessary

background knowledge to engage meaningfully in discussions about contemporary social issues, mainly due to their minimal news media consumption. This information gap requires educators to exert additional effort in making such issues accessible and relevant [4]. Another factor affecting engagement is the perception of Social Studies or Araling Panlipunan as uninteresting, especially when discussing complex or broad topics. Students often view Social Studies as dull, which hinders efforts to maintain attention and participation [5]. Students frequently experience boredom and stress when studying dense topics such as terrorism or globalization [6,7].

Student disinterest in emerging issues is further exacerbated by their greater familiarity with pop culture over national or global matters. It was highlighted that pop culture shapes youth perceptions and may distract from more critical societal concerns. Educators must work to bridge this cultural divide to promote a more nuanced understanding of emerging issues [8]. The challenge is compounded by students' shallow understanding of these issues, which limits the development of critical thinking skills. Students often prioritize entertainment over academic topics, undermining the depth of classroom discussions and competency development [9].

Lastly, poor historical recall hinders students' connecting current events with historical contexts. This can be attributed to fragmented curricula and ineffective teaching strategies [10], while it emphasizes the importance of nurturing historical memory both in schools and at home [11].

In conclusion, there is a pressing need to enhance student engagement by creating interactive, relevant, and inclusive learning experiences. Strengthening students' historical awareness, promoting real-world applications, and supporting educators with proper tools and institutional support are vital in addressing these barriers to engagement with emerging issues.

Teacher Challenges in Teaching Emerging Issues

Teaching emerging issues demands extensive preparation, expertise, and constant updating of knowledge to ensure that the topics discussed remain appropriate and relevant to students. Social Studies teachers often face significant anxiety and uncertainty, particularly when assigned to unfamiliar grade levels or tasked to teach emerging political issues. This difficulty is consistent with Herman et al. [12], who found that instructing students of different developmental stages and addressing complex topics is a significant source of stress among middle school teachers. Similarly, teacher anxiety negatively impacts performance, particularly when navigating unfamiliar content [13].

Teachers' limited political engagement or personal unfamiliarity with emerging issues further hinders their confidence in leading classroom discussions. Hobbs and Porsch [14] support this, noting that insufficient subject-matter expertise and lack of confidence diminish teachers' ability to provide high-quality instruction on emerging issues. This highlights the urgent need for continuous professional development that equips educators with knowledge and pedagogical strategies for teaching emergent, sensitive topics.

Addressing diverse classroom dynamics is another significant challenge. Managing heterogeneous classes with varying student attitudes and cultural backgrounds requires strong personal engagement skills. The Professional Development Institute [15] emphasized that effective teaching in diverse settings necessitates strategies that engage all learners. Teachers must create inclusive environments, apply culturally responsive teaching practices, and introduce multiple perspectives to encourage broad-based student participation. A notable difficulty also arises in separating teachers' personal beliefs from professional obligations, where maintaining neutrality while correcting misconceptions remains a delicate balance that must be mastered.

Students' dependence on unreliable information sources, such as social media, further complicates instruction. Bouleimen et al. [16] found that students accept information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs without critically evaluating its validity. Teaching media literacy, while crucial, is made more difficult by the limited time allocated for classes. Muir [17] emphasized the importance of developing students' skills in evaluating information credibility; however, structural barriers such as the 45 minutes per subject remain inadequately addressed.

Additionally, the lack of updated reference materials impedes effective instruction. Available modules often reflect information as early as 2015, despite the need to teach in the rapidly evolving context of 2024. The scarcity of updated materials significantly hinders instruction, particularly where students' access to reliable internet sources is unequal [18,19].

Finally, the dynamic and ever-changing nature of emerging issues compounds these challenges. The need to constantly reassess news and current events to ensure their validity and relevance burdens teachers, making it increasingly difficult to maintain accuracy in classroom discussions.

External Factors Affecting Students' Learning

External factors significantly affect students' engagement and learning, particularly about emerging issues. A dominant concern is students' over-reliance on social media as a primary source of information, often leading to misconceptions and superficial understanding. This observation aligns with Patel [20], who found that misinformation during the pandemic notably influenced students' perceptions of public health measures. Similarly, the increasing prevalence of false information on platforms like YouTube and TikTok demonstrates how unchecked exposure to digital media can distort students' understanding of critical societal issues [21].

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to significant learning gaps, which remain evident in current classroom dynamics. Although independent digital learning became widespread during the pandemic, it failed to replicate the essential components of guided instruction, resulting in deficiencies in students' comprehension and analytical skills [22].

In addition to social media reliance, concerns about students' dependence on Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for academic outputs have emerged. Over-reliance on AI leads to diminished problem-solving abilities and reduced student engagement, consistent with findings by Swenson [23], who observed that heavy AI users exhibited marked declines in independent cognitive performance. This dependence compromises the authenticity of students' work and hampers the development of their critical and creative thinking skills. Furthermore, distractions caused by gadgets during class impede learning—frequent cellphone use, whether for academic purposes or unrelated activities, divides students' attention. Similarly, students who text during lectures typically perform worse academically, suggesting that technological distractions significantly undermine classroom engagement and learning retention [24].

Another major external factor impacting students' education is declining parental involvement. There has been a significant shift from a strong teacher-parent partnership toward a model where teachers bear the full burden of students' academic progress. This trend resonates with findings from Tamez-Robledo [25], where 46% of educators identified the lack of family prioritization of academics as a leading cause of learning disparities. Weathers-Fincher [26] further emphasized that parental engagement is crucial in enhancing students' academic achievement and awareness of emerging issues. However, barriers such as limited resources and readiness contribute to the persistent gap between intended and actual parental involvement [27].

Overall, external variables such as the dominance of social media accelerated use of AI, gadget distractions, and weakened parental support present significant challenges to fostering critical thinking and deep understanding among students. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues, creating broader gaps in students' informational literacy. Addressing these challenges requires teachers to adopt flexible, adaptive strategies emphasizing critical evaluation of information, foster digital literacy, and actively bridge the support gap left by diminished parental involvement. Preparing students to engage meaningfully with emerging issues necessitates curricular interventions and systemic efforts to build resilience against unreliable external information sources.

Addressing the Demands and Challenges in Teaching Emerging Issues

Active and Interactive Teaching Methods

Social Studies teachers effectively employ active and interactive teaching methods to address the challenges of student disengagement and shallow understanding of emerging issues. Techniques such as game-based learning, collaborative learning, simulation-based learning, and inquiry-based strategies were prominently utilized to foster critical thinking, empathy, and participation among students. This approach is consistent with Mancin et al. [28], who emphasized that active learning strategies enhance critical thinking and shared understanding while promoting real-world engagement. Integrating digital tools like videos, quizzes, infographics, and online articles made learning dynamic and accessible. Similarly, multimedia resources foster greater student satisfaction, promote critical thinking, and sustain engagement, particularly in discussions involving complex societal issues [29].

Gamification emerged as a significant strategy in reframing students' attitudes toward Social Studies. Nguyen [30] noted that the effectiveness of tools like Kahoot in enhancing academic performance and student engagement supports the observation that game-based approaches help break down the perception of Social Studies as a monotonous subject. Yanes and Camacho [31] further confirmed that gamified activities significantly increased participation and interest in Social Studies education, demonstrating that integrating playful elements revitalizes the learning experience.

Collaborative strategies such as group reporting and random news reporting assignments were highlighted as essential for encouraging deeper analysis of emerging issues. Collaborative-individual learning approaches significantly enhanced critical thinking skills among secondary students, reinforcing the value of peer discussions and group work in broadening students' understanding of societal topics [32]. Similarly, random participation techniques, like random reporting assignments, effectively maintain high levels of classroom engagement by fostering shared accountability [33,34].

Experiential learning approaches, such as video interviews with LGBTQ+ families and educational field trips, were efficient in developing empathy and a deeper understanding of real-world issues. This approach resonates with Dana [35], who demonstrated the value of using real narratives to foster acceptance and challenge stereotypes. Furthermore, grounding discussions in real-life examples strengthens students' ability to connect academic content to personal and societal realities, making learning more meaningful [36].

Inquiry-based learning and Socratic questioning were powerful strategies to deepen students' engagement with emerging issues. Encouraging students to conduct independent research promotes more critical and reflective thinking, aligning with findings by Markwick and Reiss [37] and Gholam [38], who found that inquiry-based learning enhances critical thinking and leads to a deeper understanding of complex topics. Teachers' use of Socratic questioning, where layered and reflective questions guide students toward deeper comprehension, complements this process by reinforcing analytical thinking and broadening perspectives.

Additionally, scaffolding was recognized as a crucial instructional support mechanism. Building upon students' prior knowledge and gradually expanding their understanding of emerging issues reflects the findings of Nance [39] and Lee [40], who highlighted that scaffolding helps students manage complex content by breaking it down into manageable segments, promoting confidence and cognitive growth.

Finally, incorporating field trips and real-world learning experiences allowed students to connect classroom discussions to tangible, real-life contexts, enhancing their critical awareness of national and global issues. These strategies addressed the problem of disengagement and helped students appreciate the relevance of emerging issues in their own lives.

Fostering Student Engagement through Critical Thinking

The findings reveal that fostering student engagement in discussions of emerging issues requires deliberate strategies centered on critical thinking, self-reflection, and evidence-based reasoning. Teachers employed a range of techniques that not only increased participation but also deepened students' understanding of complex societal topics.

One strategy was using reflective essays and self-assessment activities, encouraging students to connect classroom discussions to their personal lives. This approach emphasized that reflective practices capture a broad spectrum of learning outcomes, including knowledge acquisition, skill development, and identity formation [41]. By requiring students to articulate how lessons apply to real-world contexts, teachers strengthened the relevance and impact of the learning experience.

Another critical tactic involved emphasizing evidence-based discussions. Rather than validating students' statements outright, teachers consistently prompted students to justify their claims, fostering source verification and essential evaluation habits. This method highlighted the importance of news literacy and critical evaluation in combating adolescent misinformation. Encouraging students to ground their opinions in credible evidence develops their reasoning and refines their argumentation skills [42].

Healthy classroom debates were another strategy to stimulate critical thinking and student interest. As observed in the findings, disagreements were welcomed as opportunities for students to express independent opinions and learn respectful discourse. Beaudry [43] supports this finding, which describes healthy debate as fostering open dialogue and critical analysis while maintaining respect among participants. By encouraging students to defend their perspectives thoughtfully, teachers facilitated deeper learning and a greater sense of ownership over the ideas discussed.

The use of HOTS and open-ended questions further amplified students' cognitive engagement. Asking situational and reflective questions tested students' prior knowledge and pushed them to synthesize and apply new information critically. Similarly, it was found that open-ended questioning fosters critical analysis and active participation, building a classroom culture grounded in inquiry rather than rote acceptance [44,45].

Exposure to multiple perspectives was another essential component of fostering critical engagement. By presenting students with various issues and viewpoints, teachers helped broaden students' analytical frames and promoted empathy, as supported by findings from the Outschool Educator Library [46]. This method taught students to appreciate diverse perspectives and understand the complexities of social and political issues.

In summary, teachers' strategies successfully addressed the challenges of student disinterest and superficial understanding when discussing emerging issues. Through critical engagement, inquiry, and reflection, students were equipped with essential skills to navigate the complexities of contemporary society thoughtfully and responsibly.

Ethical Teaching for Diverse Opinions

One approach to teaching emerging issues was the presentation of multiple perspectives. Teachers promote independent decision-making and critical analysis by exposing students to opposing viewpoints without inserting personal biases. This approach aligns with Wansink et al. [47], who found that engaging students in discussions presenting multiple sides fosters deeper critical thinking and informed learning. Presenting both sides also helped prevent confusion and allowed students to develop empathy [48], highlighting that engaging with diverse viewpoints cultivates a broader understanding. Teachers adopted a neutral mediation stance, carefully facilitating discussions without influencing student opinions, consistent with Boudreau [49], who recommended maintaining neutrality to encourage empathy and democratic engagement. By transparently presenting information without imposing personal perspectives, teachers empower students to build decision-making skills independently.

Establishing a culture of respect and encouraging equitable participation further supported ethical teaching. Teachers emphasized mutual respect, recognizing that diverse standards and beliefs inevitably lead to disagreement. This was supported by Kang [50], who found that cultivating respect for differing viewpoints reduces conflict and fosters a supportive classroom environment. To ensure inclusivity, teachers deliberately created opportunities for all students, especially quieter ones, to express their opinions. Toro [51] affirmed that equitable participation improves engagement and enhances the overall learning experience. Teachers fostered a safe and inclusive space for critical inquiry by emphasizing that many emerging issues have no one correct answer.

Upholding professional integrity and modeling objectivity played a central role. Teachers consciously avoided bias, particularly when discussing politically sensitive topics, and ensured that students received balanced, factual information. Adopting multiple perspectives enables educators to meet the diverse needs of students more effectively [52]. Educators must uphold standards of logic and evidence, allowing students to express ideas freely and without undue influence [53].

Additionally, teachers carefully navigated the balance between limited self-disclosure and maintaining professional boundaries. While minimal personal sharing can foster engagement, excessive disclosure compromises objectivity [54,55]. Teachers reinforced this by intentionally making word choices and aligning their discussions closely with the curriculum to avoid unintended bias.

Finally, using respectful and precise language was a deliberate strategy for maintaining inclusive and academically grounded discussions. Teachers prioritized neutral and respectful communication to ensure constructive and transparent classroom dialogue [56,57].

Classroom Management and Structured Discussions

The use of disclaimers before tackling emerging issues fosters student preparation and an inclusive classroom culture. Disclaimers serve to warn students that specific issues may be triggering, especially for those with personal experiences related to subjects such as LGBT issues, religious beliefs, or violence. This practice aligns with Boudreau's [49] assertion that transparency in teaching emerging issues inspires students to engage critically with sensitive material. Setting the tone early for discussions is crucial in managing delicate conversations to prevent reinforcing biases or inadvertently offending students.

Promoting respect during debates over emerging issues further enhances classroom openness to diverse viewpoints. Teachers emphasize that disagreeing is acceptable but require students to do so respectfully and to support their claims with evidence. Di Mario [58] supports this approach, noting that encouraging respectful dialogue fosters a supportive learning environment and strengthens students' critical thinking skills. By

creating a culture of respectful engagement, educators help minimize conflict and promote constructive classroom interactions.

In addition to fostering respectful debate, teachers must balance maintaining authority with encouraging student participation. Effective classroom management involves assessing classroom dynamics and adapting teaching styles to motivate students and sustain engagement. Toro [51] suggests that when teachers facilitate rather than dominate discussions, students feel more actively involved in their learning process. This reflects a broader shift in educational practices, where student-centered discussions enhance participation, empowerment, and ownership of learning.

Professional Growth and Adaptation to Challenges

Teaching emerging issues presents educators with dynamic challenges that demand constant adaptation and professional growth. Teachers must continuously enhance their teaching methods, stay informed on current developments, and develop new professional competencies to ensure quality learning experiences. Professional growth is a continuous learning process that equips individuals with updated knowledge, skills, and a broader understanding of diverse topics. Staying updated within subject areas and broader societal contexts is essential to address students' unfamiliarity and misconceptions, particularly with the rise of online misinformation [59]. Also, Long [60] noted the importance of guiding students in identifying credible sources and developing critical thinking skills to navigate a saturated information landscape.

To cope with these demands, educators engage in proactive reading, consulting multiple reliable information outlets to sustain credibility and ensure relevance in classroom discussions. Collaboration with peers is also crucial, as exchanging experiences with colleagues enhances instructional quality and nurtures collective problem-solving [61]. Furthermore, updating teaching materials to maintain relevance is a key practice, reinforcing the significance of constant professional development [62].

Technology integration is another vital aspect of adapting to 21st-century educational environments. Effective use of digital tools boosts student engagement and academic performance [63]. However, challenges persist, especially given the technological gap between digital natives (students) and digital immigrants (teachers), highlighting the need for continuous upskilling supported by training and resources [64].

Rather than completely overhauling traditional methods, teachers expand and modify their strategies to better align with student's current needs, especially when dealing with timely topics such as elections. This flexible yet grounded approach is consistent with Main [65], who noted that adaptability without abandoning foundational teaching strategies strengthens instructional effectiveness. Recognizing individual learning needs, teachers also adjust activities to suit student capabilities. Adaptive teaching enhances engagement and retention, particularly when handling emerging issues [66,67].

Anticipating potential classroom challenges further supports smooth lesson delivery. Thorough preparation allows teachers to proactively address unforeseen difficulties, aligning with International House Belfast [68], emphasizing that anticipation strengthens classroom management. Additionally, remedial strategies, such as supplemental activities and differentiated materials, assist students struggling with foundational skills like reading comprehension, a key requirement for grasping emerging issues. This approach was validated by studies highlighting the positive impact of remedial education and supplementary materials on student performance [69,70,71].

Finally, refining assessment methods ensures that instruction remains aligned with students' learning needs. Continuous evaluation through feedback from quizzes and tests helps educators adjust their approaches [72]. Item analysis provides critical insights into areas requiring reinforcement [73].

Through continuous professional growth, collaboration, technological adaptation, differentiated instruction, proactive preparation, remedial interventions, and assessment refinement, teachers successfully navigate the complex demands of teaching emerging issues. These strategies foster active, critical, and engaged learning environments, equipping students with essential skills to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

Capacity-building Program for Social Studies Teachers in Teaching Emerging Issues

Based on the study's findings about teachers' challenges when teaching emerging issues, the program "Empowering Educators: Transformative Approaches in Teaching Emerging Issues for Social Studies Teachers" aims to give them focused support to help them overcome these obstacles. Its primary goals are to increase teachers' knowledge of current issues, their capacity to recognize reliable sources, and their ability to create engaging lesson plans. The program aims to enable educators to facilitate more inclusive and relevant classroom conversations while preserving impartiality when discussing emerging issues by encouraging critical thinking and media literacy. This capacity-building program will enhance teachers' overall efficacy in tackling emerging issues and aid in their professional development.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching emerging issues in social studies classes presents many difficulties, but these difficulties also highlight the commitment and flexibility of educators. The dynamics of teaching emerging themes are complex, ranging from students' difficulty with issues like gender and LGBTQ+ to sustaining student involvement in the face of distractions and the overpowering impact of social media. Teachers often struggle with disengagement and a lack of historical context that keeps students from fully understanding current events, making it challenging to close gaps in student knowledge and participation.

But despite these challenges, social studies teachers use a variety of creative approaches to create a more engaging and interesting learning environment. Teachers overcome student disengagement and promote critical thinking and participation by implementing active learning strategies, including game-based learning, group projects, and multimedia materials. Student-centered strategies like group discussions and debates enable students to examine emerging issues from various angles and promote critical thinking about the world.

Furthermore, in addition to fostering more profound understanding, applying Socratic and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) questioning fosters a respectful, accepting classroom environment where students are encouraged to express their thoughts and consider opposing viewpoints. Teachers also recognize the significance of ongoing professional development and adjusting to rapid changes in emerging issues. Their dedication to improvement guaranteed that they stay knowledgeable, current, and prepared to manage the difficulties of their position.

Other approaches that support the maintenance of a responsive and inclusive learning environment include integrating technology into instruction and adapting curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students. By ensuring that no student is left behind, these modifications promote a learning environment where all students can interact with and comprehend challenging emerging issues. Teachers' ability to overcome these obstacles is a testament to their fortitude, inventiveness, and dedication to developing knowledgeable, critical thinkers equipped to address today's most important problems. Through their efforts, they teach pupils about emerging issues and prepare them to be involved and active citizens.

6. Acknowledgement

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