

# The Impact of Project-Based Learning in Teaching Social Studies Towards Developing the Students' Critical Thinking Skills in the New Normal

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**Abstract**— In the wake of the global shift towards remote and hybrid learning models precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, educators have been compelled to explore innovative approaches to engage students and foster critical thinking skills. This study investigates the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a pedagogical strategy in teaching Social Studies within the context of the "New Normal."

The research employed a grounded theory method as the topic seeks to explain the impact of project-based instruction on the critical thinking skills of the learners. The study will explain the process how a pedagogical approach, specifically the project-based instruction will develop the critical thinking skills among students in teaching Social Studies subjects in the new normal.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on pedagogical strategies in the post-pandemic era, emphasizing the importance of innovative and adaptive approaches like PBL to cultivate critical thinking skills, ensuring that students are better prepared to navigate an ever-changing world.

**Keywords**— Project-Based Learning, Critical Thinking Skills, Social Studies, New Normal, Education, Remote Learning, Pedagogy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a very important role in everybody's life. In the Philippines, with the implementation of the K-12 program, everyone attends schooling for a minimum of 17 years in order to get a college diploma. There are even those who attend the school beyond the minimum required number of years for studying. Individuals are studying in order to obtain a deeper knowledge and understanding of a variety of subjects to be applied to daily life. Although, education is not limited in the four corners of the classroom, since the knowledge can also be obtained through practical experiences outside of the classroom. But, the formal education and training that we get from the classroom is different from the practical knowledge that can be derived from the community. We learn better when we are in a formal education which the school caters to all learners and apply the learning as we interact with the community. The key purpose then of the school is to familiarize the learners to the present environment and prepare them for the future, by that we mean that education evolves in a continuum of bridging the present to the future.

Critical thinking involves analysis and evaluation rather than passively accepting ideas or information without questioning their reliability or truthfulness. This kind of thinking may even include an understanding of

relationships and patterns, comparing similarities and differences, understanding cause and effect of the phenomenon, predicting results, and even coming up with personal judgments (Sumarni, 2020). The critical thinking skills investigated in this study were based on four indicators like providing simple explanations, building basic skills, making inferences, and making advanced explanations. Results of the study which is based on the computation of N-gain score of both pretest and post-tests showed that the ethno-STEM project-based learning was able to improve the critical and creative thinking skills of students in all indicators.

According to Dwyer et al. (2014), critical thinking would allow the students to think rationally in overcoming problems by creating and developing alternative solutions to the problems. These skills would enable the students to come up with decisions supported by evidence.

However, in the Philippines, this sector is being challenged and confronted by various problems such as the shortage of school buildings, textbooks and teachers, the deteriorating quality of education as shown by the result of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the increasing statistics of the dropouts or out-of-school youth. Around 3.5 million of the population are considered out-of-school children and

youth (OSCY) which accounts for 9.1% of the 39 million population aged 6 to 24 years old (APIS 2017). Another challenge being faced by the education sector is the promotion of 21st-century skills among students given the situation in time of pandemic due to COVID-19.

The 21st-century skills is defined as a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world, (Moyer, 2016; Rotherham & Willingham, 2009). From the study of Johnson (2009) he emphasized that the 21st-century skills are not only limited to technological literacy but also include critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and teamwork that are necessary to succeed in work and life. Likewise, Hixson, Ravitz, and Whisman (2012) identified eight skills that every student should possess in the 21st century such as Critical thinking skills, Collaboration skills, Communication skills, Creativity and innovation skills, Self-direction skills, Global connections, Local connections, and the use of technology as a tool for learning.

According to Lugtu (2018) the Philippines was ranked as the world's 16th most ignorant country, that every Filipino should worry about since it signals the decline of the national cognition and may also imply the worsening critical thinking skills of the people. The founder and president of the Darwin International School System, Prof. Rolando de la Cruz, also asserted that "the problem of lack of critical thinking among Filipino students can be trace back, from Spanish colonial times, to the time of the Thomasites during the American occupation, to the post-war Philippines before, during and after Martial Law." Additionally, this problem stems from the rote memorization pedagogy of schools that still exists in the Philippine educational system. This is triggered by graded recitations and the type of examinations that reward students who memorize lessons that encourages temporary storing of information in the brains of learners. What impacts this situation are the students who will be looking for possible employment after they graduate from college, when artificial intelligence and robots replace jobs so fast that employees need to upgrade their skill sets to do more data analytics and complex problem-solving which all require critical thinking.

The students who are attending the formal schooling are not exempted from the situation of declining critical

thinking skills; so goes more impact for those who are dropouts or out-of-school youth. It will be too difficult for them to cope with and to compete in the globalized world requiring the 21st century skills particularly the critical thinking skills.

### *Objective of the Study*

In view of the aforesaid challenges and problems confronting the education sector, the purpose of this research is to look at the impacts of project-based learning in teaching social studies subjects towards development of students' critical thinking skills in the new normal. Social studies is the chosen subject because it is one of the important subjects that deals with the connection of individuals to other groups, with the society, real situations pertaining to the political and social issues of democratic societies, and even connects them with their past experiences.

Hence, this research aims to identify based from the perceptions of the learners if the project-based learning has an impact on the development of learner's critical thinking skills. Also, the connection between the project-based learning and the learners' critical thinking particularly social studies subjects can be established based from the result of the study. It may also contribute on the issue of how social studies subjects be taught to students in order to develop or enhance the critical thinking skills of the students.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The major problem of this study is to find out how the implementation of project-based learning impact the critical thinking of learners. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the processes considered in doing the project to develop critical thinking?
2. How does project-based instruction develop the learners critical thinking?
3. What actions or strategies utilized doing the project that contributed to development of critical thinking skills?
4. What other skills development while doing a project?

## II. METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This research proposal will explore the grounded theory method because the topic seeks to explain the impact of project-based instruction on the critical thinking skills of the learners. Hence, it implied that the study will explain

the process how a pedagogical approach, specifically the project-based instruction will develop the critical thinking skills among students in teaching Social Studies subjects in the new normal.

### **Research Sample**

This research had selected eight (8) respondents subjected for interview who had possessed the characteristics considered. Respondents in this research were chosen by utilizing the purposive sampling design. Samples were selected from those First Year College Students of Bulacan State University Sarmiento campus who were exposed to project-based learning approach in the subject Readings in Philippine History, a subject in tertiary level that discusses particular topic on external and internal criticisms. This topic exposes the students in developing their critical thinking skills using the differentiated project-based instruction.

### **Research Instruments**

The semi-structured questionnaire type was utilized in this research since the questions to be answered by the interviewees were already listed down and sent through messenger. In cases of questions to be clarified in the questionnaire, a follow-up interview was conducted.

### **Data Analysis**

This study employed the thematic analysis in interpreting the responses from the respondents. It started with data gathering, initial coding, axial coding and then coming up with themes or categories.

### **Research Ethics**

Although the topic is not that confidential in nature, still the researcher needs to make sure that the identities of the respondents together with their responses were kept confidential. Respondents were informed prior knowledge that the information they would provide will be used in the research paper as a requirement in the graduate studies of the researcher. The respondents are assured that information they provided are purely for academic purposes only.

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results of the interview showed that learners recognized the processes involved in performing a project which starts with assessment of the sources of information in terms of reliability and credibility, evaluating the content of the material or the source of information and an analysis of the project as to the procedures to be undertaken and the importance of the project. This is

reflected on the themes generated from the initial coding and axial coding of the first question such as Assessment of sources (reliability and credibility), Evaluating Content, and Analysis of the project (procedure and importance). In this regard, the initial actions of the students in performing projects leads to the development of their critical thinking as they are able to identify processes to be consider to deliver the tasks. Likewise, their ability to assess and evaluate materials in terms of importance and value is a good sign of a higher order thinking skills based on Bloom's Taxonomy. One of the respondents claimed that:

“Paghahanap ng mga supporting ideas patungkol sa topic, naghahanap ng mga tunay at totoo na mga sources na posibleng makatulong sa akin na maunawaan pa lalo ang topic. Pag mayroon ng mga sources ito ay aking ipinagkukumpara sa bawat isa upang makita ang kanilang pagkakatulad o pinagkakasunduan at ang kanilang mga pagkakaiba. Bukod pa dito ay pwede din ang mga opinyon ng mga kilalang tao at credible na may alam sa topic”.

### **English translation:**

“Searching for supporting ideas regarding the topic, looking for real and true sources that may help me understand the topic even more. When there are sources, I compare them to each other to see their similarities or agreement and their differences. In addition to this, the opinions of well-known and credible people who know about the topic are also possible”

While recognizing the processes to be considered in accomplishing the requirements for a project, the earners also acquires and develops their critical thinking. Respondents also revealed that several other skills progressed as exposed to project-based instruction. These skills include the following such as:

- More engaged learner
- Ability to apply the lesson
- Learners become organize, creative and innovative
- Learners develop decision making skills
- Collaboration of ideas
- Learners develop listening skills and open-minded

It might be true that the aforesaid skills are evident among learners which they develop while performing projects as part of the academic requirements and assessment given by the teacher. As learners acquire

these skills, the level of critical thinking skills also enhances. Once a learner is engaged on a particular task, the learner becomes more reflective on the lesson, and its application. In this case, the learner becomes more organize, creative and innovative. Further, learners become more decisive and aware of the things that going on around his environment, as he is open to a collaborative ideas from the other people. In return, the learner become more critical.

**One interviewee claimed that:**

“More engagement sa students kasi pag usapang project big deal yan sa mga students and it takes time talaga matapos pag isang project kaya ito yung lubos na pinaghahandaan ng mga students, ang sa akin naman magiging active ka due to kailangan mo talagang pag aralan at mag search ng mga ilalagay sa project dagdag pa dito halimbawa kung groupings hindi lang ikaw yung mag iisip kundi kasama yung mga kaklase sa paggawa doon na nagkakaroon din ng collaboration of ideas from each students in which is better kumpara lang sa mga pag sesearch at pagbabasa para mapaunlad yung critical thinking skills nakakatulong din yung pagkakaroon ng collaboration kasi mas maraming ideas ang maiopen na posibleng makapagpaganda at makatulong na makagawa ng maayos na project”.

**English translation:**

"More engagement with students because when talking about a project, that's a big deal for the students and it really takes time to finish a project, so this is what the students are fully prepared for, as for me, you will be active due to the fact that you really need to study and do search for what will be included in the project, in addition to this, for example, in groupings, you are not the only one who will think, but with the classmates in the work there, who also have a collaboration of ideas from each student in which is better compared to just researching and reading to develop the critical thinking skills also help having collaboration because more ideas can be opened that can possibly improve and help make a good project".

**Another interviewee revealed that:**

”It shows based on my several experiences that project based instruction helped me to go outside the box. Such that, I continuously improve, see the lapses and to take

risk upon decisions. Project Based Instruction develops my decision making and my insights”.

Aside from skills that learners are able to develop, the results also revealed that students identify strategies beneficial in doing a project. These include Planning of the project, Collaboration with others, being open-minded to others and application to real life situations. These strategies are axial codes generated from the initial coding of the samples’ responses which give a general category/ theme of Strategies in performing projects that enhances critical thinking skills. Learners reflect on suitable strategies on how to deliver their projects. Doing so, it would give us an idea that they are already applying and adopting the characteristics of being critical on tasks that they are expected to deliver. They are able to reflect appropriate plan for a project, develop solutions, and resolve issues by learning to collaborate with others and being open-minded individuals, and to be a risk-taker. As one of the respondents even claimed that:

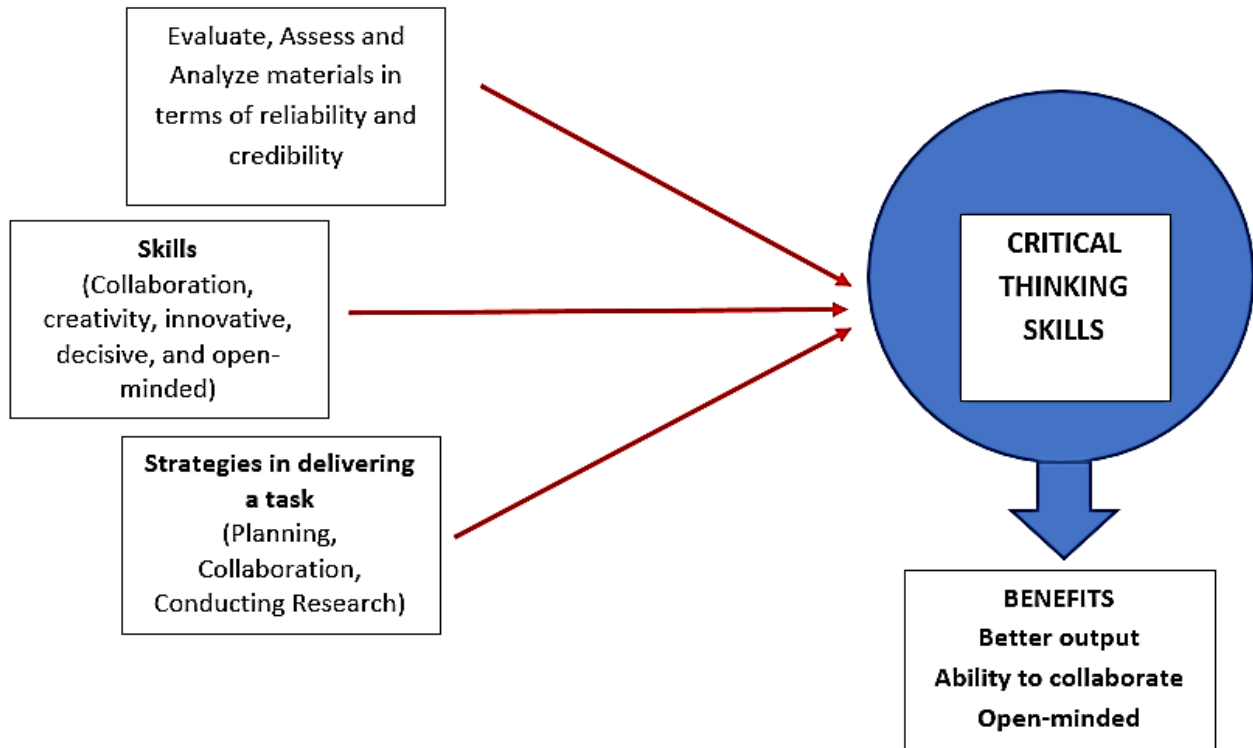
“I improve my risk - taking moves, do humane decisions, have back - up plans and list the what if's; one example to that was in our group research wherein when we got confused in our decision, someone needs to decide and I am just going to review things”.

Lastly, the respondents have shared that they become more organized in their ideas, open minded, and their ability to collaborate have enhanced.

The results presented are supported by the study of Siswandari (2019) claiming that multi-disciplinary integrated project-based learning can improve critical thinking skills and student collaboration. Similarity of results are evident in the study conducted by Kwietniewsk (2017) stating that project based learning in the classroom is beneficial to learners as it provides multiple opportunities to enhance and develop skills required to be competitive in facing the real life situations. Likewise, students are able to learn collaborating ideas with others. The results resonate with the study of Sohon (n.d.) that both Differentiated Instruction (DI), and the Project-Based Learning (PBL) can be used as an approach which enables teachers to help students meet their learning needs.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Project-based learning promotes among learners the following that develop their critical thinking skills.



*Figure 1: A diagram on the conclusion of the study*

Figure 1 details the conclusion of the study that project-based instruction in teaching social studies subject particularly the subject Readings in Philippine History in higher education would promote the capability to Evaluate, Assess and Analyze materials in terms of reliability and credibility aligned with the task required by the teacher as part of the academic requirements of the students. Likewise, this teaching pedagogy brings out the skills of collaboration, creativity, innovative, decisive, and open-minded. It also implies that strategies in developing a task are learned by the students through project-based instruction in the New Norma. Once these factors are established by the learners, their critical thinking skills is enhanced which will lead to benefits such as coming up with a better output, ability to collaborate with others that promotes being open-minded individual, and learners who are equipped with good planning and organizing strategies. For future researchers, it is important to explore other teaching pedagogy that will contribute developing 21st century skills among learners and produce values-oriented citizens.

**IMPLICATIONS TO THE FIELD**

Based on the studies presented in the literature review and the result of this study, the teaching pedagogy Project-based instruction is beneficial to the teaching of

social studies subjects as it promotes higher order thinking among learners and contributes to the enhancement of the students’ critical thinking skills.

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