

Project-Based Learning in Teaching Social Studies in Higher Education Institution: A Narrative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of Social Studies teachers in using Project-Based Learning (PBL) in higher education institutions during Academic Year 2023–2024 as a basis for developing an instructional guide. Guided by an interpretative qualitative research approach, the study sought to answer two central concerns: (1) the stories teachers tell about how they use PBL in teaching Social Studies, and (2) the similarities and differences observed in PBL teaching among Social Studies teachers. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with six Social Studies teachers from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of the Visayas and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that teachers commonly use PBL to bridge theory and society, promote active participation and collaboration, and implement instruction through intentional planning and reflective practice. While teachers shared a common pedagogical foundation grounded in student-centered and real-world learning, differences in implementation emerged due to personal teaching pathways and contextual factors such as class size, subject matter, student readiness, institutional support, and available resources. Despite these variations, strong departmental alignment and shared curricular expectations contributed to consistency in PBL practices across the institution. The study concludes that Project-Based Learning in Social Studies is both a shared and adaptive instructional practice anchored in common principles yet responsive to diverse teaching contexts. Based on these findings, the study recommends sustained professional development, strengthened institutional support, and the development of a flexible instructional guide that builds on teachers' lived experiences. Future research may extend this inquiry by examining students' perspectives and the long-term impacts of PBL on learning outcomes in higher education.

Keywords: project-based learning, social studies, qualitative research, higher education, teaching practices

INTRODUCTION

A key goal for educators and politicians alike in modern education has been to actively engage their teaching, planning and foster critical thinking abilities. In this setting, project-based learning (PBL) has come to be recognized as a potent and innovative educational strategy that aims to change the static classroom into a vibrant learning environment. Through interactive and engaging projects, PBL enables teachers to investigate real-world issues, build knowledge, and hone crucial skills (Novalia et al., 2025). It explores project-based learning's advantages, difficulties, and overall effect on learning outcomes and Teaching in the context of social studies.

In social studies education, program-based learning (PBL), especially when implemented through an exploratory approach, entails organizing the curriculum and instructional strategies around a number of clearly defined programs or projects. Active and student-centered learning is the focus of this method, which also frequently incorporates technology integration, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, assessment, and reflection (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). The transition from rote memorization to active and student-centered learning experiences is represented by project-based learning. With the emphasis on the fusion of theoretical ideas and real-world applications, this method helps teachers get a deeper comprehension of the material and its relevance to their daily lives. PBL encourages critical thinking, cooperation, communication, and creativity in teachers by immersing them in real-world problem-solving tasks skills that are becoming increasingly important in the workplace of the twenty-first century (Novalia et al., 2025).

The vital academic field known as social studies encompasses a wide range of topics which include geography, history, economics, civics, and sociology (Parker, 2015). It plays a critical role in assessing students' understanding of society, culture, and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships. However, the failure of traditional social studies teaching methodologies to connect theoretical information to practical situations often leaves students disengaged and limits their capacity to apply knowledge to real-world situations (Dubinsky & Hamid, 2024). Higher education institutions have recently focused on teaching students both hard skills such as professional, cognitive knowledge, and soft skills such problem-solving and teamwork (Emanuel et al., 2021). However, traditional learning has been playing a dominant role where teachers are "the transmitter of the knowledge" and students act as "the receptor of the information" (Andriyani & Anam, 2022). This makes it difficult to attain these skill-related goals. Students find it challenging to participate completely in educational activities as a result which could result in a superficial understanding of disciplinary information.

Some researchers have a great deal on PBL and are connected to the Buck Institute for Education. Their research offers useful tactics and recommendations for putting PBL into practice in social studies classrooms (Brody, 2024; Gardner, 2022). These provide guidance on how to manage projects well and incorporate them into a variety of topic areas including social studies. Dewey (2022) highlighted the value of reflective thinking and hands-on learning in the classroom. His theories, which promoted education that links pupils with real-life experiences and critical thinking, set the foundation for contemporary PBL techniques.

Through these issues and situations, researcher might provide insightful analyses of the advantages and difficulties of social studies program-based learning, as well as evidence-based suggestions for practitioners, legislators, and teachers. In addition, universities, and research universities in particular, place a greater emphasis on developing students' research skills than on developing their professional or transferable skills (Otermans et al., 2025). As a result, there may be a disconnect between what kids learn in school and what they require for employment (Farber et al., 2023). It is argued that to fix this scenario, students should be given the chance to engage in problem-solving and knowledge building in legitimate professional situations (Farber et al., 2023). Project-based learning (PBL) is a desirable strategy for achieving this objective (Gardner, 2022). The impacts of PBL and instructors' direct instruction on students' academic progress in elementary, secondary, and university education.

Atheoretical Stance

The research on program-based learning in social studies education is a qualitative study and will be based on Narrative Inquiry. Learning theory of this would entail merging ideas from project-based learning and narrative inquiry techniques. This strategy encourages educators to create and share narratives about their exploratory investigations through fun, hands-on projects, with the goal of improving their learning experience and comprehension of social studies subjects. Through experiences and memoirs, narrative inquiry seeks to understand human experiences and the construction of meaning. In the context of teaching social studies, for educators encouraging students to investigate historical events, cultural viewpoints, and societal challenges through storytelling falls under the umbrella of narrative inquiry. It is possible for educators to encourage students to write narratives highlighting the unique and common experiences of people from many eras and cultures to increase empathy and their comprehension of historical context.

Philosophical Stance

This study is a qualitative study, which can be explained through its basis in epistemology, ontology, axiology, methodology, and rhetoric. These sources of ideas would be helpful enough to understand further in this research study.

Epistemology. From an epistemological perspective, the study will examine the experiences of Social Studies teachers utilizing Project-Based Learning in higher education during the academic year 2023-2024. The findings will emerge through the narratives shared by participants, highlighting their individual and collective stories. The researcher will delve into the teachers' perspectives on how they implement PBL in their classrooms, analyzing the similarities and differences in their approaches, as well as the contextual factors that shape their

practices. This exploration aims to uncover insights that will inform the development of enhanced instructional plans, ultimately bridging theoretical understanding with practical application in Social Studies education.

Pre-thematizing. In pre-thematizing the study, the researcher will focus on the varied experiences of Social Studies teachers utilizing Project-Based Learning (PBL) in higher education. This entails recognizing that these teachers are not only individuals in a classroom setting but also vital contributors to enriching the understanding of PBL in Social Studies instruction. By engaging with the teachers, the study aims to illuminate their perspectives on how PBL enhances learning experiences, the challenges they encounter in its implementation, and the opportunities for developing effective instructional strategies. This approach seeks to foreground their insights, creating a foundation for informed recommendations that can improve teaching practices in the field.

Intentionality. Intentionality is crucial in understanding the epistemological viewpoint of the study regarding Social Studies teachers and Project-Based Learning (PBL). The researcher explicitly aims to uncover the intentional actions, strategies, and thought processes that inform the teachers' experiences and practices, emphasizing the purpose and significance of conducting the study. This intentional stance acknowledges the diverse perspectives of the teachers while respecting and valuing their insights. The researcher adopts a collaborative approach, recognizing that the knowledge generated about PBL implementation is not static but is shaped through interactive dialogue and shared experiences.

Ontology. From this perspective, the ontology of Social Studies teachers using Project-Based Learning (PBL) reveals various insights into their experiences and pedagogical practices. The narratives of these teachers will capture their behaviors, interactions, and reflections surrounding PBL, highlighting its transformative role in their teaching processes. Each teacher's experience serves not only as a personal account of instructional methods but also as a representation of the evolving landscape of education within higher learning institutions. The study will explore the existence and function of PBL as a pedagogical approach, examining how it has been integrated into Social Studies curricula and its impact on student engagement and learning outcomes.

Axiology. From the perspective of axiology, the study will recognize the intrinsic value of Social Studies teachers' experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL) in higher education. It will prioritize the importance of teachers' perspectives and the ethical implications of their instructional practices, emphasizing respect for their insights and the challenges they face in implementing PBL. The researcher will strive to create an environment where teachers feel valued and heard, ensuring that their narratives are depicted authentically and responsibly. This approach aims to foreground the subjective experiences of educators while also acknowledging the objective realities of teaching contexts, resource availability, and institutional support.

Facticity. This perspective aligns with existentialist philosophy emphasizing the immutable realities that shape the experiences of Social Studies teachers in their use of Project-Based Learning (PBL). Within this context, facticity encompasses a range of elements, including the teachers' individual backgrounds, teaching environments, institutional frameworks, and the resources available to them. These factors serve as the foundational realities that influence how teachers conceptualize and implement PBL in their classrooms, shaping their pedagogical identities and classroom dynamics.

Philosophical reduction. Philosophical reduction will be employed in this study to strip away layers of assumptions and external influences, revealing the core truths that underlie Social Studies teachers' experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL). This process will involve moving beyond surface-level observations and educational norms to explore the deeper essence of PBL's impact on teaching practices and student engagement. Through reflective analysis and dialogue with teachers, the study will aim to unearth the fundamental truths about the methods, challenges, and successes associated with PBL in Social Studies education, as well as the values it embodies.

Methodological. From a methodological perspective, the researcher will consciously strive to explore and comprehend the underlying themes and patterns in the experiences of Social Studies teachers utilizing Project-Based Learning (PBL) in higher education. This approach will guide the identification of significant elements regarding the implementation, effectiveness, and challenges associated with PBL in Social Studies instruction. The process of thematizing will help the researcher focus on essential components such as teaching strategies,

student engagement, and educators' insights, enabling a thorough exploration of the multifaceted role of PBL in enhancing educational practices and outcomes.

Rhetoric. From a rhetorical perspective, rhetoric is often misunderstood as mere embellishment or a superficial tool for persuasion, sometimes seen as a substitute for genuine engagement. However, in the context of Social Studies education and Project-Based Learning (PBL), rhetoric serves as a vital mechanism for fostering deeper understanding and collaboration among educators and students. It transcends mere language to encompass the ways in which teachers articulate their pedagogical values, strategies, and experiences, influencing how students grasp and apply knowledge. Rhetoric in teaching PBL is not limited to the spoken word; it derives meaning from the teacher's actions, presence, and ability to weave together diverse elements of learning into cohesive, impactful projects.

Art of Writing. The present study aims to inform, persuade, educate, and motivate, serving as a fundamental mechanism for effectively communicating the findings and insights regarding Social Studies teachers' experiences with Project-Based Learning (PBL). The process of informing involves the meticulous presentation of factual data and nuanced analysis derived from the research, ensuring that educators and stakeholders have access to accurate and reliable information about PBL's impact in the classroom. Persuasion, in this context, entails crafting compelling narratives supported by robust evidence, aiming to influence educators' perspectives and practices, potentially guiding them toward adopting innovative strategies for teaching Social Studies.

Domain of Inquiry

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of Social Studies teachers using Project-Based Learning in Higher Education Institutions Academic Year 2023-2024 as basis for an instructional guide.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following sub problems:

1. What stories are teachers telling about how they use Project-Based Learning in teaching Social Studies?
2. What similarities and differences are observed in Project-Based Learning (PBL) teaching among Social studies teachers?
3. Based on the findings of the study, what enhanced instructional plan can be developed?

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study employed a qualitative method of research utilizing narrative inquiry with the aid of an interview guide. The implications of project-based learning (PBL) on the social studies teaching process are explored in this qualitative research study. This study attempted to identify the potential advantages, difficulties, and transformative features of this teaching strategy by examining the experiences and viewpoints of educators who have incorporated PBL into their social studies curricula. The research aims to offer a comprehensive knowledge of how PBL influences teaching practices, student engagement, and the development of critical thinking abilities in the setting of social studies education through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and theme analysis. This qualitative research examines how project-based learning affects social studies instruction. The study aims to identify educators' perspectives on the advantages, difficulties, and transformative potential of PBL in the context of social studies teaching through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The research seeks to provide insightful contributions to the academic and practical spheres of teaching and learning through thematic analysis.

Participants

The participants of the study 6 teachers from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of the Visayas. All informants are educators earned years of expertise in teaching Social Studies. Each participant completed an informed consent form after being briefed about the study, receiving guidance on questions, and indicating their

willingness to participate. The researcher seeks to get in-depth knowledge and understanding of a specific subject. Judgmental sampling can be used to guarantee that the sample covers a variety of perspectives, which are critical for understanding the program's overall impact.

Table 1 Focal Participants

Participant	Department	Teaching Experiences
Teacher A	Political Science	4 years
Teacher B	Political Science	10 years
Teacher C	General Education	3 years
Teacher D	General Education	11 years
Teacher E	General Education	5 years
Teacher F	General Education	3 years

The chosen respondents are educated with a degree in social studies or any related field of profession. The respondents are currently working at the University of the Visayas and teaching any social studies – related subjects for more than a year. The researcher-made sure that participants give their free, informed permission after being made aware of the goals and limitations of the study. The informants were chosen using the Purposive Sampling Method based on the set criteria for the study.

Data Gathering Tools

This study utilized a researcher-made interview guide questionnaire. This questionnaire will determine the narratives of the teachers about project-based learning in teaching social studies in Higher Educational Institutions. This instrument was created to better fit the purpose of the study. Validation were conducted by three jurors with doctoral degrees in Social Studies, using Good and Scates validation form. The Interview Guide consists of the following: Part I is the profile of the respondent's where they were asked about their gender, course and department and length of years teaching or using PBL. Part 2 contains their experiences and perception towards the application of project-based learning. Lastly, part 3 contains the questions as a guide during follow-up interviews.

Data Gathering Procedure

Pre-Data Gathering. The data collection commenced by obtaining permission from the Dean of Graduate Studies of Education at the University of the Visayas, followed by a letter to the Research Director and to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for distributing questionnaires and conducting the study. Consent will also be obtained before engaging students in the study, and provide clear explanations regarding how any information obtained from their involvement would be handled with the utmost confidentiality and used to further the study's objectives. The researcher submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure ethical guidelines were followed and participants were protected.

Actual Data Gathering. Prior to starting the interview, the researcher obtained informed consent from each participant in their vacancy and availability. The researcher will give the participant free rein to select a good setting for the interview that would guarantee seclusion, reduce outside noise, and assure participant comfort. The participant will pick a specific date and location within the Institution and spared more or less than 1 hour. The researcher introduced herself, the significance and relevance of the study, the purpose of the study and the researcher will describe the study's goals, confidentiality policies, and any possible risks or advantages. The researcher will listen intently as the researcher follows the interview instructions and asked questions in a conversational style to encourage participants to share their ideas and experiences. The researcher will record the interview with the respondent's permission in order to get correct answers, and took thorough notes.

Post-Data Gathering. All data the data gathered were organized, analyzed and interpreted. Moreover, the answered questionnaires will be kept in the cabinet of the researcher in which nobody could access without her permission. However, these questionnaires will be shredded after a year or after the publication of the study.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the qualitative data, this study utilized Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The participants' stories and responses will serve as the raw data, and the researcher will interpret these core narratives to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants in using Project-Based Learning in Higher Education Institutions. Narrative research is an aspect of research that involves gathering and then reflecting on people's lived experiences, according to Creswell et al. (2007). Narrative research explores the life experiences of individuals over time. This approach is frequently used to examine and interpret personal narratives or stories that people have shared, with an emphasis on comprehending the experiences, viewpoints, and meanings that are ingrained. The data were organized into themes, including stories of social studies teachers in using PBL, as well as the similarities and differences observed in using PBL in the classroom. The final step will involve validating the findings by returning the descriptions and themes to the participants and key stakeholders. This process will ensure that the analysis accurately reflects their opinion/perspective and thereby preserving the integrity of the data.

Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. It has been approved following the protocol of the Research and Ethics Committee of the University of the Visayas with Reference No. 2026-0316 dated April 16, 2026. The research involved university students participating voluntarily in an online survey. Before completion of the questionnaires, an accompanying cover letter explained the confidentiality and purpose of the study, the potential objectives, and the voluntary participation. No financial incentives were provided for participating in the study. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter contains the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data on the experiences of Social Studies teachers using Project-Based Learning in Higher Education Institutions Academic Year 2023-2024 as basis for an instructional guide.

Stories of Teachers about Project-based Learning in Social studies

This central theme presents the shared narratives of Social Studies teachers from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of the Visayas regarding their experiences in using Project-Based Learning (PBL in higher education. The stories highlight how teachers conceptualize, adopt, and implement PBL as part of their instructional practice, revealing both their pedagogical motivations and classroom realities. Through their stories, PBL emerges as a learner-centered approach that connects theory to societal contexts, promotes active engagement and collaboration, and is sustained through intentional planning and design. Collectively, these narratives provide a holistic view of how Project-Based Learning is practiced in Social Studies instruction reflecting teachers' efforts to make learning meaningful, relevant, and aligned with academic goals.

Table 2. Stories of Teachers in using Project-based Learning in Social Studies

Themes	Factors	Synthesis
I Decided to Try Out	Teachers use real-world issues, community-based tasks, and applied projects to help students connect Social Studies concepts to actual social realities.	Stories of teachers reveal that PBL serves as a bridge between abstract theories and real-life contexts, making Social Studies learning more meaningful, relevant, and socially grounded for students.
I Am Fully Engaged in PBL	Project-based activities require group work, shared responsibility, discussion, and interaction, which increase student participation and collaboration.	PBL transforms the classroom into an interactive learning community where engagement is sustained through collaboration, dialogue, and active participation, reflecting the participatory nature of Social Studies.

I See Improvements in Students' Learning	Teachers adopt PBL through reflective practice, carefully plan projects aligned with learning outcomes, and design structured activities with clear guidelines and assessments.	The effective use of PBL is rooted in intentional instructional planning, where projects are purposefully designed to align with course objectives, ensuring both engagement and academic rigor.
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The thematic table presents a clear synthesis of the stories of teachers about Project-Based Learning in Social Studies by showing how the three interrelated themes collectively explain their instructional experiences. The first theme indicates that teachers use PBL to bridge theoretical concepts and real-world social contexts, making learning more meaningful for students. The second theme highlights how PBL fosters active participation and collaboration, transforming classrooms into interactive learning communities where students engage through teamwork, dialogue, and shared responsibility. The third theme emphasizes that these instructional practices are sustained through intentional planning and reflective design, with projects carefully aligned to learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Taken together, the table illustrates that teachers' use of PBL is not incidental but purposeful, learner-centered, and grounded in thoughtful pedagogy, demonstrating how authentic application, collaboration, and careful planning converge to shape effective Social Studies instruction in higher education.

Theme 1: I Decided to Try Out

In many Social Studies classrooms in higher education, teachers often recount a shift in their practice that feels almost like a story of transformation, moving away from traditional lectures and textbook-driven lessons toward Project-Based Learning (PBL), where learning begins to mirror the real world. They describe designing experiences where students take on the role of investigators, exploring historical events, examining social issues, and grappling with contemporary problems through meaningful projects. Instead of simply delivering information, these teachers guide students through inquiry, helping them analyze sources, question perspectives, and connect theory to lived realities. Along the way, they witness how students become more engaged and thoughtful, not only understanding concepts more deeply but also learning to propose informed solutions grounded in civic awareness. In these narratives, PBL becomes more than a method, it becomes a bridge between classroom knowledge and the complexities of society, reshaping both how teachers teach and how students experience learning.

"One of the reasons I use project-based learning is so students can see that Social Studies is not just theory. I usually let them work on projects related to current social issues so they can connect what we discuss in class to what is happening around them."

– Teacher A, Line 3

"In my classes, instead of long exams, I ask students to do group projects like community studies or case analyses. It helps them understand the topic better because they actually apply what they learn."

– Teacher B, Line 6

"I noticed that when students work on projects, they become more involved. For example, when they research local history or social problems in Cebu, they are more eager to participate because it feels closer to them."

– Teacher C, Line 2

"I use project-based learning mainly to develop their critical thinking. I guide them, but I let them decide how to approach the project, what sources to use, and how they will present their output."

– Teacher D, Line 1

"As a Social Studies teacher, I want students to understand that the subject affects real communities. Through projects, they get to analyze issues, not just read about them."

– Teacher E, Line 4

“I think project-based learning makes students more responsible for their learning. They can’t just wait for the teacher, they have to work together, and really understand the lesson to finish the project.”

– Teacher F, Line 3

Social Studies teachers in higher education share stories that bring Project-Based Learning (PBL) to life stories grounded in their day-to-day encounters with students, communities, and the realities of teaching a subject deeply tied to society. In their classrooms, learning moves beyond lectures and textbooks, unfolding instead through projects that mirror real-world challenges, local histories, and contemporary social issues. Through these experiences, teachers narrate not just a method, but a transformation in how teaching and learning are lived. Teacher A recalls intentionally designing projects that bridge theory and lived reality. For them, PBL becomes a way of answering a recurring student question: Why does this matter? They describe how students begin to see Social Studies not as distant or abstract, but as something happening around them every day, visible in the news, in their communities, and in their own lives.

Similarly, Teacher B narrates a shift away from traditional assessments toward more experiential forms of learning. Exams, once central, are replaced by collaborative inquiries community studies and case analyses that ask students to do Social Studies rather than simply remember it. In recounting these practices, Teacher B reflects on how understanding deepens when students actively apply concepts. For Teacher C, the story unfolds in moments of visible student engagement. They observe how learners come alive when projects bring them closer to home when the subject matter reflects Cebu’s local histories and ongoing social concerns. Teacher D’s narrative centers on trust trusting students to take ownership of their learning. In their classroom, PBL is not tightly controlled but deliberately open-ended. Students make decisions, choose sources, and design their own ways of presenting knowledge, while the teacher stands beside them as a guide rather than in front as the sole authority.

In another account, Teacher E speaks of a deeper purpose: connecting academic learning with civic awareness. Their story highlights a desire for students to recognize that Social Studies is not confined to classrooms but is embedded in real communities facing real issues. Through projects, students learn to engage, question, and analyze. Finally, Teacher F reflects on how PBL reshapes student responsibility. In their narrative, learning becomes a shared endeavor, one that demands collaboration, accountability, and genuine understanding. Students can no longer remain passive recipients; they must actively contribute.

This aligns with constructivist views of learning where knowledge is actively constructed through experience and reflection. Rehman et al. (2024) explained in their study that PBL immerses students in complex and real-world tasks that require inquiry, decision-making, and problem-solving. Similarly, Bendeliani and Torstendotter (2026) emphasized that PBL helps learners gain a deeper understanding of subject matter by applying knowledge in authentic contexts. The experiences of the University of the Visayas Social Studies teachers reflect these principles demonstrating how PBL enhances relevance and meaning in higher education instruction. In general, these stories shared by the six teachers emphasize that Project-Based Learning is a deliberate pedagogical choice aimed at transforming Social Studies from a content-heavy subject into an engaging, practical, and socially relevant learning experience. These insights serve as a strong foundation for developing an instructional guide that reflects real classroom practices and institutional context.

Theme 2: I am Fully Engaged in PBL

Teachers often share stories of how Project-Based Learning (PBL) gradually reshaped the way their classrooms felt and functioned. They recall how, in the past, Social Studies lessons were dominated by lectures, where student participation was minimal and conversations were limited. Over time, however, they began to design projects that placed students at the heart of the learning process, transforming the classroom into a more interactive and dynamic space. In these experiences, students were no longer passive listeners but active participants working together, exchanging ideas, and tackling complex tasks as a team. Teachers describe how these projects created natural opportunities for collaboration, where learners engaged in discussions, challenged

one another's thinking, and solved problems collectively. Through these stories, it becomes clear that PBL does more than change instructional strategies; it cultivates a classroom environment that reflects the very essence of Social Studies, social, participatory, and deeply rooted in shared understanding.

"When I started using project-based learning, I noticed that students became more active during class. They talk more, share ideas, and really work together to finish the project."

– Teacher A, Line 7

"Group projects help students who are usually quiet. Once they are working with their classmates, they become more confident to contribute."

– Teacher B, Line 6

"I see better participation when they know they are producing something as a group and not just listening to a lecture."

– Teacher C, Line 9

Teachers explained that projects require students to work in groups, exchange ideas, and negotiate roles, which strengthens collaboration and communication skills. Through these shared learning experiences, students become more engaged not only with the subject matter but also with their peers. Teacher A recounts one of these moments of transformation, describing how classroom energy shifted when projects were introduced. What was once a silent room becoming a space filled with conversation, idea-sharing, and collective effort. For Teacher B, the story centers on students who previously lingered in the background. Through group work, these quieter learners began to find their voice, supported by the presence and encouragement of their peers. Similarly, Teacher C reflects on how participation becomes more meaningful when students are engaged in producing something together, an output that requires both individual effort and collective responsibility.

"I assign roles within the group so each student has responsibility. That way, everyone is involved and accountable."

–Teacher D, Line 6

"In Social Studies, collaboration is important because students learn different perspectives from one another. Projects allow that to happen naturally."

– Teacher E, Line 9

"During project work, I act more as a facilitator. I observe how they work together and guide them if there are conflicts or challenges."

– Teacher F, Line 8

Across these accounts, participation is not simply increased, it is transformed. Students begin to engage through dialogue, shared tasks, and the process of building something meaningful together. The teachers describe classrooms that feel more dynamic, where learning is not delivered but co-created. As the narratives deepen, collaboration emerges not as an incidental outcome, but as an intentional design of the learning experience. Teacher D shares how they structure group work carefully, assigning roles to ensure that each student carries responsibility within the collective task. In another account, Teacher E highlights how collaboration in Social Studies becomes a space for encountering diverse perspectives. Through projects, students learn that understanding social issues requires listening to others and negotiating meaning. Meanwhile, Teacher F reflects on their evolving role within these collaborative spaces. Rather than directing every step, they observe, guide, and intervene only, when necessary, particularly when students face interpersonal challenges.

The narratives of the teachers demonstrate that PBL shifts the classroom dynamic from teacher-centered to learner-centered, promoting active engagement and shared learning. By working collaboratively, students engage in meaningful dialogue, practice problem-solving, and develop social skills essential for academic and professional success. This increased engagement also contributes to improved motivation, as students feel more invested in tasks that involve cooperation and tangible outputs. According to Mendo – Lazaro et al. (2022), structured group work enhances learning outcomes, interpersonal skills, and student motivation. In a collaborative environment, learners benefit from positive interdependence and individual accountability both of which are evident in the teachers' project designs.

These stories suggest that Project-Based Learning enhances student engagement by fostering collaboration and active participation. Through group-based projects, students become co-constructors of knowledge, developing both academic understanding and interpersonal skills. These experiences highlight the importance of incorporating collaborative project designs in Social Studies instruction and provide valuable insight for the development of an instructional guide that promotes active and student-centered learning in higher education.

Theme 3: I See Improvements in Students' Learning

Teachers often begin this story by recalling the moment they first tried Project-Based Learning (PBL) in their Social Studies classes, not as a sudden shift, but as a thoughtful response to what they felt was missing in their teaching. They speak of reflecting on their practices, attending professional development sessions, and recognizing the need to make learning more engaging and meaningful for their students. From there, PBL slowly took shape, first through small, tentative projects, and later through more carefully designed and structured activities. They describe how each project was intentionally planned—aligned with course objectives, grounded in real-world issues, and crafted to encourage inquiry and deeper understanding. Over time, what started as an experiment became a deliberate and sustained approach, guided by clear purpose and careful preparation. In these narratives, PBL is not portrayed as an improvised method, but as a well-thought-out journey, one that reflects the teachers' commitment to designing richer, more meaningful learning experiences in Social Studies.

"I started using project-based learning when I noticed that students could answer exams but struggled to explain how the lessons applied to real situations. That's when I realized I needed a different approach."

– Teacher A, Line 8

"At first, I tried small projects, just to test if it would work in my class. Over time, I slowly integrated more project-based activities as I saw students becoming more engaged."

– Teacher B, Line 12

"My exposure to PBL came through seminars and discussions with colleagues. I realized that it fits Social Studies well because the subject deals with real social issues."

– Teacher C, Line 14

Teacher A begins their story with a moment of realization, an instance where traditional forms of assessment no longer seemed sufficient. While students could perform well in exams, something essential was missing: the ability to connect knowledge with real-life contexts. This realization marked the beginning of their transition toward PBL. For Teacher B, the journey toward PBL was gradual and exploratory. They recall starting small, testing whether project-based tasks could work within their classroom context. Over time, these initial experiments grew into more sustained practices as they witnessed increased student engagement. Meanwhile, Teacher C situates their experience within professional learning spaces, seminars, conversations with colleagues, and exposure to new pedagogical ideas. Through these encounters, they began to see PBL not just as a method, but as an approach that aligns closely with the nature of Social Studies itself.

"One project I often use is a community issue analysis where students identify a current social problem and propose solutions based on our lessons."

– Teacher D, Line 14

“I ask students to create a mini-documentary or case study about local history in Cebu. It really shows how they understand the topic.”

– Teacher E, Line 13

“One activity that worked well was asking students to compare historical events with present-day social conditions. Their presentations showed deep analysis.”

– Teacher F, Line 10

As their stories progress, teachers move from describing how they adopted PBL to illustrating how it is lived in their classrooms through specific projects. These projects serve as concrete expressions of their pedagogical intentions, often rooted in real-world issues, community contexts, and historical inquiry. Through them, students are invited to move beyond passive learning and actively apply concepts in meaningful ways. Teacher D, for instance, describes a recurring project that engages students directly with contemporary social concerns. Teacher E tells of projects that bring local history to life, asking students to construct narratives through creative outputs such as mini-documentaries or case studies focused on Cebu. In another account, Teacher F reflects on activities that encourage students to draw connections across time linking historical events with present-day realities. Through these comparisons, students demonstrate not only understanding, but critical analysis.

These stories highlight that PBL is not a singular strategy but a collection of thoughtfully constructed learning experiences. Each project is designed to engage students in inquiry, analysis, and application core elements of Social Studies education. Underlying these practices is a strong emphasis on intentional planning. Teachers describe a process that begins with identifying key learning outcomes and competencies, ensuring that projects remain aligned with course objectives. From there, they design tasks that require critical thinking, collaboration, and sustained inquiry. Their narratives reveal an awareness that meaningful projects do not emerge spontaneously; they are carefully structured, scaffolded, and guided

Based on the study conducted by Ghani et al. (2021), they emphasized that effective PBL requires intentional design, clear alignment with learning goals, and well-defined assessment criteria. Building on their work, effective Project-Based Learning is not simply the inclusion of projects in instruction but is grounded in intentional instructional design, where learning goals, activities, and assessments are carefully aligned. Similarly, this perspective is closely aligned with the principles of backward design articulated by Jensen et al. (2017). Backward design begins with the identification of desired learning outcomes, followed by the determination of acceptable evidence of learning, and finally the planning of instructional activities that support those outcomes.

The expansion of these ideas underscores that successful PBL implementation depends heavily on planning and design, not merely on student activity. Intentional alignment of projects with learning goals and assessments enhances instructional effectiveness and ensures that PBL serves as a credible and sustainable teaching strategy in higher education.

Similarities and Differences in Project- Based Learning in Social Studies

This section presents an overview of the similarities and differences in how Social Studies teachers implement Project-Based Learning (PBL) in higher education. Drawing from the narratives of the teachers, this discussion examines shared practices that reflect common pedagogical foundations, as well as variations shaped by individual teaching styles and contextual factors. While teachers generally adhere to core principles of PBL such as student-centered learning, collaboration, and real-world application, and their approaches differ in terms of project design, facilitation, and implementation. These similarities and differences provide insight into how PBL is collectively understood and individually adapted within the institution, offering valuable perspectives that inform the development of a flexible yet context-sensitive instructional guide for Social Studies teaching.

Table 3. Similarities and Differences Observed in Project-Based Learning in Teaching Social Studies

Themes	Factors	Synthesis
We Found our Common Ground	Teachers demonstrate similar foundational practices in PBL such as student-centered instruction, use of real-world social issues, collaborative work, and alignment of projects with learning outcomes.	Despite individual teaching styles, Social Studies teachers share a common pedagogical foundation in implementing PBL, reflecting a shared understanding of its principles and educational purposes
We Each Made it Our Own	Differences arise in teaching styles, level of student autonomy, project complexity, facilitation strategies, and pacing of project activities.	While teachers utilize the same instructional approach, PBL is expressed differently based on individual teaching philosophies, resulting in varied classroom implementations.
It All Depends on the Classroom	Class size, subject area, institutional support, available resources, time constraints, and student characteristics influence how teachers design and implement PBL activities.	Variations in PBL practices are shaped by contextual and structural factors, explaining differences in implementation even among teachers within the same institution.
We Moved In The Same Direction	Shared syllabi, curricular guidelines, institutional policies, and common professional training contribute to similarities in PBL approaches.	Perceived consistency in PBL implementation highlights the role of departmental and institutional alignment in standardizing teaching practices while supporting shared instructional goals.

The thematic table explains how both similarities and differences in Project-Based Learning (PBL) practices among Social Studies teachers emerge from a shared pedagogical foundation shaped by individual and contextual influences. The first theme shows that teachers commonly ground their PBL practice in student-centered learning, real-world applications, and collaborative activities, indicating a collective understanding of PBL principles. The second and third themes reveal how variations in teaching styles, facilitation strategies, class size, subject focus, and available resources lead to different expressions of PBL in the classroom, highlighting the role of personal teaching pathways and contextual realities. The fourth theme underscores that, despite these differences, departmental guidelines and institutional alignment contribute to consistency in practice. Overall, the table illustrates that similarities arise from shared goals and frameworks, while differences are shaped by individual teaching identities and contextual factors offering a balanced view of PBL implementation that can inform the development of a flexible yet coherent instructional guide.

Theme 1: We Found our Common Ground

Teachers often tell this part of their journey as a realization that, despite their differences, they were not working in isolation after all. As they shared experiences about using Project-Based Learning (PBL) in their Social Studies classes, a pattern began to emerge, a kind of common ground that quietly connected their practices. They spoke of designing lessons that placed students at the center, of anchoring projects in real-world social issues, and of encouraging collaboration and meaningful application of concepts. Even with varying levels of experience, subject focus, and classroom conditions, their stories echoed similar beliefs about what PBL should look like and what it could achieve. In these narratives, PBL was not just an individual teaching choice, but a shared way of understanding learning, one that reflected a collective commitment to making Social Studies more relevant, engaging, and grounded in real-life contexts.

“When it comes to project-based learning, I think we are quite similar. Most of us focus on letting students explore real social issues and work in groups rather than relying purely on lectures.”

– Teacher A, Line 15

“Based on what I observe, my colleagues also use projects that are aligned with the syllabus and course outcomes. We may have different styles, but the purpose of the projects is almost the same.”

– Teacher B, Line 19

“In our department, we usually encourage students to collaborate and produce outputs that show application of Social Studies concepts. That’s something we all practice.”

– Teacher C, Line 21

“Even when we teach different subjects, the idea of student-centered learning through projects is common among us. We let students investigate, discuss, and present.”

– Teacher D, Line 18

“I do not think my PBL approach is very different from others because we follow the same learning objectives and we value active learning in our classes.”

– Teacher E, Line 17

“Most Social Studies teachers here use projects to connect lessons to real-life situations. That’s something we all see as important.”

– Teacher F, Line 17

Teacher A begins by situating their practice within this collective space, recognizing that their approach is not isolated but part of a broader pattern within the department. In their story, PBL becomes a shared language among teachers, one centered on engaging students with real-world issues and collaborative inquiry. Similarly, Teacher B reflects on how this alignment is sustained through common academic structures such as course outcomes and syllabi. Although teaching styles may vary, the underlying purpose of projects remains consistent, a shared commitment to meaningful learning. For Teacher C, this shared practice extends into the everyday culture of the department. They describe a learning environment where collaboration, discussion, and application are not isolated strategies, but commonly practiced elements across courses.

Teacher D’s narrative further reinforces this sense of collective identity, emphasizing that even across different subject areas, the commitment to student-centered learning through projects remains consistent. Their account reflects a shared pedagogical belief in allowing students to investigate, discuss, and present as active participants in knowledge construction. In a similar vein, Teacher E situates their own practice within this collective framework, noting that their approach is shaped by shared objectives and a department-wide emphasis on active learning. Rather than viewing their methods as distinct, they see them as part of a larger, unified direction. Finally, Teacher F highlights a central thread that runs through all these narratives, the importance of connecting lessons to real-life contexts. In their account, this goal serves as a unifying principle that guides how PBL is implemented across the department

This is strongly supported by Zhang and Ma (2023) who identified authentic tasks, student autonomy, and collaboration as defining characteristics of Project-Based Learning. Authentic tasks require students to engage with real-world problems rather than artificial or isolated classroom exercises, while autonomy allows learners to make decisions about how they approach, investigate, and present their work. Furthermore, Naseer et al. (2025) emphasized that effective PBL rests on shared design principles, including meaningful inquiry, alignment with learning goals, sustained student engagement, and collaborative work.

The presence of a common pedagogical ground among Social Studies teachers suggests that the development of an instructional guide for PBL can build on already established shared practices. Rather than introducing entirely new approaches, the guide can strengthen and refine existing strategies that teachers already value, such as real-world application, collaboration, and alignment with learning outcomes. This shared foundation also provides opportunities for peer collaboration, mentoring, and departmental alignment in PBL implementation.

Theme 2: We Each Made It Our Own

Teachers often tell this part of the story as a recognition that, although they shared a common belief in Project-Based Learning (PBL), the way it unfolded in their classrooms was uniquely their own. As they spoke about

their experiences, it became clear that no two implementations looked exactly alike some described tightly structured projects with carefully guided steps, while others allowed for more open-ended exploration and greater student autonomy. These differences reflected not confusion, but the personal imprint each teacher brought into the classroom, their teaching philosophies, their ways of managing learning, and the experiences that shaped how they saw their role. In these narratives, PBL became something flexible and living, adapting to each teacher's style and context. Rather than signaling inconsistency, these varied expressions revealed how a shared pedagogical approach could be meaningfully reimagined, allowing each teacher to make PBL truly their own while still holding on to its essential principles.

"I think my approach is a bit more structured compared to others. I give students clear steps and deadlines because I feel they need more guidance, especially at the start."

– Teacher A, Line 15

"Some teachers give students more freedom, but in my case, I still prefer to guide them closely because not all students are ready to work independently." – Teacher B, Line 11

"My PBL approach depends on the class. Sometimes I allow students to design their own projects, while other teachers prefer to give specific project topics."

– Teacher C, Line 9

"Compared to others, I focus more on reflection. After the project, I ask students to write about what they learned and the challenges they faced."

– Teacher D, Line 14

"I handle larger classes, so my projects are simpler and more group-based, unlike others who teach smaller classes and can manage more detailed outputs."

– Teacher E, Line 12

"I think my strategy is different in terms of pacing. I don't rush the project; I give them more time even if it takes several weeks."

– Teacher F, Line 10

Teacher A begins by describing their preference for structure, particularly when introducing students to project-based tasks. Their story reflects a careful balance between innovation and support, emphasizing the need to guide students as they navigate unfamiliar learning processes. Similarly, Teacher B highlights the importance of close facilitation, especially for learners who are still developing independence. In their account, structure becomes a form of support rather than limitation. In contrast, Teacher C describes a more flexible and responsive approach, one that shifts depending on the needs of the class. Their narrative reflects an adaptive teaching style, where decisions about structure and autonomy are shaped by the learners themselves.

Other teachers highlight particular elements of PBL that they prioritize within their practice. For Teacher D, the story centers on reflection creating space for students to think about their learning experiences, challenges, and growth. Meanwhile, Teacher E situates their approach within the practical realities of teaching. Handling larger classes requires them to simplify project design and rely more heavily on group work, demonstrating how contextual factors shape pedagogical choices. Teacher F, on the other hand, reflects on pacing as a defining feature of their practice. Their narrative reveals a deliberate effort to slow down the learning process, allowing students the time they need to engage deeply with their projects.

Across these stories, a pattern becomes visible: while the teachers share a commitment to PBL, they continuously make decisions about how it should unfold in their own classrooms. These decisions involve how much structure to provide, how much freedom to allow, how projects are paced, and which aspects of learning are emphasized,

whether it be reflection, collaboration, or independent inquiry. What emerges is an understanding of PBL not as a fixed model, but as a dynamic and adaptable practice. Teachers do not simply apply PBL in the same way, they interpret and reshape it in response to their students' needs, classroom conditions, and personal teaching philosophies. In doing so, they demonstrate agency as educators, actively negotiating between guiding and letting go, structuring and allowing freedom.

According to Wang et al. (2016), differences in scaffolding are expected and necessary in PBL environments. Similarly, Sanchez-Garcia and Reyes-de-Cozar (2025) noted that while PBL is grounded in common principles, its success depends on how teachers tailor project design and facilitation to their learners. Sanchez-Garcia and Reyes-de-Cozar (2025) argued that flexibility in implementation allows teachers to address diverse classroom needs while maintaining student engagement. From a constructivist perspective, the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development by Lev Vygotsky supports the idea that teachers must adjust their level of guidance depending on capabilities of the students (McLeod, 2025).

These narratives suggest that variation in practice is not a weakness but a strength. It reflects the capacity of PBL to remain responsive and context-sensitive, allowing teachers to tailor their approaches while remaining anchored in shared pedagogical principles. Through their stories, PBL becomes a lived experience, one that evolves through practice, reflection, and the ongoing interaction between teacher, students, and context. The narratives shared by the teachers emphasize that while Project-Based Learning (PBL) is grounded in shared principles, its classroom implementation varies according to individual teaching preferences and instructional judgments. Teachers described consciously adjusting their approach based on how much structure, guidance, and pacing they believe their students need. Some respondents emphasized providing clear steps, timelines, and closer facilitation, particularly when students are still developing independence in project work.

Theme 3: It All Depends on the Classroom

Teachers often share this part of their story as a moment of realization that even with a shared commitment to Project-Based Learning (PBL), what they could do in their classrooms was often shaped by realities beyond their control. As they reflected on their experiences, they spoke of large class sizes that made close facilitation challenging, limited resources that required creativity, tight schedules that constrained project timelines, and varying levels of institutional support that either strengthened or complicated their efforts. Some described adjusting projects to fit the subject they were teaching, while others spoke about responding to the needs and abilities of their students. In these narratives, it became clear that implementing PBL was not just about beliefs or intentions, but about navigating the conditions in which teaching takes place. Through their stories, teachers showed how context quietly but powerfully influenced their decisions, shaping the way PBL was designed, adapted, and sustained in their Social Studies classrooms.

“One major factor for me is class size. When the class is large, I have to simplify the projects and make them more group-based.”

– Teacher A, Line 13

“The subject I teach also affects how I use PBL. Some topics are easier to turn into projects, while others need more guidance.”

– Teacher B, Line 10

“Institutional support matters. If we have access to resources like internet, library materials, or technology, it's easier to design better projects.”

– Teacher C, Line 14

“Time is always a challenge. Sometimes I adjust the scope of the project depending on how many weeks I can allocate in the semester.”

– Teacher D, Line 9

“I think student readiness also affects how we implement PBL. Some classes need more structure because they’re not used to this type of learning.”

– Teacher E, Line 12

“Our facilities and scheduling affect how detailed the projects can be. That’s why PBL looks different in each class.”

– Teacher F, Line 11

As teachers recount their experiences, they point to a range of contextual and structural elements that shape their instructional decisions. These include class size, subject matter, availability of resources, time constraints, institutional support, and student readiness. Rather than presenting these as obstacles, their stories reveal how such factors become integral to how PBL is designed and enacted in real classrooms. Teacher A begins with a reflection on class size, describing how the number of students directly influences the way projects are structured. In larger classes, complexity must often give way to manageability, prompting adjustments that ensure participation remains possible for all. Similarly, Teacher B situates their decisions within the nature of the subject they teach. Their narrative highlights that not all topics lend themselves equally to project-based approaches, requiring teachers to make careful judgments about when and how to implement PBL. For Teacher C, the story draws attention to institutional conditions, particularly the availability of resources. Access to technology, internet connectivity, and library materials becomes a determining factor in how rich and complex projects can be.

Time also emerges as a central concern in the narratives. Teacher D reflects on the limits of the academic calendar, describing how project scope is often adjusted to fit within the available weeks of a semester. In another account, Teacher E highlights student readiness as a key consideration. Their story emphasizes the need to align project demands with students’ prior experiences and capabilities, particularly when learners are new to inquiry-based approaches. Teacher F further situates PBL within broader institutional realities, describing how facilities and scheduling shape what is practically achievable in the classroom.

The influence of contextual factors on PBL implementation is well documented in the literature. Novalia et al. (2025) emphasized that effective PBL depends heavily on classroom conditions, teacher support, and institutional resources. Their study found that variations in implementation quality often stem from differences in time allocation, class size, and available materials. Similarly, Sanchez-Garcia and Reyes-de-Cozar (2025) noted that while PBL principles may be consistent, teachers’ ability to implement them effectively is shaped by contextual constraints such as curriculum demands, assessment systems, and institutional support. These constraints necessitate adaptation rather than uniform application.

Across these narratives, a consistent insight emerges: differences in PBL implementation are not primarily driven by differing beliefs about teaching, but by the contexts in which teachers work. The teachers share similar goals, to engage students, connect learning to real-world issues, and foster critical thinking, but the paths they take toward these goals are shaped by situational constraints and opportunities. Their stories reveal a form of pedagogical adaptability, where teachers continuously balance intention with feasibility. Projects are modified, scaled, or restructured to fit class sizes, align with available time, or accommodate limited resources. In this process, teachers demonstrate not only commitment to PBL, but also responsiveness to the realities of their environments.

Theme 4: We Moved in the Same Direction

Teachers often narrate this part of their experience as a sense of moving together, almost without realizing it at first. As they reflected on their use of Project-Based Learning (PBL), many expressed that their practices did not feel vastly different from those of their colleagues. They spoke of shared syllabi, common curricular expectations, and similar professional training that seemed to guide them in the same direction. In their stories, there was a quiet recognition of alignment, a feeling that, despite individual styles and classroom differences, they were part of a collective effort shaped by their department. This shared direction gave them a sense of

consistency and coherence in how PBL was understood and implemented. Through these narratives, it became evident that institutional structures and collaborative professional spaces played a significant role in bringing their practices closer together, supporting not only consistency but also a shared commitment to common educational goals.

"I don't think my approach is very different from others because we all follow the same syllabus and learning objectives."

– Teacher A, Line 10

"When we talk about projects, I notice that we usually have similar expectations for students, especially in terms of research and group work."

– Teacher B, Line 12

"Since we belong to the same department, our way of implementing PBL is almost the same. We were guided by the same curriculum."

– Teacher C, Line 9

"We often share ideas and materials, so our projects tend to be aligned even if we teach different subjects."

– Teacher D, Line 14

"Because of departmental guidelines, I don't see much difference in how we use PBL. We all try to meet the same course outcomes."

– Teacher E, Line 11

"Our training and meetings help us stay on the same page, so our PBL strategies are not really far from each other."

– Teacher F, Line 13

Teacher A reflects on this sense of alignment by pointing to the shared foundations that guide their work. For them, similarities in practice stem naturally from common curricular frameworks. Similarly, Teacher B describes how this alignment becomes visible in the expectations teachers hold for student outputs. Across classrooms, projects tend to emphasize similar elements, research, collaboration, and meaningful engagement. For Teacher C, this consistency is rooted in a shared curriculum that acts as a guiding structure. Their narrative emphasizes that belonging to the same department creates a common direction for how PBL is understood and enacted.

Beyond formal structures, teachers also describe how everyday professional interactions contribute to this alignment. Teacher D highlights the importance of collaboration among colleagues sharing materials, discussing strategies, and learning from one another's experiences. In another account, Teacher E underscores the role of departmental guidelines in shaping consistency. These guidelines serve as anchors, ensuring that teaching practices remain focused on common learning goals. Teacher F further reflects on how professional development spaces, trainings, meetings, and discussions sustain this shared understanding. Through these collective experiences, teachers remain aligned in both vision and practice.

Yang and Xu (2026) who emphasized that shared vision and collective commitment within professional learning communities lead to greater instructional coherence. When educators collaborate and align their practices around common goals, instructional consistency naturally emerges. Similarly, Tidemand and Tamborg (2025) argued that systemic alignment through curriculum frameworks, professional development, and institutional support plays a significant role in sustaining instructional reform. Fullan noted that when teachers work within aligned structures, innovative practices such as PBL are more likely to be implemented consistently and effectively. In

the context of Project-Based Learning, Rehman et al. (2024) stressed the importance of shared understanding and common design principles in sustaining high-quality PBL practices across classrooms.

These narratives reveal that alignment in PBL implementation is not imposed but cultivated. It is shaped by shared syllabi, common learning outcomes, and institutional expectations, as well as by ongoing dialogue among teachers. These structures create a sense of coherence, allowing educators to work toward similar goals even as they teach different courses or bring individual styles into their classrooms. Importantly, the teachers' stories suggest that consistency does not equate to uniformity. While their practices may appear similar, each teacher continues to exercise professional judgment in adapting PBL to their specific context. What binds their approaches is not identical execution, but a shared commitment to student-centered learning, meaningful application, and the broader goals of Social Studies education.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an established and meaningful instructional approach among Social Studies teachers in higher education, shaped by both shared pedagogical principles and contextual realities. Teachers' stories indicate that PBL is intentionally used to connect theory with real-world social issues, promote active participation and collaboration, and support deeper student engagement. Across classrooms, PBL serves as a vehicle for making Social Studies more relevant and experiential, encouraging students to analyze, inquire, and reflect on societal concerns grounded in academic concepts. At the same time, the study highlights that while teachers share a common understanding of PBL, differences in implementation naturally emerge. These variations are influenced by personal teaching pathways, classroom conditions, subject matter, student readiness, institutional support, and available resources. Teachers adapt their strategies in response to these factors, demonstrating professional judgment and flexibility rather than inconsistency. Despite such differences, a strong sense of departmental alignment and shared instructional direction contributes to coherence in practice reinforcing common goals and expectations in PBL implementation.

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