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CURRENT STATUS OF ORGANIZING HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY TEACHING UNDER AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING APPROACH IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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ABSTRACT

Experiential learning is an important instructional approach that contributes to the development of students' competencies and qualities. Therefore, organizing the teaching of the integrated subject History and Geography under an experiential learning approach is necessary in the context of the ongoing reform of Vietnam's General Education Program. This paper investigates the current status of organizing History and Geography teaching under an experiential learning approach in primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, and proposes several solutions to improve the effectiveness of teaching this subject through experiential learning. Primary schools may refer to the research findings to select appropriate solutions, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of organizing experiential activities in History and Geography teaching in alignment with the requirements of the 2018 General Education Program.

KEYWORDS: History and Geography, experiential learning approach, current situation, primary schools, Ho Chi Minh City.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's 2018 General Education Program issued by the Ministry of Education and Training sets out a number of new orientations for teaching and learning, emphasizing learners' activeness, creativity, and the application of knowledge; focusing on learning how to learn and how to think; encouraging self-study; and creating conditions for learners to update knowledge and skills while developing competencies and qualities. An important orientation in renewing teaching methods and forms, particularly at the primary level, is to promote learners' active engagement, autonomy, and creativity, and to develop their action competence and collaborative working competence [1]. Given these orientations, teaching through an experiential learning approach should be prioritized, because it provides learners with experiences at different levels, thereby fostering their competencies and qualities.

Experiential learning is an instructional approach that enables students to engage directly with their surrounding environment through their senses, thereby stimulating activeness, autonomy, and creativity in the process of knowledge construction. Many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of experiential learning. Notably, Dewey's view of "learning through doing" highlights the centrality of action in learning; Kolb's research emphasizes a cyclical process consisting of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application, through which learners develop knowledge and skills; Beard points out the widespread use of experiential approaches in teaching practices worldwide; Piaget underscores the decisive role of experience in children's cognitive development; and Vygotsky argues that practical experience helps learners mobilize personal prior experience to develop independent problem-solving competence [2-7].

Numerous studies have examined experiential learning within specific school subjects. In Grade 5 Mathematics, experiential approaches have been used to create interactive learning environments that help students explore and apply knowledge, as illustrated by studies employing GeoGebra (e.g., Le Viet Minh Triet, Duong Huu Tong, Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy) and by hands-on experiential activities using readily available materials (e.g., Le Thi Thu Huong, Kim Ngoc). Research by Le Thi Thom on Vietnamese language teaching, Nguyen Thi Dung on organizing experiential activities in teaching literary reading, and Duong Tran Binh and Nguyen Lam Tuyet Ngoc on Grade 3 Natural and Social Science also shows that experiential learning enhances students' learning interest and the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition [8-12].

In the primary curriculum, besides subjects such as Vietnamese and Mathematics, the integrated subject History and Geography also play an important role in shaping primary students' qualities and competencies. Moreover, the objectives and curriculum of History and Geography contain features well suited to experiential learning: integrating historical and geographical education with cultural and social content through connections of space and time; integrating environmental protection and humanistic value education; combining theory with practice; and helping students explore the natural and social world to nurture national pride and love for nature, homeland, and country [13]. This indicates that the curriculum clearly emphasizes the formation and development of students' qualities and competencies through active learning activities that connect knowledge with practice and educational content with real-life contexts. In practice, many primary schools have actively implemented experiential teaching. However, experiential activities in History and Geography teaching at the primary level remain limited. This paper investigates the current status of organizing History and Geography teaching under an experiential learning approach in primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, and proposes solutions to improve teaching effectiveness in alignment with the 2018 General Education Program.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a literature review method and a survey method using a questionnaire designed on Google Forms with a 5-point Likert scale. The survey was administered to 75 school administrators

(including principals, vice principals, and heads of subject teams in primary schools, as well as district-level education managers) and 178 teachers from 14 public and non-public primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers. Survey data were processed using SPSS version 27.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Conceptualization of History and Geography Teaching under an Experiential Learning Approach

Teaching is an interactive process between teachers and learners through which scientific knowledge, as well as cognitive and practical skills, are transmitted and acquired; on that basis, learners' worldview is formed, creativity is developed, and personal qualities are cultivated [14].

Experience is a process of direct engagement, reflection, observation, and interaction with the environment, objects, and phenomena in an active and autonomous manner, drawing on one's knowledge, prior experiences, and lived experience to acquire new knowledge [15].

Teaching under an experiential learning approach is a form of instruction closely connected to teachers' organization of learning and students' participation in experiential activities. In this approach, students' activity is central, and all students experience learning through a specific process. Experiential teaching requires students to mobilize their prior experience and use multiple senses to engage with learning tasks. Through such engagement, students can develop independent and collaborative working abilities, creative thinking, and critical thinking [16].

Organizing teaching under an experiential learning approach is the process of establishing a dialectical relationship between teaching and learning in an intentionally designed learning environment, where students interact and connect with their lived experience to explore and acquire new knowledge, thereby developing qualities and competencies and meeting instructional objectives [17].

Based on these concepts, this paper conceptualizes teaching the integrated subject History and Geography under an experiential learning approach as a process in which teachers arrange and coordinate, in a rational and scientific manner, the elements of the instructional process. In this process, students are placed in specific situations close to real life or in authentic historical and geographical contexts, so that they can mobilize lived experience, knowledge, emotions, and personal experience to explore and construct new knowledge.

3.2. Current Status of Teaching History and Geography under an Experiential Learning Approach in Primary Schools in Ho Chi Minh City

a) School Administrators' and Teachers' Awareness of Teaching History and Geography under an Experiential Learning Approach

Table 1. Awareness of the advantages of the experiential approach in teaching History and Geography

Advantages of the experiential approach in teaching	Level of Implementation	
	Teachers (Mean)	School Administrators (Mean)
1. Students develop scientific understanding competencies in History and Geography linked to real-life practice	4.02	4.37
2. Create an environment for students to explore History and Geography knowledge and creatively apply learned knowledge and skills through direct engagement with real-world contexts	4.06	4.41
3. Develop students' autonomy and self-learning, communication and collaboration, problem-solving and creativity through subject learning	4.08	4.40
4. Students explore the natural and social world with national pride and love for nature, homeland, and country, thereby fostering qualities such as patriotism, compassion, diligence, honesty, and responsibility	4.13	4.43
5. Develop students' experience and social interaction skills	4.09	4.41
6. Increase students' learning interest when studying History and Geography	4.08	4.45
Overall Mean	4.08	4.41

The results in Table 1 show that both school administrators and teachers highly valued the advantages of the experiential approach in increasing learning interest and developing students' qualities and social competencies (overall mean for teachers = 4.08; for administrators = 4.41). These findings indicate that teachers and school administrators not only recognize the cognitive benefits but also adopt a comprehensive view of the significance of experiential teaching, which is consistent with the orientations of the 2018 General Education Program. One teacher shared: "Students are much more interested when they can participate in experiential activities rather than just sitting and listening to lectures as before."

b) Current Status of Teaching History and Geography under an Experiential Learning Approach

(1) Experiential teaching formats for History and Geography in primary schools:

Table 2. Current status of experiential teaching formats in History and Geography

Experiential teaching formats	Level of Implementation	
	Teachers (Mean)	School Administrators (Mean)
1. Experiential formats	3.31	3.28
1.1. Research-project experience	3.12	3.03
1.2. Extracurricular experience: history lesson at a museum	3.09	3.00
1.3. Field trip experience at historical sites/heritage locations	3.16	3.09
1.4. Group activity experience (e.g., group discussion, group practice)	3.99	4.23
1.5. Role-playing historical figures	3.36	3.37
1.6. Dramatization/theatricalization of History and Geography knowledge	3.18	2.93
1.7. Using learning materials in History/Geography museums via software and learning applications	3.28	3.33
1.8. Acting as tour guides introducing local History and Geography knowledge	3.26	3.24
2. Simulated experiences	3.17	3.14
2.1. Simulation using software and AI applications	3.12	3.05
2.2. Simulation using models/dioramas	3.09	2.87
2.3. Simulation through games and scenarios	3.17	3.27
2.4. Simulation using virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies	2.58	2.44
2.5. Simulation using pictures and videos	3.89	4.05
Overall Mean	3.25	3.22

The data in Table 2 indicate that the implementation level of experiential formats reported by teachers and school administrators was only moderate, suggesting that the application of organizational formats remains uneven and insufficiently systematic. Formats that are easier to implement in classrooms, such as group-based activities or learning through pictures and videos, were used more frequently, showing

a tendency to prioritize low-cost activities that fit existing conditions. By contrast, field-based experiential formats and technology-enhanced formats, especially AR/VR simulations, received very low ratings, reflecting major limitations in leveraging the potential for deep experiential learning in History and Geography. A teacher noted: “Although field experience is very useful, it is complicated, time-consuming, and requires coordination from many parties.” Similarly, a school administrator stated: “AR/VR is beyond the capacity of current school conditions; most teachers have never had access to it.” Overall, experiential implementation still leans toward simple in-class activities, while real-world and high-technology formats have not been sufficiently exploited, creating a gap between the requirements of the 2018 General Education Program and current implementation capacity.

(2) Steps for organizing experiential History and Geography teaching:

Table 3. Current status of steps for organizing History and Geography teaching under an experiential approach

Stages of organizing instruction	Level of Implementation	
	Teachers (Mean)	School Administrators (Mean)
1. Preparation stage	3.99	4.02
1.1. Identify competency development objectives for students in History and Geography teaching	4.08	4.15
1.2. Select lesson content in accordance with the History and Geography curriculum	4.02	4.12
1.3. Develop the teaching theme/topic	3.99	4.00
1.4. Plan experiential learning formats (locations and types of experience) aligned with curriculum competency requirements	3.85	3.84
1.5. Plan teaching methods to develop student competencies as required by the curriculum	3.98	3.99
1.6. Plan teaching conditions, instructional media, and necessary equipment for implementing the lesson plan	3.99	4.01
2. Implementation stage	3.93	3.98
2.1. Announce the theme/topic, objectives, and expected learning outcomes of the lesson	3.99	4.11
2.2. Pose questions/problems to elicit and connect students' prior experience relevant to the lesson theme	4.02	4.08
2.3. Organize students' experiential engagement (listening, seeing, touching, handling, etc.) and connect it with prior knowledge	3.85	3.87

2.4. Organize students to perceive objects/phenomena, internalize or discover concepts, and form skills	3.86	3.99
2.5. Organize students to manipulate objects/phenomena (group work, observation, comparison, analysis, discovery) under teacher guidance	3.90	3.85
2.6. Organize students to apply knowledge and skills to solve problems raised by the learning activity	3.96	4.00
3. Closure stage	4.01	4.13
3.1. Assess students' completion of learning tasks and the History and Geography lesson plan according to criteria	4.07	4.20
3.2. Collect feedback on what students have gained from the lesson	3.99	4.15
3.3. Assess students' knowledge acquisition and skill formation	4.00	4.17
3.4. Judge the extent to which the lesson plan objectives were achieved and draw lessons for the next lesson	4.02	4.09
3.5. Provide a basis to refine the teaching plan for subsequent stages with higher requirements	3.98	4.03
Overall Mean	3.97	4.04

The findings in Table 3 show that the implementation of the steps for organizing History and Geography teaching under an experiential approach in primary schools in Ho Chi Minh City was generally fairly high. Among the three stages, the closure stage was implemented more effectively than the preparation and implementation stages. However, the implementation stage, which plays a central and decisive role in experiential teaching, had the lowest mean score, reflecting inconsistency and limitations in teachers' practical operational capacity. A teacher shared: "The classroom is crowded and lacks materials, so direct experiential activities often cannot be carried out; we have to replace them with pictures or videos." From a management perspective, a school administrator commented: "Some teachers are still confused when designing experiential activities, especially those requiring manipulation, movement, or connection with real-life contexts." The low ratings for core activities such as hands-on manipulation, multisensory experience, and planning experiential formats indicate a clear dependence on material conditions and a lack of proactive strategy in instructional organization. It can be concluded that while awareness of experiential learning is relatively strong, teachers' capacity to organize experiential instruction remains limited and represents a major area for improvement.

(3) Assessment of learning outcomes in History and Geography under an experiential approach:

Table 4. Current status of assessment in History and Geography teaching under an experiential approach

Assessment of learning outcomes	Level of Implementation	
	Teacher s (Mean)	School Administrators (Mean)
1. Assessment content	3.75	3.82
1.1. Level of achievement in knowledge relative to lesson objectives and expected outcomes	4.04	4.17
1.2. Level of skill formation relative to lesson objectives and expected outcomes	4.02	4.12
1.3. Students' level of active participation in learning activities	4.05	4.17
1.4. Assessment of students' interest and attention when participating in learning activities	4.05	4.16
1.5. Ability to collaborate in groups and socially interact while completing learning tasks	3.35	3.36
1.6. Assessment of students' progress compared to prior stages on the above indicators	2.98	2.96
2. Assessment methods	4.09	4.19
2.1. Assessment through learning products	4.07	4.15
2.2. Oral questioning	4.11	4.28
2.3. Essay/written assignments	4.06	4.07
2.4. Observation	4.13	4.25
3. Assessment tools	3.27	3.26
3.1. Observation sheet	3.21	3.19
3.2. Checklist	3.16	3.15
3.3. Criteria-based rating scale/rubric	3.19	3.17
3.4. Record book/notebook	3.14	3.13
3.5. Self- and peer-assessment forms	3.15	3.12
3.6. Diverse tests	3.92	4.04
3.7. Use educational software and applications to monitor, manage, and assess	3.13	3.03
4. Participants in assessment	3.91	4.08
4.1. Student self-assessment	4.02	4.24

4.2. Peer assessment	3.90	4.17
4.3. Teacher assessment	4.14	4.39
4.4. Parent assessment	3.58	3.53
Overall Mean	3.69	3.75

Based on the analysis in Table 4, assessment practices in experiential History and Geography teaching have shown initial positive changes, particularly in assessment methods. Observation and oral questioning were rated highly by both teachers and school administrators due to their flexibility and suitability for primary students. However, several core aspects of competency-based assessment received low mean scores, especially the criterion of monitoring students' progress across stages, indicating that assessment practice still focuses on single points in time rather than on learning processes. One teacher shared: "We lack specific guidance materials, so we struggle to use tools such as rubrics or observation sheets." From the management perspective, a school administrator acknowledged: "Training on competency-based assessment has not been consistent; many teachers do not fully understand it or apply it mechanically." In general, although teachers and school administrators recognize the role of assessment in experiential learning, implementation still relies on traditional formats and does not effectively use tools that capture learning processes, thereby limiting the development of students' comprehensive competencies.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study shows that both teachers and school administrators hold positive perceptions of teaching the integrated subject History and Geography under an experiential learning approach in primary schools, consistent with the orientations of the 2018 General Education Program. However, implementation remains limited in terms of organizing direct experiential activities, diversifying experiential formats, and using process-oriented assessment tools. Constraints related to facilities, learning materials, technology, and teachers' capacity to organize experiential instruction continue to be major barriers. This situation reflects a gap between curriculum requirements and practical implementation in primary school contexts. The proposed recommendations aim to strengthen teacher professional development, improve supporting conditions, and enhance the effectiveness of organizing experiential History and Geography teaching in the coming period.

To enhance primary teachers' capacity to organize History and Geography teaching under an experiential learning approach, it is necessary to strengthen professional development on designing experiential activities, especially field-based experiences, hands-on manipulation, and multisensory experiences, so that teachers become more confident in organizing inquiry-oriented activities connected to authentic contexts. At the same time, schools should establish support mechanisms in terms of facilities, learning materials, and technology (e.g., digital maps, visual resources, and feasible uses of AR/VR applications) to enable teachers to implement a wider range of experiential formats. In addition, guiding teachers to develop assessment criteria systems, checklists, learning journals, learning portfolios, and process-tracking tools will improve the quality of competency assessment in

the spirit of experiential learning. Stronger coordination among teachers, school administrators, and parents is also needed to build consensus for organizing field activities and learning projects. Finally, professional sharing forums should be established so that teachers can exchange experiences, introduce effective models, and address difficulties, thereby gradually developing a sustainable and effective culture of experiential teaching in primary schools.

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