



Research Article

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Oral History Approach in Social Studies Teaching: Its Improvement to the Elementary School Learners' National Identity Values in Kuwait

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Abstract

Being a dynamic social studies teacher assumes responsibility to produce better nation citizens. This study determined the effects of oral history approach in social studies teaching on elementary school learners' values improvement in Kuwait. A quasi-experimental group design was used in the study with thirty female students from the two grade five classes in Kuwait. These respondents were selected at random, with the permission and approval of their respective teachers. There was a significant difference between the mean scores of the pretest measurements in the national identity values. Likewise, there was also a significant difference between the mean scores of respondents' achievements in the posttest. With the use of an oral history approach to teaching social studies, the respondents exhibited well-grounded national identity values that may benefit the people and catapult the country's positive development. These values were indicative of creating high engagement within the classroom, increasing students' responses, and improving their national identity values through awareness of the country's oral histories. With the use of this approach as a critical part of the learning environment, it becomes an efficient tool for the respondents' personal and intellectual development.

Keywords: oral history, oral history approach, national identity values, achievement, quasi-experimental

1. Introduction

Throughout the course of history in education, teachers have sought ways and approaches to educating students effectively. Integrating an effective teaching method into the social studies curriculum is a pressing challenge for teachers, especially for students to develop an interest in learning history, and its relationship between the past and present events, in order to shape their national identity. The process of integration is one of the Quadrant Model of Teaching (QMT) as an avenue for effective instruction opens opportunities for education leaders and policy-makers to institutionalize curriculum reforms that address culture-based integration (Inocian, 2015); this model serves as a theoretical anchor in the study. QMT is a holistic approach to social studies teaching that emphasizes the 21st-century skills of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. De Leon & Ross (2010) asserted that social education aimed for (1) cultural transmission; (2) understanding history and social sciences disciplines; (3) reflective inquiry on social issues; (4) personal development; and (5) informed social criticism among others, which gives the field an appearance of pedagogical and curricular diversity.

The social studies teachers are trustees of the nation's cultural heritage through cultural transmission. Nihilism has no room in social studies education when the historical past shapes the present and anticipates the future. Keeping abreast of what is happening in the social environment is an antecedent to reflective inquiry. Self-regulation indicates personal development before understanding others; getting ready for whatever criticisms becomes a healthy ground for further self-improvement to understand others regardless of faith, ideology, and social background. Hence, among these five aforementioned aims, this study is anchored on the first and fourth aims mentioned by De Leon & Ross (2010). Social studies, as a curriculum, allows students to learn practical things to improve significantly their daily life, such as giving them an awareness of their environment, developing their critical thinking abilities, and understanding other countries' cultures. This statement agrees with Summerfield (1987), stating that social studies help mold students to become appropriate men and women in their social norms (p. 9). Having access to an effective means of teaching will result in a great advantage not only to the educators but also to the students, but the school and the community as well. Ardemento et al. (2014) proved this claim on the advantages of using oral history in teaching social studies.

This claim explains that there are many benefits in practicing an oral history approach to critical thinking, organizational, and communication skills, helping students achieve state and national standards. It also allows classrooms to support the alignment of skills outlined as a common core. Besides, this approach can positively impact teachers (p. 1). In this manner, the use of oral history as a teaching approach may lead students to acquire knowledge and develop values and positive attitudes. This approach may also cultivate the student's skills in communication and documentation.

This study determined the effects of oral history approach in social studies teaching to elementary learners' values improvement in Kuwait. The national identity is a double-edged concept of bipolarity: the good and the bad. When dimensions of patriotism, ethnic and civic conceptions of nation-hood of national identity are promoted, it would yield a positive result; and when the dimension of chauvinism is used, the result is negative (Aichholzer et al., 2021). While debates on national identity yield positive and negative effects, it is apparent that national identity values play a major role in community development by encouraging discipline, trustworthiness, equal opportunities, tolerance, hard work, and patriotism. National identity is people's attachment to their beloved country, such as the cultural orientation, the spoken language, ideology and religion, arts, crafts, and social and economic styles. For instance, looking into the symbols of a national flag of one's country lies in the country's identity and its people on what they value politically, socially, and economically. Social studies teachers' role is to promote the positive side of national identity rather than to promote violence and bigotry, as is the negative side. As used in the study, the national identity values include political, social, and economic values. Political values refer to belief systems on how to respect the state, the rule of law, rules and regulations, and authority. Social values refer to the multitudes of customs and traditions that shape people's behavior, conduct, attitudes, and propriety in social interactions. According to Akpan & Okoro (2018), the manner of living in the community can be directly affected by national values, and this can also be supporting the progress of the citizens within that community (p. 1).

The public school is one of the most important institutions contributing to the formation of the system of values within the family, community, and the nation as a whole. It is in the school that the imminent Thomas Hobbes' badness of an individual will be transformed into goodness; or, on the other side, Jean Jacques Rosseau's eminent goodness of an individual be further promoted, due to its role in the development of national values and the molding national identity of an individual. The method of instruction used in social studies is essential for students to learn. In order to build a suitable system of values, this must be done on intellectual and educational foundations through which they are provided with many concepts and human values necessary for society's success. Hence, the social studies curriculum must be enriched with the values needed for the community and should be designed to achieve good citizenship through a set of social, moral, religious, and national values using an appropriate and effective teaching methodology. This study is contrived

from the observed curriculum of social studies teaching in elementary schools in Kuwait, which necessitates improvement in the utilization of teaching methodology. Rejoining with this, Aldwelh (2016) showed that the “values in the national education books are stated randomly and lacked inclusiveness, balance, and proper graduation” (p. 147). This situation needs an imperative response to provide more balanced perspectives with regard to the utilization of oral histories that are relevant to children’s interests and appreciation.

The major implication of the study is that if national identity values are truly imbibed by the students and the nation as a whole, many tragic events that have been experienced in the past would be better understood and therefore not to be committed again “because good character is easy to learn in childhood than to unlearn bad habits in adulthood” (Akpan & Okoro, 2018, p. 122). Training the young during their formative years is very important as a predictor of their success when they become adults in the future. In addition, having well-grounded national values may also lead to the country’s positive development and its people. The study also hypothesized that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the pretest measurements of the national identity values; there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the pretest achievement.

2. Review of Related Literature

A large number of social studies teachers in different countries experience difficulty in developing students’ comprehension of significant events from the past. According to Al-Rabaani (2015), these difficulties are the manifestation of certain factors, including the vagueness and lack of information about the events that transpired in the past as well as the students’ difficulty in relating the past events to their present life. These difficulties may negatively impact the students’ perception and attitude towards studying social studies since they may view the subject as dull, lifeless, and unrelated to their current lives.

One way to change this negative perception of history students is by using an effective teaching approach that is learner-centered, contextual, and innovative. This will have a significant impact on the absorption and retention of knowledge being taught in schools. Throughout the course of history, educators have sought methods and approaches to instruct students in schools effectively. According to Summerfield (1987), “The school system has of course been affected historically by the class structure, and a brief outline of this relationship is necessary to establish the context in which this exploration is being made” (p. 19). In the Philippines, it is through localization and contextualization of social studies instruction, that makes social studies relatable to the learners (Inocian, 2015; Inocian, 2015). It is through localization and contextualization of social studies teaching that those students see the meaning which they can relate to their lives, and one way to do this is through the use of oral history approach.

Identifying the best teaching approach for social studies is challenging since there are multiple strategies and the curriculum covers four interrelated components, including: “civics, economics, geography, and history” (Schneider et al., 1994, p. 10). This complexity is basically anchored on its nature that is multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, community-oriented, experiential, and value-laden. Some popular examples of these approaches are the lecture method, where the teacher does all the talking; the discussion method, where students talk and exchange ideas with each other; and field trips, where students can experience and explore information outside the classroom under the supervision of the teacher to fit it in its diverse nature. However, a recent study conducted by Suh, Butler, & Yaco (2015) showed that oral history is a powerful tool that can be used in gaining new knowledge by both teachers and students (p. 108).

Definitions of oral history could verify this claim. For example, the Oral History Association (2019) defined “oral history as a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events”, a form of new historicism when meanings of historical texts are challenged, in response to the voices of others. Sounding like an oxymoron, oral history is the oldest and, at the same time, the newest type of

historical documentation when this is passed down orally to a succeeding generation. In social studies teaching, the meaning of concepts is made experiential to students and becomes unstructured based on the learning contexts of the students. Though historians developed this method to record and understand memories, which can be applied in the academic world, this started the re-emergence of oral history in the digital age, which is animated that attracts more attention to the learners.

Furthermore, another claim by Ardemendo et al. (2014) reinforced the advantage of using oral history as a teaching method stating that “oral history fosters intergenerational appreciation and an awareness of the intersection between personal lives and larger historical currents, it projects and inspires active participation in history, furtherance of education, and civic life” (p. 1). Teaching of social studies is made relational to students’ contexts and experiences. A paper using oral history projects claims the application of oral history in the classroom has multiple benefits for students. They can learn historical content, learn related disciplines, feel personal connections to the past and their own community, learn research skills, develop writing and critical thinking skills, feel included, and develop valuable interpersonal skills (Walbert & Shawver, 2002, p. 5). Oral history can also be a powerful catalyst for change. This reality has become the humanistic aim of social studies education in the 21st century. The documentation of lived experiences has a significant contribution to society by understanding, accepting, imbibing, and redefining our national values—a shift from a positivist paradigm to an interpretive paradigm of research priorities. Zahran (2004) noted that having a strong attachment to a group and showing a sense of responsibility towards this group can be perceived as having a good foundation of those national values (as cited in Subheyyin et al., 2017, p. 1), justifying the community orientation of social studies education.

There are reciprocal relationships between values and education. According to Ashour (2004), education plays a major role in developing the system values (as cited in Subheyyin et al., 2017, p. 2). If the school is authoritarian, then students become more disciplined and controlled compared to a democratic school, where students become free and make better decisions for themselves. In addition, McFarland (2007) agreed that educational curricula should be enhanced with values necessary to the community to achieve good citizenship by promoting a core group of values. This context remains an integral imperative that social studies is a value-laden program of the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of the social sciences and the humanities. For example, social, moral, national, religious, and economic values taught through the curriculum can strengthen the individual's values and, therefore, the society will benefit as a whole (as cited in Subheyyin et al., 2017, p. 2). Nevertheless, with the benefits enumerated in using oral history as an approach in teaching social studies, there is a question as to why many teachers are still not utilizing oral history as a teaching approach; thus, this research holds its purpose why this is conducted.

Although existing literature covers a variety of such studies, these reviews also focus mainly on the perception and insights of educators in using oral history as an approach in teaching and its advantages and disadvantages. These reviews are composed of three major sections: (1) Teaching Difficulty, (2) Teaching through oral history, and (3) Impact of using Oral History.

3. Teaching Difficulty

Prior research suggests that teachers find difficulty engaging their students to participate in classes most of the time, especially when they have a low interest in the course; utilizing an appropriate teaching method plays an essential role for the students to become more engaged in the course. This perception was seconded by the study conducted by Erskine (2018), disclosing that it is a challenge for the educator to convey and instill values assimilated in the curriculum to students, regardless of their instruction level. Educators play the most significant part in the learning cycle since learning through textbooks only covers a small part of history. There is often insufficient time in the academic year. Besides, with our fast-developing educational system and the dynamic learning curve of each student, developing and applying an effective teaching method that will suit mostly to students will

be more eminently favorable for the teachers when they achieve the expected learning standards prescribed in the curriculum.

Currently, the standardization of the educational content, according to Olsen (2016), has reduced social studies and other subjects to a compilation of facts that must be memorized for a test rather than the application of the knowledge presented and learned. With this, learning courses have most likely lost their practical uses. Students have become more puzzled about the relevance of learning such subjects, resulting in students having low interest in learning and teachers having trouble raising students' participation during classes. This context demands the use of spiral progression of the curriculum that allows the levels of competencies to graduate from easy to difficult learning skills (Inocian, 2015).

4. Teaching through Oral History

Engaging students to learn history and searching for an appropriate teaching method to stimulate students' imagination is challenging for many social studies teachers. Several literature pieces were reported to address the challenges expressed by social studies teachers through the utilization of oral history as a teaching approach. For instance, a study conducted by Olsen (2016) established that oral history is perceived as a solution to the problem of students having a low interest in studying history by bringing colorful characters into the classroom and allowing students to hear their voices. With this, students will develop empathy through the experiences of these people.

Olsen (2016) also revealed that this approach is more efficient than traditional approaches because it adds more authenticity and full accounts of relevant historical events. It also exposes students to valuable perspectives that are often concealed in traditional curricula or through textbooks. The oral history approach proves to be an effective teaching method and thoroughly develops the students' growth, which is advantageous to both the students, the teachers, and the community.

The application of oral history as a teaching method in social studies helps raise students' level of engagement since they gather and consolidate the information, which allows them to have a deeper understanding of the difference between the past and the present life. This claim was also reflected in a previous study administered by Erskine (2018), emphasizing that oral history is "one method that many educators have found fits well with their larger pedagogical approach" by building a "living, breathing history into the curriculum". It was also reported in the study of Erskine that oral history is an effective way of preserving people's life experiences and helping students have more meaningful community engagement.

Using an oral history approach can also help the students develop a more comprehensive comprehension of the effects of societal issues on life development. This approach may also lead students to become more enthusiastic since they will be conducting interviews with older people. Many of the students' grandparents are still alive and have first-hand experience of significant events in the past and still practice traditional customs, thus making it easier and natural for them to elucidate their past experiences and give authentic information. The oral history approach can also broaden the students' understanding of the past by giving them multiple interpretations from the perspective of the people who experienced them personally.

Nevertheless, even with the effective use of oral history as a teaching approach, it still has its flaws. According to some literature, problems were divulged when utilizing oral history as a teaching method in the classroom. One example is Erskine's research in 2018, which conferred that students often experience challenges throughout the collection of oral histories from interviewees. Another problem was revealed in the study made by Foley & Aarstad (2017), in which they contrived that "some people are skeptical of oral history and certainly; interviewers do not always remember things exactly as they happened" (p. 4).

This particular problem arises when interviewees are older and may experience trouble with their past recollections. This may lead to inaccurate and misleading information; thus, certain factors

should be considered when using oral history and there should be close monitoring from the instructor. Also, preparing students to share personal information and teaching them to listen to each other is an additional hurdle to consider (Northrop, 2015).

Social studies teachers may show little interest in using oral history as a teaching approach in the classroom. This drawback was reported in the literature published by Filer (2008), revealing that this approach is rarely being used in “highest school classes due to a variety of factors including lack of teacher education or experience; relevance to today’s curriculum demands; and/or, time and budget” (p. 5). Besides that, Erskine (2018) recommended teachers to:

Engage the class in a discussion regarding the purpose of studying history. What should history reflect? Should it reflect the subject’s memory and experiences, or should it reflect the interviewer’s biases and ethical convictions? What is being preserved, and why? Educators should prepare students in advance.

This series of questions pose a challenge among many social studies teachers on how to make their teaching more relevant and more exciting to the learners. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of using oral history as a teaching methodology cannot be denied. The value of these features in education explains that oral history allows students to develop a positive attitude toward learning history and past events and develops their sense of achievement (Lanman, 1987, p. 123). This value remains one of the goals of social studies education worldwide; those social teachers will have to keep their attention (Stockard, 2001).

5. Impact of Using Oral History

Social studies teachers emphasize the significance of learning history, which tends to be the students’ least chosen subject. Thus, teachers want to develop within students a more positive attitude in learning history and social studies as well as to imbibe into them the need to preserve history, customs, and traditions. With the positive impact of oral history projects on the students, they also develop a more personal attachment and engagement with local history as they interview people from their communities, thus serving as an excellent investment into purposeful research (Dayton-Wood et al., 2012, p. 77).

Several studies have been conducted that revolve around using oral history as a method of teaching history and social studies. These studies assume that using oral history may also lead students on the path of self-discovery. Assigning students oral history projects allows schools and educators to help students connect to their community and family history (Erskine, 2018). There are several advantages in using this approach, and according to Foley & Aarstad (2017), this is “often the best way to learn how an experience felt, why people made the choices they did, and how they make sense of what happened to them” (p. 4).

In the classroom, the teacher has an excellent opportunity to open a discussion about topics that may have emerged during the interview, thus making the interview easier and allowing students to enjoy and internalize the interview process. Also, according to Erskine (2018), it can be concluded that “this is a teachable moment and can lead to some genuinely soul-searching moments for the students”. Furthermore, Filer (2008) affirmed in his study that many students prefer unconventional methods of discovering and interpreting subjects, and these methods are found crucial in continued educational advancement (p. 5). With these findings, oral history as a teaching method can be very advantageous to both the student and teacher, making learning history and social studies more interesting and colorful.

The use of oral history aids teachers and students. It greatly impacts scholars and historians in their research studies and data gathering, especially when unveiling significant events in history that are agreed upon. Aharon (2020) stated that historians’ ability to study important events in history is impaired by the lack of archival records, thus allowing oral history to showcase its potential.

However, the use of oral history remains underutilized because “oral history can be a cumbersome resource to use” (Boyd, 2013). Oral history should be an integral part of teaching

curricula because of the advantages it has for students and educators, as well as the community, and this was reflected in the previous literature, “beyond the value of conducting oral histories, this dual inquisitiveness and proactivity can give students the confidence and consciousness to become more effective citizens” (Olsen, 2016). Citizenship training is the ultimate goal in social studies education where students become an asset to that nation rather than a liability. The use of civic education is a relevant component in this aspect.

6. Research Methodology

A quantitative method of research was used in the study. With this positivist paradigm, it employed the use of a quasi-experimental design specifically on one group experimental design using pretest and the post-test measures with oral history approach as an intervention in order to find out its effectiveness.

7. The Research Instruments

7.1 National values questionnaire

This survey consisted of 30 items measuring political values (13 items, ex. I feel proud of my home country), social values (11 items, ex. I share in social occasions), and economic values (6 items, ex. I always support my national products). Internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha α . Political values dimension (Alpha α = .954, social values dimension, α = .919, economic values, α = .882, entire scale, α = .975). Item total correlation ranged between 0.319 and 0.476.

7.2 Achievement test

This test was constructed to measure students' achievement in the social studies unit developed in light of the oral history approach. The earlier version of the test consisted of 24 items, while the final version contained 20 items because four items were deleted after their item-total correlation coefficients were insignificant. The validity of the achievement test was assessed through content validity. The test items were given to a jury, a panel which is specializing in curricula and instruction of social studies.

7.3 The Research Participants

Thirty female students were recruited from two five graders classes in Kuwait. Their mean age = 11.367, SD = 2.965. They were selected on a random basis. Teachers in both classes clarified the purpose of the study to the students. They were asked to respond to the questionnaire and the achievement test before and after the instructional unit based on the oral history approach. Thirty female students were recruited from two five graders classes in Kuwait. Their mean age = 11.367, SD = 2.965. They were selected on a random basis. Teachers in both classes clarified the purpose of the study to the students. They were asked to respond to the questionnaire and the achievement test before and after the instructional unit based on the oral history approach.

7.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation and the Cronbach's Alpha α = .782. Item total correlation ranged between 0.270 and 0.606 to ensure its reliability.

7.5 Ethical Considerations of the Study

In as much as the study uses fifth graders, necessary permissions were asked. A letter of informed consent was sent to the parents, the teachers, and the school heads allowing access to conduct the study. A separate letter of assent was given to the parents to allow their kids to generate the needed data. An appointment time and the identified place were approved by the teacher and the researcher to gather the needed data. The data were treated confidentially. Thank you notes and small tokens of appreciation were given to the research participants for their gestures in helping out the data gathering process.

8. Results and Discussion

The present study's main aim was to assess the effectiveness of the oral history approach in improving national values (social, economic, and national) and increasing the achievement of five graders in Kuwait.

Table 1: t-test results of the difference between pre and post-test of national values N=30

Dimensions	Pretest		Posttest		T value	df	sig	effect size
	M	SD	M	SD				
Political values	17.90	2.71	33.90	1.95	28.31	29	0.000	.97
Social values	15.13	2.21	27.20	1.69	26.11	29	0.000	.96
Economic values	8.07	1.36	15.23	1.50	18.39	29	0.000	.92
Total score	41.00	5.01	76.33	3.52	35.53	29	0.000	.98

As reflected in Table 1, significant differences are shown among the mean scores of the pretest and the posttest of the three kinds of values favoring the post-measurement. The three dimensions of political, social, and economic values have improved the national identity among the Grade 5 children in social studies. This means that oral history is a vehicle of the Grade 5 children's awareness of the government rules and regulations. Oral history is a means of how they behave in a society dictated by their social values. They also learn the importance of proper spending and saving as one of the economic values. Saving is a key concept in economics vital for sustainable living (Balaza et al., 2021; Inocian, 2015).

Table 2: t-test results of the difference between pre and post-achievement N=30

Dimensions	Pretest		Posttest		T value	df	sig	effect size
	M	SD	M	SD				
Total score	14.17	2.21	21.53	1.98	11.53	29	0.001	0.82

Table 2 showed the significant differences in the post measurement achievement. The given findings were consistent with Walbert and Shawver's (2002) results, who claimed that the application of oral history in the elementary classroom has multiple benefits to students. It allows them to learn historical content, learn related disciplines, feel personal connections to the past, personal connections to their own community, learn research skills, develop writing and critical thinking skills, feel, and develop valuable interpersonal skills (pp. 1-2). This relates to Inocian's Quadrant Model of Teaching (2015), which emphasized the learning of knowledge by learning content on history and other related disciplines; the mastery of skills through research and other writing activities with the use of critical and other thinking skills; collaboration, and cooperation through feelings and the use interpersonal skills; and learning to create relevant outputs through personal choices within the past and their own community.

The effectiveness of the use of oral history approach in improving national identity values and achievement. This fact was explained by Walbert and Shawver (2002), who asserted that oral history allows students to get familiar with the viewpoints of persons who were ignored or dropped from the historical record, to compensate for the digital age, to learn different types of information, to ask questions of personal interest, to tell their own stories in their own words, and to provide a precious opportunity for human interaction. Consequently, oral history can help students learn new historical content, learn research skills, practice excellent writing skills, teach valuable critical thinking skills, create a feeling of inclusion and personal connection to the past and the life of their community, and develop valuable interpersonal skills (pp. 1-5). The present findings have provided educators with some insights into the importance of incorporating oral history approach during the instructional process. It was found to be an effective tool in these contexts.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of oral history approach in social studies teaching improves the elementary school learners' national identity values in Kuwait in three areas political, social, and economic values. The fifth-grade respondents have high regard for respect to authority, rules and regulations, and government. Social norms, customs, and traditions affect their social interaction that shapes their attitudes and behavior. Economic values of survival, economizing, proper spending, and saving are also noted with high significance relative to political and social values at the same time. The findings of the study also affirmed Inocian's Quadrant Model of Teaching, which is basically brain-based, integrative, experiential, collaborative, creative that is localized and contextualized, where the use of oral history in teaching remains one of its elements. With political, social, and economic values improved, it is suggested that educational institutions will use oral history approach to be integrated into the plethora of teaching approaches, methods, and techniques in the teaching of social studies education not only in Kuwait but also in the rest of the countries in the world as well. Massive training and reorientations of elementary school social studies teachers will be planned out with appropriate financial funding and support among education heads and stakeholders. It is also imperative that the use of creativity that produces learning outcomes be enhanced in order to promote students' meaningful learning experiences and outcomes.

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