

# The Role of Geographical Fieldwork in Social Studies Education Program: The Comparative Studies in Thailand

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## Abstract

Geographical fieldwork is recognized as the most engaging and successful learning and instruction for both students and faculty. It affords them the ability to engage in various course delivery techniques. It also plays a crucial role in combining many theoretical and practical topics taught within a geography degree. This study aims to examine the value of geographical fieldwork for undergraduate students compared to four universities in Thailand. This qualitative research was conducted through online interviews with eight social studies education lecturers and program leaders from social studies education programs at four universities in Thailand, both rural and urban, that have organized fieldwork activities more than three times per academic year. Following a thematic analysis of the data, it was determined that multiple overarching themes contributed to the formulation of the perspective on developing practical skills through geographic fieldwork.

The primary finding was that the role of geographical fieldwork is comparable, emphasizing inquiry-based learning through integrating geographical theories and practicing outside of the classroom: curriculum design and administration influence particular outcomes, such as community development and learning space utilization.

**Keywords:** Geographical Fieldwork, Social Studies Education, Comparative Study.

## 1. Introduction

Fieldwork Education has always been an integral part of studying geography for a university degree, particularly obtaining geographical skills [1]. The capacity to create sufficient spatial comprehension through fieldwork, including experiences outside the laboratory, library, and classroom, can improve the learning results of college students. In addition, this method is widely regarded as one of the most impactful and successful teachings and learning approaches currently available [2]-[3]. Importantly, various transferable skills can be acquired through fieldwork. These authors identified these skills as attributes desired by employers and, as such, essential for graduates entering the workforce after completing their degree [4]-[5]. Many experts believe that fieldwork is the most effective method for teaching information and skills to geographers who have demonstrated their industry productivity [6]



**Figure 1: The wheel of fieldwork experience [7]**

Geography is taught in several Thai universities as part of the curriculum for undergraduate students. It was developed as a qualifying standard for education students by the Office of the Higher Education Commission in Thailand (4 years). Aside from academic results, university students must also gain essential talents. Therefore, geographical fieldwork is incorporated into the undergraduate curriculum.

However, there is no universal plan for fieldwork in geography education, as each university program's curriculum structure and evaluation criteria vary. These disparities are influenced by social and community contexts [8]. Some organizations, for instance, focus on ethnography and settlement development, while others emphasize local knowledge and community service. This study will examine the importance of fieldwork in geography education by comparing the usefulness of fieldwork education in four social studies education program from a curricular and learning management standpoint.

## 2. Methodology

This research will seek to provide information regarding the value of geographical fieldwork and answer the research questions that will serve as its foundation.

### *How do geography professors at each university view the role of geographical fieldwork?*

The study's goal was attitudes toward comprehending real-world human behavior [9]. Qualitative research is appropriate for comprehending human performance and motivation, hence ensuring the depth and specificity of the study. For this reason, the researcher is focusing on the relevant teaching experience and concept of geography education to appreciate participant perspectives better. Qualitative research is more successful in answering questions that cannot be answered through statistical processes or other quantifiable approaches; it also refers to people, feelings, views, and experiences [10]. In addition, qualitative research generates a variety of data gathering techniques, including observation, case studies, and interviews, which means that research activities connect directly with participants [11].

Online individual semi-structured interviews (SSIS) were utilized to collect data for this study. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher responds to participant remarks and follows preset questions [12]. Consequently, this interview method is appropriate for gathering information on how instructors perform geographical fieldwork and how they might greatly enhance their students' practical skills.

In addition, the face-to-face interview at each university hampered data collection for the Covid-19 project in Thailand. In this strategy, researchers employ the online interview method. Researchers will have greater access to geographically dispersed persons because they will no longer be constrained by the geographical limitations of in-person interviews [13]. "Purposive sampling" was the sampling approach used to find the answer to the research question [14]. In the sample recruitment method, the researcher examined the participation of education program leaders and lecturers from four Thai university social studies education programs. The researcher employed four factors to identify the four universities regarding the selected universities.

- Two universities should be placed in rural areas.
- Two universities should be located in urban areas.
- The social studies education program should have more than 30 students.
- The number of geographical fieldwork activities should exceed three every academic year.

These four colleges should be positioned in a mix of rural and urban locations to illustrate the differences in their fieldwork methodologies. These distinctions have resulted in discernible differences in activities and a great deal of heterogeneity in fieldwork outcomes dependent on each university's surrounding environment and the specific objectives of its geography curriculum. In addition, the number of students in the program should exceed thirty, be commensurate with the Thai higher education standard, and be suitable for fieldwork in geography lessons. Lastly, the university must conduct fieldwork activities more than three times since it may be demonstrated that the university promotes fieldwork in the social studies education curriculum. The lecturer can track the students' learning and skill development on each trip.

However, this university heterogeneity does not satisfy statistical assumptions due to the nature of the study. Nonetheless, it can be guaranteed that the colleges chosen will represent the variety of fieldwork methodologies utilized by social studies education students in Thai universities.

Participants must have three years of experience working in the education program and knowledge of geography education. In addition, participants should have experience with fieldwork education management and curriculum development. Indeed, the researcher will initiate contact by obtaining the email addresses of possible volunteers from the websites of the selected colleges.

### **3. Results**

#### ***Perceptions regarding the Role of geographical fieldwork***

To comprehend how geography professors consider the role of geographical fieldwork, it was necessary to comprehend how interviewees perceive geographical fieldwork methodology and instructional approach. The codes "fieldwork," "field trip," "cooperative working," and "experience" were repeated within the theme "geographical fieldwork."

##### ***University 1***

*In higher education programs, integrating a social science background with a geography approach to learning. Through student fieldwork projects, the primary aim is to improve the quality of life in the community.*

##### ***University 2***

*In the fieldwork approach, knowledge is integrated, and inquiry-based procedures are prioritized. Understanding geography and how to teach it in the classroom, especially how to incorporate local communities and learn spaces into the curriculum.*

##### ***University 3***

*Applied to learn through integrating theoretical frameworks and practice with real-world situations. Focusing on inquiry-based learning and integrating fieldwork method expertise with students' prior knowledge.*

##### ***University 4***

*Emphasis on teamwork and cooperative fieldwork to comprehend the physical environment and people relationships in the excursion area.*

The interviews revealed that the significant role of geographical fieldwork at each university is the learning strategy of experience, emphasizing the integration of theories and background knowledge with using essential geographical instruments in natural areas. In order to develop new social knowledge, their university's approach to geographical fieldwork integrates geography subject with a social science framework from earlier learning modules. Nevertheless, some lecturers offer opportunities for students to practice using critical geographical tools and systems outside of the classroom, which are essential abilities for a geography teacher. Some colleges believe that team-based geographical fieldwork facilitates the development of a more comprehensive grasp of the physical environment and human interaction than traditional classroom instruction.

### **4. Discussion**

#### ***The Role of geographical fieldwork***

According to the data, the role of geographical fieldwork at four universities is an inquiry-based learning style in which students manage their work. This engages students in generating questions, locating relevant material, and analyzing information to answer the original question in an organized manner [15]. The fieldwork method's structure of student projects, research, and discussion groups promotes inquiry-based learning through student interaction [16]. In particular, bridging background knowledge and theories to experience [17] is a direct role of geographical fieldwork in lecturers' views. According to the results of the interviews, learning fieldwork in both educational contexts is expected to integrate geographical and social scientific contexts. It can be centered on investigating rural and urban areas to

promote community health and comprehend the creation of identity and enculturation of space and place [18].

Consequently, geographical fieldwork is the child-learning center where children begin self-discovery and information acquisition by employing human geography and social theory frameworks. In addition, using various geography tools and new technology in actual space, particularly in metropolitan settings, is one of the learning skills developed through fieldwork [19]. The role of geographical fieldwork is a learning strategy that has increased learning experience, heightened interest in academic subjects, and contributed to developing more positive learning attitudes. Furthermore, geographical fieldwork in rural universities has the potential to create more prosperous communities [20]. This is seen in the learning results of educational leadership-focused fieldwork that improve the quality of life in student communities. Indeed, a feeling of human development and the development of the five senses motivates individuals to learn actively and creatively, fosters the acquisition of new abilities, and explores the broader potential of playful and multisensory environments [21]. Geographical fieldwork provides prospective geography instructors with the requisite potential and knowledge skills prior to graduation. Through school fieldwork, kids in elementary and secondary school will acquire this knowledge and these practical skills. Fieldwork is crucial for higher education and is linked to classroom management in the future occupations of students for this reason. Consequently, the educator's role in geographical fieldwork is the advanced inquiry-based learning process that integrates human geography and physical geography to investigate natural and social phenomena. Fieldwork is more highly recognized for its social, moral, and civic benefits than its contribution to classroom geography education.

## 5. Conclusion

Geographical fieldwork has become a crucial method for enhancing the geography skills of social science students, particularly education students. However, the design of activities and learning outcomes targets typically varies based on each country's social and learning context.. This study intends to compare how geographical fieldwork is taught at four universities in Thailand. This study is qualitative research employing online interviews, and all data were collected by eight geography professors and program leaders from four Thai universities' social studies education programs. Then, all data are subjected to thematic analysis to answer research questions. This study concludes that fieldwork teaching approaches at four universities are comparable, concentrating on inquiry-based learning that combines geographical ideas and allows students to practice outside the classroom. Some learning outcome objectives, such as community building and learning space use, vary based on the curriculum design and compatibility of the learning management system employed. Rural and urban colleges have established the objective of fieldwork that focuses on collaborative working activities that apply classroom geography knowledge to real-world situations.

Nonetheless, several rural university view the role of geographical fieldwork as the mission to build communities and the well-being of residents. Universities in the capital city, on the other hand, create the fieldwork strategy to practice numerous geographical technologies and tools as their budgets and technological support increase. Consequently, it is essential to recognize the significance of geographical fieldwork as inquiry-based learning approaches developed from personal experience and social context that have followed the potential of geography teaching standards, such as an appreciation for human nature.

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