

Challenges of Students in Conducting Social Studies Research: Implications for Pedagogical Enhancements

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the unique challenges faced by student-researchers in social studies, addressing the scarcity of field-focused research in the existing literature. It employs a basic qualitative design, utilizing written responses and interviews with 29 student-researchers and five faculty members for data triangulation. A reflexive thematic analysis revealed five major themes: dilemmas in topic selection and content exploration; obstacles to participant engagement and data collection; challenges in advisor and panel interactions; difficulties in the research process; and challenges to mental and physical well-being. These findings can inform improvements in research instruction, mentoring strategies, and institutional support systems. The study also highlights the importance of designing discipline-specific interventions and suggests directions for future research based on the identified limitations.

Keywords: instructional material; research pedagogy in higher education; social studies research; teaching strategies for research; research challenges

INTRODUCTION

The educational advancement of nations is closely linked to their economic and social development (Baya et al., 2024; Bian, 2024), supporting the global goal of achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (Yamaguchi, 2023). Research plays an essential role in informing policy, guiding evidence-based decisions, and improving educational practices (Farley-Ripple et al., 2018). In this context, social studies serve as an important discipline for developing critical thinking, civic engagement, and problem-solving skills—competencies essential for sustainable development (Akhan et al., 2023; Suleman, 2023). As an interdisciplinary field, social studies enables learners to analyze and respond to complex social realities (National Council for Social Studies, n.d.), and research in this area contributes to community development and social transformation.

In the Philippine setting, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), through Republic Act 7722 and CHED Memorandum Order No. 52, s. 2016, mandates that State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) conduct research that addresses local development needs and global academic standards (CHED, 2016). Nevertheless, many students within SUCs encounter difficulties throughout the research process, which may limit their ability to contribute meaningfully to education and development objectives. Common challenges include limited research training, poor time management, weak collaboration, and inadequate feedback from thesis panels (Quinto, 2022). Financial limitations, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, also restrict access to resources. Graduate students face further challenges such as low English proficiency, work responsibilities, and demanding academic requirements (Santos et al., 2024). Additional concerns involve minimal instructor guidance, a lack of confidence in writing, and difficulties in teamwork (Balbag et al., 2024).

These challenges are not unique to the Philippines. Studies from different countries report common obstacles among student researchers, including difficulties in data collection (Kalman, 2019), topic selection (Alsied & Ibrahim, 2018; Khan et al., 2023), time management (Ramadhanti et al., 2020), low motivation (Le et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2022), and recruiting participants (Dantic et al., 2024). These problems are often exacerbated by insufficient advisor support (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020; Macharia & Kahiri, 2024), a lack of mentoring, and emotional stress (Sverdlik et al., 2018), as well as ongoing academic writing difficulties (Ballena & Liwag, 2019), which further hinder research progress.

These findings demonstrate the widespread nature of research-related challenges. While many difficulties are common across academic

disciplines, the field of social studies presents distinct obstacles. Its emphasis on sociocultural, political, and historical analysis introduces complexities requiring context-sensitive inquiry. As Shehadeh (2020) argues, research must be situated within its disciplinary and cultural context to ensure relevance and rigor.

The literature further highlights the necessity of discipline-specific strategies to address these unique challenges. Studies emphasize that improving academic writing, reading habits, time management, and access to learning materials may mitigate common research difficulties (Del Rosario, 2022; Rosario, 2024). Although these findings primarily emerge from research on literature students, they emphasize core academic competencies that are applicable to research challenges in many fields. Such obstacles, observed in diverse educational settings, reflect deeper issues in students' capacity to sustain and complete scholarly work. Moreover, the quality of lectures depends significantly on instructional materials, topic coverage, and student engagement, all of which impact learning outcomes.

Despite existing general interventions, there remains a significant gap in addressing the distinctive needs of social studies students. Integrating discipline-based approaches tailored to the realities of social studies research is imperative. As argued by Castillo (2023) and Castillo and Tunitit (2024), identifying and addressing small-scale, discipline-specific challenges is important for informing inclusive and responsive large-scale educational strategies. Thus, integrating global insights with local realities may provide a more comprehensive and actionable understanding of the research challenges faced by students, primarily within the public higher education sector.

Recognizing the important role of social studies in developing socially aware and research-skilled individuals, this study explores the challenges that social studies student-researchers face. Using a perspective sensitive to both context and discipline, this study aims to provide practical recommendations for teaching research that supports education for sustainable development. Specifically, the study addresses the following research question: *What challenges are experienced by student-researchers in conducting social studies research?*

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach, specifically Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) basic qualitative research design, to explore student-researchers' challenges in conducting social studies research. This

approach and design are appropriate, as they are grounded in the perspective that knowledge is constructed through human interactions with experiences and environments. A qualitative approach is suitable for understanding lived experiences, and the selected design provides a framework for exploring participants' perspectives without emphasizing the essence of a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, as cited in Bulusan et al., 2021).

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at a state university in the Philippines, a public higher education institution in the northern region, approximately 296 kilometers from the country's capital. The university comprises multiple colleges offering various academic programs, including social studies, a major area of specialization in one of its colleges. This field attracts students who aspire to become educators. Given the focus of this study, the selected setting is appropriate, as it represents a specialized and localized context while providing microlevel insights that can inform macrolevel policies.

In addition, the researchers utilized purposeful sampling. The following are the inclusion criteria for selecting participants: (1) social studies students who are enrolled and recently concluded social studies research courses during the academic year 2023--2024; (2) social studies who are regular students, i.e., they are under the standard curriculum and not identified as irregular or unit earners; and (3) they must be willing to participate in the study.

Furthermore, the researchers included faculty members in the study to ensure data triangulation and strengthen the credibility of the findings. These faculty members (1) were currently serving as research advisers for social studies students, (2) were assigned to evaluate social studies research outputs for the current academic year, and (3) had prior experience teaching research methodologies within the discipline. These selection criteria ensured a multiperspective analysis of the challenges faced by the student-researchers. These eligibility criteria led to 29 student participants and five faculty members.

Instrumentation

This study designed and utilized two open-ended questionnaires: one for gathering data on the challenges faced by student participants and the other for data triangulation with faculty members. The instrument included questions that were adaptable for students and faculty participants. A panel of one language and education expert and two social

studies education research experts validated the two sets of questionnaires. Table 1 presents the four types of questions used for each group.

Table 1: Types of Questions used in the Open-ended Questionnaire for Students and Faculty Members

Type of Question	Question for Student Researcher	Question for Research Adviser Faculty Member
Introductory	How do you prepare yourself for research writing?	How do you prepare your advisees/students for research writing?
Transitory	How do you see the relevance of preparation and rigor in research?	How do you see the relevance of preparation and rigor in research?
Key/Core	As of this time, share your notable experiences you have in conducting research. Are there challenges? If there are, what are these? Based on your experiences, if you could mention needs or suggestions to support social studies researchers like you, what are this/these?	As of this time, share your notable experiences in the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reviewing papers on social studies research 2. Research advising to social studies student researchers Are there challenges encountered in your experiences? If there are, what are these?
Closure	As a student-researcher, what specific enhancement/s do you want to recommend to support research in your field?	As an adviser or research instructor, what specific enhancement/s do you want to recommend to support student researchers/advisers/instructors?

Note. The types of questions (column 1) were adopted from Bulusan et al. (2021).

Data collection

This study was conducted at a rural university in northern Philippines, with approval secured from a CHED-accredited institution recognized for its adherence to ethical research practices. The university employs an evaluation process involving internal and external experts to ensure the quality and integrity of submitted research proposals. Initially,

the study underwent an internal review by institutional experts specializing in the relevant research area. The external evaluators were subsequently invited for further scrutiny. Seven experts in research, education, social sciences, and qualitative methodologies rigorously evaluated the study before granting final approval. The study strictly adhered to ethical and cultural sensitivity guidelines upon receiving approval.

The study utilized an essay-writing activity and follow-up interviews to gather data on the challenges experienced by the participants. The first phase was conducted in a controlled environment, free from noise and distractions, and lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Given the topic's sensitivity, this procedure managed social desirability bias (Bispo, 2022) and maintained confidentiality (Bos, 2020). The second phase involved follow-up interviews to triangulate the findings. Faculty members were asked to share their observations and experiences regarding the challenges students face when conducting this type of research. Faculty inputs were collected in a short-response format, with one week allotted for completion. This flexible timeframe addresses the response burden (Rolstad, 2011), accommodates their academic responsibilities, and permits them to provide well-considered responses.

To implicate the findings with pedagogical enhancements, the researchers reviewed the literature, policies, and research methodology books (those cited in the introduction). This review provided pedagogical insights that informed the study's discussion and recommendation. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including obtaining informed consent from participants via a form adapted from Feeler (2012).

Data analysis

The challenges faced by student researchers were analyzed via the Reflexive Thematic Analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2022). This framework allowed the researchers to carefully read and look closely for meanings conveyed by the responses of the student-researchers. This process enabled the researchers to generate themes that reflected the students' challenging experiences.

The first step in the thematic analysis was dataset familiarization, where the researchers became deeply acquainted with the dataset. This step involved reading and rereading the student researchers' essays and interview transcripts to become intimately familiar with the content. Following familiarization, the coding phase began. The researchers systematically examined each essay and interview transcript, identifying data segments that were potentially meaningful in answering the research question or objective.

In the initial theme generation phase, the researchers began to identify patterns of meaning that emerged from the codes. Codes that shared a similar concept were grouped together into potential themes. These themes were constructed on the basis of the data collected from the essay responses and interviews. All the coded data relevant to each potential theme were collated.

The Theme Development and Review phase followed, during which the researchers assessed how well the candidate themes captured the data. This step involved revisiting the entire dataset to ensure that the themes aligned with both codes. The researchers reviewed whether each theme provided a compelling and accurate representation of the patterns in the data. Themes were adjusted as necessary—some were merged, others were split, and in some cases, they were discarded—until they formed a coherent narrative that addressed the research question.

After reviewing the data, the researchers proceeded with Theme Refinement, Definition, and Naming. At this stage, each theme was refined to ensure a clear and distinct focus, and was built around a central concept. The researchers carefully defined the core of each theme, considering how it contributed to the overall story of the data. Brief descriptions were written for each theme, and informative names were assigned to capture their essence succinctly.

The final step was writing the analysis, which involved lumping together the analytic narrative with the data extracts to communicate the challenges faced by the student researchers. The writing process began informally during the earlier analysis phases, with notes and reflections feeding into the more formal writing. In this phase, the researchers completed the final report, which included the introduction, methodology, analysis, and conclusion.

Table 2 presents an example of the thematic analysis of one challenge faced by student researchers. The table illustrates the process from coding the data to developing themes, showing how the responses were analyzed and grouped into meaningful patterns. This example demonstrates how a finding was systematically derived from the data.

Faculty members' responses were also included to triangulate the data on the challenges faced by student researchers. These responses were analyzed in connection with the student data. This comparative analysis helped to corroborate the findings and address any inconsistencies. Finally, the researchers engaged in frequent discussions and consulted clinical experts to enrich the study's implications for pedagogical enhancements.

Table 2: Sample thematic analysis

Code	Initial Theme	Developing and Reviewing Theme	Refining, Defining and Naming Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Difficulty in topic selection● Challenge in topic selection● Self-reliance in conceptualizing the research topic● Difficulty in crafting the title● Need for reference and guidance● Difficulty in finding relevant literature	Challenges in Research Preparation and Execution	Preparation Challenges - This theme remains largely unchanged but is now focused on challenges related to the preparation of research tasks. It includes difficulties in topic selection and literature review.	<i>Topic Selection and Content Exploration Dilemma</i> - This theme encapsulates the challenges encountered in selecting research topics and exploring content. It encompasses struggles in crafting titles or deciding on topics, as discussed by participants. Moreover, the difficulty in finding relevant literature and resources, as well as the need for up-to-date related literature and references, fall under this category.

RESULTS

Topic Selection and Content Exploration

The first challenge for student researchers is the dilemma of selecting a topic and exploring its content. This challenge encompasses the difficulties encountered in selecting research topics and exploring relevant content. It includes struggles with crafting titles or deciding on specific

topics, as discussed by participants. Moreover, the difficulty in finding relevant literature and resources, as well as the need for up-to-date related literature or references, also falls under this category.

Students frequently report struggling with the initial stage of topic selection. For example, Participant 2 noted, “In conducting research, we encountered challenges such as choosing a topic that would allow us to conduct the study more easily, determining which sites to use when searching for related literature and studies, and assessing whether our paper was correct or not.”

Another issue reported by students is the challenge of finding relevant literature. Participant 6 noted, “Some challenges include the topic of interest and looking for RRL.” This response reflects a common struggle in identifying a compelling research topic and locating the necessary related literature. Participant 11 further articulated this concern: “In conducting our research paper, we struggled to find related studies that would support the statements or findings in our research.”

The challenge of obtaining up-to-date literature is also prevalent. Participant 10 stated, “We are experiencing difficulties in accessing current and up-to-date RRLs,” indicating the struggle to find recent research resources.

Similarly, Participant 15 noted, “It took us hours to look for RRLs and other inputs needed in our study.” Similarly, Participant 29 expressed frustration: “It is very challenging to start research, particularly in finding possible topics and the related literature that supports it.”

Faculty members' observations further support these findings. Faculty Member 1 noted that students struggle to craft Chapter I, particularly in integrating relevant literature. Faculty Member 2 observed, “You will notice that the introduction is poorly structured and lacks substantial related literature.”

Participant Engagement and Data Collection Obstacles

The second challenge involves participant engagement and data collection obstacles. This theme encompasses difficulties related to engaging participants and gathering data. It includes instances where respondents were uncooperative during surveys or interviews, as well as challenges in accessing specific populations, such as indigenous peoples (IPs). The struggle to reach fourth-year respondents for questionnaire distribution also falls under this category. These challenges have implications for the quality and completeness of data collection efforts, as expressed by the participants.

One recurring issue that many participants emphasized was the uncooperativeness of respondents during surveys. Participant 4 shared

their frustrations: “There are also students who do not respond properly to the survey and treat it as a game.” This concern was reflected by Participant 9, who encountered a situation where “...some of the respondents think it is easy, so they left the questionnaire unanswered.” Another theme that emerged in the responses was the discomfort and hesitation of the respondents during the interviews. Participant 10 noted, “The respondents seemed uncomfortable answering the questions and were shy during the interview.” Student researchers also expressed concerns about their uncertainty when approaching participants. Participant 12 admitted, “We are unsure how to approach them. Is it appropriate to ask for their time, or will we be bothering them?”

Accessing specific populations, such as indigenous peoples (IPs), is a common obstacle. Participant 13 said, “It is tough to engage with them. It is also challenging to understand IPs, and it is hard to find respondents willing to give their time and provide answers.” Furthermore, scheduling issues and logistical challenges in distributing questionnaires to fourth-year students were significant hurdles. Participant 16 noted, “Some of our respondents are no longer on campus because they are on their field study. We were unable to collect all their responses due to insufficient time.” Similarly, Participant 18 highlighted the difficulty in reaching fourth-year students: “Scheduling is difficult. It is also challenging to distribute the questionnaire to fourth-year students since we used a hard copy format.”

One of the more personal challenges involved managing the perceptions of participants’ families. Participant 21 recounted an experience in which a family member became upset during data collection: “One of our daughter’s respondents got angry because of the thought that we are just making money interviewing their mother.”

The overarching theme of frustration in engaging participants is further supported by the researchers’ observations of the student researchers’ reactions upon returning from their data collection efforts. The researchers noted that when student researchers returned from data gathering, they often expressed frustration about how respondents treated them or that some respondents did not complete their questionnaires (Researchers’ Observation Notes, 2024, pp. 6–7).

Adviser and Panel Interaction Challenges

The third challenge involves adviser and panel interaction difficulties. This theme refers to obstacles related to communicating and collaborating with advisers, panelists, and instructors. It includes instances where participants struggled with issues concerning support, communication, and compliance.

Several participants emphasized difficulties in receiving timely guidance from their research advisers, often due to the advisers' busy schedules. Participant 4 noted, "One of the challenges in our research is that our adviser is busy and does not have much time to provide detailed guidance." This concern was reflected by Participant 10, who expressed frustration over the lack of direct supervision: "Our research adviser has not been able to supervise us much."

Other students also expressed disappointment with the limited engagement of their instructors. Participant 16 reflected, "There are these instructors who are not that approachable and... these instructors that do not want to cooperate... will be considered a barrier in the conduct and accomplishment of the research study." Similarly, Participant 23 described an initial setback due to insufficient guidance: "The challenge we initially encountered, particularly in writing the introduction, was that our research instructor did not provide us with guidance on how to do it."

The participants also reported challenges during interactions with panelists, especially concerning conflicting feedback. Participant 21 stressed the need for coherence in the panelists' suggestions: "Panels should see to it that the researchers will not be confused with their different ideas... all panels should suggest the same or come up with one solution if they have something to correct or suggest." In some cases, participants felt that the panelists were unnecessarily strict or obstructive. Participant 5 shared an experience of a panelist who was overly harsh during a defense: "Some panelists are very strict and scolding, which was somewhat traumatic." Participant 24 recounted a delay caused by a panelist's refusal to sign approval forms despite the research team following all instructions: "Even we already do what he said... he does not want to sign the forms' approval sheet... like a delay tactic."

The challenges of balancing student expectations with the workload of advisers and instructors were evident from the faculty's perspective. Faculty Member 2 acknowledged the struggle, noting, "They are almost giving up on their research. Work was very challenging for me as an adviser and guide. I gave many comments and suggestions, which required a total revision of the direction of the study." Similarly, Faculty Member 5 emphasized that students need to take greater initiative in their research: "Given the busy schedules of the faculty, students need to learn to be independent. The research subject should encourage them to seek out and research necessary information they do not understand."

Research Process Challenges

The fourth challenge that student researchers face in social studies research at public higher education institutions involves multiple aspects

of the research process, including time mismanagement, administrative hurdles, and coordination issues.

An issue identified by the participants is time mismanagement, which hampers adequate preparation and completion of research tasks. Participant 4 noted, "Defending our research is chaotic because we did not have much time for preparation, as it coincided with other activities for our different subjects." This concern was also expressed by Participant 6, who stated, "Some of the challenges include time mismanagement." Time mismanagement extends beyond scheduling conflicts and affects the overall readiness of students. Participant 15 explained, "Signing letters and necessary documents is sometimes delayed because higher-ups or faculty members are not available, causing us to lose time and have to return the next day."

Administrative challenges further complicate the research process. Participant 3 described the difficulties associated with off-campus research: "One of the major challenges with off-campus research is processing necessary documents, such as insurance and waivers, as it can consume much time." Moreover, Participant 17 expressed frustration with the repetitive paperwork involved: "The process is also stressful because there are many documents that need to be signed, and there is not a standard format for the letters, which leads to repeated printing and signing."

Coordination issues among group members who live in different areas are another major encounter. Participant 19 recounted:

"One challenge I encounter is that some group members are not cooperating because they believe the tasks are easy to complete. Some group members did not contribute to the effort during the hard binding phase and have not yet distributed the materials."

This geographical separation can lead to difficulties in scheduling meetings and ensuring everyone's contribution to the project, as Participant 6 noted: "Meeting with groupmates was also a challenge because we do not live in the same municipality or barangay."

Group dynamics also contributed to the research challenges. Participant 8 shared, "What I will not forget is having groupmates with closed minds who were unwilling to accept our ideas." Participant 10 added, "Some groupmates are quite relaxed, and there are damaged friendships and relationships due to misunderstandings in the research."

Faculty members also observed these challenges. Faculty Member 3 remarked, "During the defense, you can see that there are points where

they do not know what they are saying. They are not prepared.” Faculty Member 5 also observed, “Research is difficult. From their experiences and sacrifices, I can see that even the processes are tiring for them.”

Mental and Physical Well-being Challenges

The last challenge expressed by the participants was mental and physical well-being challenges. Verbatim responses from the students in this study illustrate the nature of these issues, which involve experiencing stress, anxiety, and physical strain during the research process.

For example, Participant 17 shared how overwhelming the research workload became: “It is extremely stressful... I neglected my health. I stayed up late, felt exhausted, and had no appetite until I could write something.” Participant 22 emphasized the need for both mental and physical preparedness to undertake research: “Conducting research requires being physically and mentally prepared. It is challenging because sometimes you feel like there is almost no hope due to exhaustion.” Similarly, Participant 24 described how stress and sleeplessness became central elements of their research journey: “There are many challenges in doing research, such as stress and sleepless nights.”

The emotional toll of research is further reflected in Participant 29’s statement: “It is heartbreaking and exhausting, especially when you have barely any sleep and you just have to endure it.”

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGICAL ENHANCEMENTS

The findings of this study underscore five interconnected challenges that student-researchers face in conducting and completing research in social studies: topic selection and content exploration dilemmas, participant engagement and data collection obstacles, advisor and panel interaction challenges, research process challenges, and mental and physical well-being challenges. These encounters are not isolated issues but reflect larger systemic gaps in research instruction and supervision. For educational institutions and teacher education programs, this calls for a deliberate rethinking of pedagogical approaches to better support student-researchers.

The first challenge remains a critical barrier, often rooted in students’ inability to link personal interests with researchable and socially relevant issues. Similarly, Alsied and Ibrahim (2018), Balbag et al. (2024), and Khan et al. (2023) noted that a lack of exposure to conceptual frameworks and literature often leads to vague and overly broad topics. In the context of social studies, this issue reflects a missed opportunity to

train students in aligning research with societal goals such as the SDGs, CHED Memo No. 20 s.2016, and NCSS thematic standards. This suggests the need to integrate a dedicated module on issue identification and research topic contextualization early in the course. Educators may utilize locally grounded exemplars, problem-tree analyses, and thematic mapping to help students explore and link current issues and possible avenues.

In addition, educators may consider employing locally relevant case studies, thematic mapping, and problem-tree analyses to scaffold students' ability to formulate meaningful and timely research problems. Furthermore, integrating practical instruction on accessing academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and DOAJ alongside tools such as Mendeley, Zotero, and citation features in Microsoft Word may empower students to engage critically with literature. Short workshops on crafting problem statements, complemented by reflective exercises and peer reviews, could enrich students' ability to design research that is both rigorous and socially grounded. These strategies may enhance the inquiry-based orientation of social studies and increase students' capacity to engage in civic-oriented research.

The second major challenge concerns participant engagement. Students reported difficulties in establishing rapport with certain groups, such as indigenous peoples (IPs), and in securing willing and participatory respondents. Similar concerns related to data collection and participant availability have been documented by Dantic et al. (2024) and Kalman (2019). Moreover, this finding reflects a contemporary issue: the growing disconnection among people, which underscores the need to cultivate intercultural competence, as emphasized by Hastowohadi et al. (2024). These challenges highlight the importance of strengthening students' preparedness for conducting research in real-world settings that require interpersonal sensitivity, ethical awareness, and strategic communication. Social studies pedagogy may include culturally responsive research training, role-playing, scenario-based simulations, and localized ethics case studies. Teachers may partner with community leaders and local government units to design experiential learning activities that expose students to real field dynamics prior to actual data gathering.

Moreover, classroom strategies such as SWOT analysis of fieldwork readiness, reflective journaling after mock interviews, and peer evaluation of data-gathering plans could enhance critical thinking, empathy, and adaptability. Embedding activities on ethical clearance procedures, community protocols, and inclusive language in research methods courses may help reduce apprehension and promote respectful engagement with participants. Such enhancements respond directly to the

need for research rooted in human dignity and social equity, which are core principles in social studies education.

A third finding points to a weak and, at times, strained adviser–advisee relationship. Students commonly report unclear expectations, inconsistent feedback, and communication gaps—all of which contribute to stalled research progress and diminished motivation. These findings align with studies by Bakhou and Bouhania (2020) and Macharia and Kahiri (2024), who emphasized that limited supervisor support remains a persistent barrier to research completion and quality. This suggests the value of adopting a structured mentoring framework. Educators may consider codeveloping research advising contracts with students that outline roles, consultation schedules, expected deliverables, and communication protocols. Such agreements could serve as a shared guide to support accountability, clarity, and better communication in the advising process.

From a curricular standpoint, introducing orientation activities focused on productive consultation practices, question framing, and documentation of adviser feedback could support students' preparedness. The use of research logbooks, simple adviser feedback forms, and periodic progress checks may also provide structure and encourage consistent engagement. To support faculty, professional development sessions on advice strategies, time management, and the effective use of digital tools may be considered. While these steps may not fully resolve all challenges, they can contribute to a more supportive and responsive research environment within teacher education programs.

Time management and adherence to institutional protocols have emerged as notable challenges. Many students perceive ethical clearance processes and administrative requirements as burdensome, especially when compounded by internal group conflicts and uneven task distributions. These concerns are consistent with the observations of Quinto (2022) and Santos et al. (2024), who noted that poor communication and loosely structured timelines often result in project delays and student disengagement.

To respond to this challenge, educators may embed capstone planning sessions early in the course, where students draft Gantt charts and align them with institutional research timelines. Instructors can also introduce practical and accessible task management tools such as Google Sheets, Google Calendar, and Padlet. These platforms are free, user friendly, and suitable for group collaboration. They can also be used to track deadlines, assign tasks, and provide real-time updates. The incorporation of weekly progress checks, guided peer reflections, and group consultations into the schedule may also support students in

managing their time more effectively. These strategies may help build a sense of responsibility and teamwork while making administrative tasks easier to manage.

More importantly, institutional research offices could consider simplifying clearance procedures and providing ongoing support through consultations, templates, and sample forms. Including an orientation on institutional protocols within research methods courses, along with formative activities that simulate the approval process, may help make compliance less intimidating. These steps could make the process more efficient and help students feel more confident and better understand research procedures, which are important skills for future teachers and educational leaders.

Finally, the mental and physical well-being of student-researchers should be considered an essential aspect of effective teaching and research mentoring. As discussed by Sverdlik et al. (2018), even doctoral students, despite their advanced academic training, report high levels of stress, burnout, and health concerns linked to the pressures of research. If such difficulties are prevalent among PhD candidates, it becomes even more critical to recognize and address these challenges among undergraduate students, who are still developing essential research and coping skills. This comparison suggests that well-being support should not be reserved for advanced levels but must be integrated from the early stages of the research journey.

The challenges encountered by student-researchers can be traced back to underlying issues in academic writing, as suggested by Ballena and Liwag (2019). When writing skills are underdeveloped, these challenges are compounded, affecting motivation, confidence, and research output. Del Rosario (2022) and Rosario (2024) underscore the value of practical instructional strategies such as reader-aware writing, systematic notetaking, and active engagement techniques, which, although drawn from the literature pedagogy, can be effectively adapted to enhance research instruction in the social studies context. Integrating these strategies in a structured manner may address multiple learning gaps simultaneously, including those identified by Le et al. (2024) and Zhou et al. (2022) related to demotivation.

In social studies, research occupies a uniquely applied role. Unlike conventional academic inquiry, it is tied to teaching practices and the preparation of future educators. It aims to generate knowledge, improve classroom instruction, and promote critical awareness of community issues. This applied nature requires that research be firmly situated within its specific disciplinary and cultural contexts to ensure both relevance and rigor, as claimed by Shehadeh (2020). Consequently, research approaches

in social studies should be locally grounded and inquiry-based, encouraging students to investigate real problems and connect them to curriculum design and pedagogy. Such models may encourage competence and a deeper sense of social responsibility. As noted by Castillo (2023) and Castillo and Tunitit (2024), research anchored in local contexts has the capacity to drive educational reform and promote equity in policies and practices.

These findings highlight the need for sustained support systems in teacher education programs, including the design of scaffolded research materials, mentoring schemes, and reflective learning tools. However, implementing these interventions presents practical challenges. Variations in faculty load, student readiness, institutional priorities, and resource availability may affect the feasibility and long-term impact of these reforms. Many methods for ensuring success include deliberate planning, continuous faculty development, and monitoring and adjustment. Given these challenges, future studies may create and test practical support tools such as writing modules, research guides, and adviser-led workshops designed for education students. These should be attempted in actual classes to determine how they help students improve their writing skills, finish their research, and feel more confident in the process.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed the challenges faced by student researchers in conducting social studies research at a state university in the northern Philippines. Given the contextual nature of social studies, students require structured guidance in understanding their theoretical foundations and methodological approaches. Directing them toward international, national, and local frameworks can help shape their research direction, as social studies aim to address pressing societal concerns. Unlike other fields, social studies research is shaped by content-specific standards that influence its scope and methodology. However, the other identified challenges, from research management to institutional constraints, are comparable to those in different disciplines.

The application of the pedagogical enhancements discussed in this study is suggested. Based on the literature and expert input, these strategies may enhance students' research experience by making the process more structured and manageable. A practical way to implement these improvements is to develop instructional materials that directly address these challenges and integrate effective teaching methods. Providing clear research guidelines, simplifying administrative procedures, and

strengthening mentorship programs could help students manage research demands more effectively.

This study has its limitations. The findings come from experiences in a single public higher education institution, which means that different schools with varying resources, student backgrounds, and support systems may face different challenges. As education and research practices continue to change, so do the difficulties that students encounter. Continuing research and regular updates to teaching strategies will be necessary to ensure that students receive the proper support and resources to succeed in their research work.

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