

The Impact of Place-Based Education Approach in Teaching Social Studies to Grade Four Students



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ABSTRACT: The objective of this study was to assess the influence of incorporating place-based education (PBE) into Social Studies lessons on the academic attainment and contentment of fourth-grade students. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the efficacy of this initiative was gauged through achievement tests, observations, and semi-structured interviews. Through cluster random sampling, 24 grade four students participated in four months of Social Studies instruction using the PBE method.

Data derived from the learning achievement test underwent analysis involving mean scores, standard deviation, and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Concurrently, qualitative data from interviews and observations underwent content analysis. The analysis of pretest and post-test scores revealed a marked discrepancy between the post-test mean ($\bar{x}= 22.71$) and the pretest mean ($\bar{x}= 18.63$), signifying a substantial 4.08 mean difference. This pointed to a notable improvement in post-test scores in contrast to the pretest. Examination of qualitative data, framed by content analysis principles, demonstrated a noteworthy impact on students' contentment with their learning experiences.

The study's findings highlight the potential of extending PBE implementation to other subjects, echoing its positive effects on students' educational engagement and satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: Place-Based Education, Learning Achievement, Learning Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, the notion of education extends beyond mere classroom attendance for children; it is now recognized as a means to foster comprehensive comprehension of the environment and the intricate interplay between human behavior and nature. However, Bhutan's education system primarily focuses on examination-driven classroom instruction, leading to a disconnection between students and practical experiences. This disconnect hampers their ability to apply classroom knowledge to everyday life, as noted by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2014) and the Royal Education Council (REC, 2020).

To remedy this disparity and facilitate more effective learning, pedagogical strategies must permit learners to derive meaning from diverse sources and experiences. Addressing this growing chasm between students' experiences and their education is crucial. Enter place-based education (PBE), an approach integrated into Bhutan's education system to bridge the gap between communities and schools and alleviate challenges encountered by educators and learners (REC, 2020).

Originating in 2008, PBE was initially introduced by Bhutan's Ministry of Education, funded by the Jim Petersen Bhutan Education Trust, aimed at enhancing science education. Subsequent research highlighted PBE's versatility across the curriculum. Accordingly, the REC, in early 2018, extensively trained master trainers, training trainers (ToT), and primary school principals as ToTs from various districts. In February 2021, a nationwide five-day virtual training for primary school teachers across subjects was conducted (REC, 2020).

PBE's core tenets encompass a multidisciplinary approach that prioritizes experiential learning within students' immediate surroundings. Significantly, Social Studies, as an interdisciplinary subject, covers an expansive array of topics. This overlap between PBE and Social Studies positions the former as a potentially advantageous framework for enhancing understanding in the latter (DCPD, 2022; Resor, 2010; Akkaya, 2014). Consequently, PBE emerges as a pertinent approach capable of augmenting both learning achievements and students' engagement in Social Studies.

Modern education transcends conventional classroom education, necessitating a harmonious integration of classroom knowledge and real-world experiences. Bhutan's adoption of PBE underscores this realization and its efforts to connect students with their environment. In short, place-based education helps students learn to care about the world by helping them understand the place they live in and take action on their own backyards and communities (PEEC, 2010).

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Through extensive training and alignment with the interdisciplinary nature of Social Studies, PBE promises to enrich students' educational journey and foster deeper engagement with subject matter.

Situational analysis

Based on their teaching experiences, the researchers noted disappointing performance among grade four students in the school, evidenced by lower results across subjects compared to previous years' exams. The 2021 student progress report indicated an overall 60.4 percent pass rate for grade four students. The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2014) similarly highlighted a decline in learning achievement as students' progress to grade four, with this trend being most pronounced at this level. The study further revealed that students struggled to comprehend concepts and apply knowledge to real-life contexts (MoE, 2014).

Given the widening disparity between students' experiences and their education, the introduction of place-based education (PBE) in 2008 by the Royal Education Council (REC) aimed to address this issue (REC, 2020). To bridge this gap, the researchers participated in a four-day virtual PBE training in 2021, sparking their interest in utilizing the PBE approach to enhance students' learning achievement and satisfaction in Social Studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The place-based education approach establishes vital connections between learning and local communities. By intertwining the school, community, and environment, PBE counters academic isolation, facilitating robust bonds. PBE empowers students to understand and engage with their community, fostering proactive roles as catalysts for change. This relevancy renders learning meaningful, nurturing conscientious citizens and capable leaders attuned to community needs (Schroeder et al., 2015). Through PBE, students embark on experiential journeys, gaining insight into diverse careers. These hands-on encounters guide informed career choices, emboldening them to pursue their aspirations effectively.

Place-Based Education (PBE) is an instructional strategy immersing student in local surroundings for meaningful learning (Gruenewald, 2003). When education aligns with future careers, students perceive its relevance to their lives, resulting in heightened engagement and enthusiasm for learning (Schroeder et al., 2015; Corissa, 2018). DPCD (2022) outlines that the introduction of Social Studies aims to cultivate social skills and instill values of interconnectedness, dependence, and harmonious coexistence rooted in human values. The subject also fosters an enhanced comprehension of the interplay between all life forms and their environment. Social Studies equips individuals with cognitive abilities for reasoned, sensible, logical, and reflective decision-making in their daily routines. Consequently, Social Studies education synergizes effectively with the principles of place-based education.

Place-Based Education is an approach that connects learning and communities with the primary goals of increasing student engagement, boosting academic outcomes, impacting communities and promoting understanding of the world around us. In addition to these goals, there are many additional benefits to place-based learning experiences. These benefits can impact students, teachers, families, communities and society (Gettingsmart, 2021). And subjects like social studies is all about the people and places and there can be no other suitable approach to promote meaningful learning than PBE.

With PBE, there is a potential to involve the whole community in the learning process of the children. The approach will create a positive feeling on the community that they also have equal hands in educating their children and promoting one's own culture and tradition along with the schools' scheduled lessons. In the long run, the approach like PBE in the classroom will engage students in real-world projects in the local environment and community.

Apart from benefiting the learners from PBE approach, even the teachers involved get a kind of professional development opportunities as indicated by Sobel (2005) that rather than trying to create new committees or new scheduled meetings, lots of learning takes place in the process of using PBE principles in the classroom by the teachers.

Place-Based Education (PBE) effectively addresses diverse learners' needs by employing local contexts to teach various subjects, thereby enhancing engagement, academic performance, and community involvement (REC, 2020; Schroeder et al., 2015). Akkaya and Karakus (2018) conducted a study indicating significantly higher learning achievements among the experimental group exposed to PBE compared to the control group taught traditionally. PBE also contributes to the development of vital skills including social interaction, problem-solving, and critical thinking, fostering students' heightened awareness and appreciation for their surroundings (Akbas & Çakmak, 2019). Similarly, Dorji et al. (2021) observed that involving the local community in teaching activities facilitated hands-on learning experiences. Adhering to PBE principles within classrooms promoted active student engagement, subsequently enhancing their learning outcomes.

According to research, place-based education can boost academic performance, particularly in topics like social studies (Sobel, 2004). The accomplishment of PBE projects can increase students' self-confidence and drive to achieve academic success. They are more likely to have confidence in their capacity to do well in social studies and other topics when they can understand how their efforts affect their community or the environment. Better social studies outcomes may result from students who participate in place-based education because they frequently acquire more favorable attitudes about learning and their communities (Gruenewald, 2003). PBE links what students learn in the classroom to their local surroundings, communities, and cultures. Students are more

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motivated to engage with the material when they can relate what they are learning to their own life. This might involve studying regional history, current affairs, and societal concerns in social studies that the kids can easily connect to.

Place-based education engages students by connecting classroom content to their local environment, making learning more relevant (Smith, 2007). PBE frequently combines several topic areas. For instance, a social studies study on regional environmental problems might incorporate scientific ideas. This interdisciplinary approach helps students recognize the connections between several fields and promotes learning across areas. According to Hart (2010), Place-based social studies instruction enables students to research local history, investigate current concerns, and evaluate historical events' effects.

According to research by Stevenson, Peterson, and Anderson (2006), place-based education may influence students' attitudes and actions toward the environment. Students are more likely to embrace sustainable behaviors and promote environmental conservation when they forge deeper connections with their local surroundings. With grade four pupils in mind, place-based education frequently incorporates environmental education into the social studies curriculum. With this strategy, children are exposed to ecological concerns and encouraged to take care of their local habitats (Gruenewald, 2005). Students' ecological literacy is boosted by initiatives including researching regional ecosystems, doing environmental evaluations, and taking part in conservation initiatives. By visiting nearby historical places or staging historical reenactments in their towns, students can better understand historical events through place-based education, according to research by Sobel (2004). Similar to this, Furlong and Christensen (2007) note that by encouraging students to explore and map their local areas, teaching social studies using place-based methodologies can enhance students' geographic understanding.

Place-based education, according to Smith and Sobel (2007), helps foster democratic principles and citizenship by empowering students to recognize and address local issues. Students get a stronger understanding of the connections between social, economic, and environmental issues—which are crucial to the study of social studies—through participation in local initiatives. The place-based education strategy's capacity to instill in grade four kids a feeling of civic participation and citizenship is another benefit. Students become involved in their communities by researching and resolving local problems and concerns (Gruenewald, 2003). Their civic awareness is improved, and a sense of empowerment and responsibility are also instilled, thanks to this practical approach to social studies.

Social Studies encompasses the analysis of societal functioning and human interactions, integrating disciplines such as history, political science, economics, civics, sociology, geography, mathematics, anthropology, archaeology, and religion (DCPD, 2022). Similarly, Place-Based Education (PBE) involves students in local traditions, cultures, landscapes, and experiences, using these as foundations for language arts, math, social studies, science, and more. PBE establishes connections between learning and communities, enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Notably, both PBE and Social Studies share the goals of offering a multidisciplinary outlook and fostering students' comprehension of diverse natural environments and social frameworks, both locally and globally (REC, 2020). Using place-based education to teach social studies has several benefits, one of which is the improvement of students' comprehension of the material. Students are more likely to understand the relevance and significance of what they are studying when they can relate abstract social studies topics to real-world situations (Smith, 2002). This means that subjects like history, geography, and civics become more concrete and accessible for fourth-graders.

PBE, according to Anderson and Houtenville (2018), promotes a better knowledge of subjects through practical applications. Students are more likely to retain knowledge over time if they have first-hand experience with the ideas they are studying about. This supports the results of Lieberman and Hoody (1998), who contend that PBE enables students to establish significant connections between the material they are learning in the classroom and their own lives.

Hence, PBE emerges as a potent strategy for effectively delivering Social Studies content.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can students' learning achievement and satisfaction be enhanced through place-based education?

Sub Questions

1. How does the adoption of a place-based education approach impact the academic performance in Social Studies for fourth-grade students?
2. After implementing the Place-Based Education approach in teaching Social Studies, what is the level of satisfaction in learning reported by fourth-grade students?

Action plan

Conducted at Katsho Lower Secondary School, Haa, this action research engaged 24 grade four students. Baseline data was gathered in April, followed by a four-month intervention phase spanning from May to August 2023. Throughout this period, the teaching of Social Studies was carried out using the Place-Based Education (PBE) approach.

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Baseline data analysis and findings

Prior to the intervention, assessment tools including a pretest, semi-structured interviews, and observations were employed to gauge learning achievements and satisfaction levels. The pretest outcomes revealed a notably low performance by participants, with an average score of 18.63. Observations conducted during this phase highlighted students' reluctance towards the assigned activities, marked by a lack of enthusiasm, impatience, and an inclination towards distraction. In alignment with these observations, the semi-structured interviews underscored learners' minimal engagement and disinterest in learning Social Studies through conventional methods.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Employing a mixed methods approach, this study aimed to assess learning achievements and satisfaction levels among grade four students through Place-Based Education (PBE). Mixed-method research involves the incorporation of quantitative and qualitative data collection as well as analysis procedures (Guest & Fleming, 2015).

Participants

Cluster random sampling was employed to select a single section of 24 students, involving of 13 girls and 11 boys. These students collaborated closely with the researchers during the study to enhance both their learning achievements and their satisfaction with the learning process.

Instruments

Learning Achievement Test

To assess the impact of place-based education on enhancing participants' learning outcomes, a pretest and posttest were conducted prior to and following the intervention. The participants responded to 30 multiple-choice questions in both assessments.

Students learning behavior observation

Observation serves as a qualitative data collection method employed to witness and delineate participant behaviors within a social context, thus yielding firsthand insights within authentic environments. This approach proves valuable in capturing detailed aspects of participants that may remain concealed using alternative techniques (Anis, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In their study of assessing student contentment in learning social studies via place-based education (PBE), researchers opted for structured observation. This involved focusing on 11 distinct learning behaviors to comprehensively evaluate the students' engagement and satisfaction levels. This methodological choice enables a holistic understanding of the impact of PBE on social studies learning experiences.

Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews afford researchers the flexibility to engage in more informal conversations, facilitating the emergence of unforeseen insights (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). In order to delve deeper into participants' experiences and gain a more profound understanding of the phenomenon, the researchers utilized a semi-structured interview approach, consisting of six carefully crafted questions. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the subject while accommodating the possibility of unanticipated revelations.

Data collection

To gather data, the researchers secured parental consent for participants under 18 years old. The study involved initial and concluding assessments, with 16 lessons of 80-minute duration each observed by peer researchers. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were held post-intervention to gain deeper insights.

Intervention phase

During the intervention phase, the researcher conducted lessons encompassing subjects such as landforms, weather, local government, people and the environment, and various occupations. This educational initiative spanned from June to September and employed place-based education (PBE) strategies, including treating the community as a classroom, prioritizing student-centric learning, connecting local to global perspectives, and addressing real-world challenges.

Throughout the program, participants engaged in hands-on learning beyond the confines of the traditional classroom. The local community served as the backdrop for their learning experiences. For instance, in the section focusing on local government, a guest speaker (gup) was invited, and students proactively inquired about the roles, responsibilities, and criteria for local government candidates. Similarly, in the context of 'work people do', after classroom discussions, students ventured into the community to interact with different workers, questioning them about their roles and tools of the trade. This field visit aimed to familiarize students with work processes and the qualifications needed.

Another session involved students embarking on a brief exploration of the school campus to gain insights into waste management. Students shared their feelings about waste, engaged in waste segregation, and brainstormed ways to minimize waste in their vicinity. Furthermore, lessons on "weather" and "landforms" prompted students to create weather instruments and replicate landforms using accessible school materials. These activities fostered group collaboration, with the researcher facilitating the process.

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Throughout this period of intervention, the approach transcended conventional classroom learning, fostering an experiential understanding of subjects by connecting them to the immediate environment. The methodology not only enhanced students' comprehension but also encouraged active participation and practical application of concepts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Post Intervention data findings

The study's results were presented in alignment with the research inquiries.

Research question 1: How does the adoption of a place-based education approach impact the academic performance in Social Studies for fourth-grade students?

Table 1: The comparison between the pretest and posttest within the sample group.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pre	24	18.63	4.063	11	25
Post	24	22.71	3.155	15	27

Z=-4.210^b Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)- .000

To address research question 1, both a pretest and posttest were administered to the sample group before and after the intervention. The outcomes of the descriptive statistical analysis of the sample group's achievement test scores are presented in Table 1. The average score on the pretest was 18.63, while the posttest average was notably higher at 22.71. This indicates a positive shift, with the posttest mean surpassing the pretest mean by 4.08 points. Notably, the lowest and highest scores on the pretest were 11 and 25, respectively. For the posttest, the minimum and maximum scores were 15 and 27. Correspondingly, the standard deviation for the pretest was 4.063, and for the posttest, it was 3.155, as detailed in Table 1. The calculated statistical values reveal a significant result; the z-score of -4.210 with a p-value of 0.00 demonstrates a considerable increase in posttest scores compared to pretest scores. This robustly indicates that the intervention had a positive impact on all participants. The observed enhancement in learning achievement tests provides compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning (PBE) approach in teaching Social Studies.

Research question 2: After implementing the Place-Based Education approach in teaching Social Studies, what is the level of satisfaction in learning reported by fourth-grade students?

In addressing research question 2, the information derived from student learning behavior observations and semi-structured interviews underwent transcription and analysis, with a focus on identifying prevailing themes and patterns. Initially, the data obtained from each tool were subjected to distinct analyses. Subsequently, these datasets were amalgamated and systematically organized according to shared themes.

Theme 1: Active Engagement

The students demonstrated remarkable enthusiasm for their Social Studies learning experiences. According to the observations of a peer observer, the students maintained high levels of attentiveness and remained focused on their assigned tasks. This was attributed to the evident collaboration among group members, contributing to the successful execution of the lesson within stipulated time frames (S6). During collaborative endeavors such as pair and group activities, students exhibited cooperative attitudes towards their partners and peers, enabling them to effectively complete designated tasks within designated timeframes.

Initially, the peer observer detected some initial hesitancy among students. This was evident through expressions of confusion at the outset. However, as students gradually became acquainted with the approach, these hesitations seemed to dissipate, giving way to a sense of enjoyment (S23). The students' initial reservations were overcome through engagement in community-oriented activities orchestrated by the researchers. Consequently, as the study progressed, a proactive involvement in all activities became evident. Notably, students displayed a willingness to participate, readily answering questions and even taking the initiative to seek clarification when needed, reflecting an eagerness to learn (S20). Such positive and enthusiastic responses from students contributed to fostering a vibrant and dynamic learning atmosphere.

Despite the initial hesitant responses, the peer observer observed a consistent enhancement in student participation. As the study unfolded, all students emerged as active and engaged participants in various activities. Correspondingly, participants' perspectives on the Problem-Based Learning (PBE) approach to teaching Social Studies were captured through semi-structured interviews. These discussions unveiled the participants' favorable viewpoints on incorporating PBE into their learning experiences. A student articulated their engagement, stating that interacting with the local community heightened their learning engagement and enjoyment. The setup provided ample opportunities to interact directly with primary sources, facilitating question-asking and doubt clarification (S4). This enthusiasm was illustrative of learners' contentment and involvement in the learning process.

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In conclusion, the students' initial hesitations gave way to an engaged and proactive approach to learning, further supported by positive peer observations. The inclusion of community-linked activities and the utilization of primary sources enriched the learning experience. The consensus from participants in the semi-structured interviews underscored the engaging nature of the PBE approach. Their active participation and satisfaction substantiated the effectiveness of this approach in enhancing Social Studies education.

Theme 2: Learning interest

The implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBE) approach significantly elevated students' enthusiasm for learning. Participants attested to the enjoyable nature of the activities and the introduction of a dynamic, interactive learning environment. The process of sharing ideas among peers was identified as a key factor that infused the learning process with excitement. One participant noted the benefits of collective problem-solving in PBE, expressing that it facilitated quicker answers and efficient task completion. The contrast between such interactive sessions and traditional lectures was underscored, with students emphasizing the thought-provoking nature of community interactions as opposed to passive listening (S2).

Engagement with various community members resonated positively with participants, as it brought about a sense of excitement and novelty. The experience of visiting the RBA colony was particularly noteworthy, where students engaged with workers and gained insights into their professions. This encounter was described as enlightening and gratifying, transcending traditional classroom experiences (S24). The PBE approach was likened to an engaging excursion that enlivened the learning process, offering respite from mundane routines. The diverse interactions with different workers and their professions, ranging from bakeries to tailors, contributed to this sense of exploration (S4).

Participants highlighted the value of diverse perspectives, finding them intriguing and characterizing PBE as a platform for the exchange of ideas. The visit to the local community was identified as a catalyst for amplified interest in learning, a sentiment that was further corroborated by the peer observer's findings. Notably, the observer noticed a significant upswing in students' learning enthusiasm. This was evidenced by students voluntarily engaging in activities beyond their assignments and experimenting with various materials, indicative of a heightened curiosity (S12).

The experiential dimension of the PBE approach was instrumental in fostering students' learning interests. Through hands-on experiences, students' perceptions of social studies were transformed. A participant expressed a newfound vigor in their approach to lessons, specifically attributing it to the practical orientation of PBE. The integration of practical activities, such as crafting weather instruments and landforms, contributed to a more engaged and proactive learning attitude (S7). The observer's insights revealed the palpable enjoyment students derived from the outdoor activities, where they connected with real-world applications. Curiosity and inquisitiveness were observed in students' inquiries about electric cars and their mechanisms, indicating the depth of their interest in the subject matter (S7).

In summary, the PBE approach brought about a paradigm shift in students' learning dynamics, fostering a vibrant atmosphere of engagement and enthusiasm. The fusion of interactive learning, community interactions, and practical experiences reshaped participants' perceptions of learning. This was evident not only through their verbalized experiences but also in the observations of the peer observer. The PBE approach ignited a renewed commitment to learning, propelling students to approach their studies with a sense of curiosity and dedication.

Theme 3: Experiential learning

Problem-Based Learning (PBE) lessons introduce hands-on activities that infuse learning with a sense of enjoyment. This approach serves a dual purpose: it not only engages students with the subject matter but also underscores its real-world relevance, catering effectively to diverse learning styles. As expressed by a participant, the activities, such as crafting weather instruments and landform models, stand out as enjoyable experiences (S7). By actively interacting with the learning materials, students establish connections between their studies and their own lives, delving deeper into the learning process. The act of crafting weather instruments and landform models using repurposed items not only facilitated understanding but also cultivated awareness of resource utilization (S9).

These hands-on encounters fostered a multifaceted approach to learning. Participants not only absorbed information but also translated it into personalized knowledge through observation and application. This process was transformative, leading to adjustments in their perspectives and behaviors based on these newfound insights. Every student was engaged in the co-creation of meaning through information assimilation and experiential exploration.

Interviews with participants unveiled a palpable sense of contentment derived from the PBE approach in learning social studies. Their accounts reflected improved learning outcomes, evident in enhanced test scores. A participant highlighted the positive impact of PBE on their academic performance, expressing how their understanding had deepened, leading to higher marks (S11). This attests to the potential of experiential learning to elevate educational achievement.

In conclusion, PBE's hands-on activities instill a sense of enjoyment in learning, bridging the gap between academic content and real-world relevance. The approach accommodates various learning preferences and nurtures holistic understanding.

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Participants' reflections on improved test scores underscore the efficacy of experiential learning in bolstering academic accomplishment.

Theme 4: Positive Relationship

The adoption of the Problem-Based Learning (PBE) approach fostered positive dynamics between students and teachers, creating an environment free from the pressure of constant question-and-answer interactions. This approach not only alleviated the sense of scrutiny but also actively engaged students in the learning process. Notably, students reported feeling a newfound closeness and comfort with their teachers, enabling them to freely seek clarifications without hesitation. This shift was articulated by a participant who expressed feeling at ease and more familiar with their teacher through PBE, which consequently empowered them to seek assistance when needed (S15).

The PBE methodology was found to cultivate camaraderie among classmates, with students asserting that such connections might not have formed without the collaborative activities inherent in the approach. Group work, in particular, facilitated interactions that led to stronger bonds among peers, positively influencing their learning experiences. A participant underscored this sentiment by stating that PBE activities fostered camaraderie and enhanced their learning as a result of engaging with friends (S8).

The interactive nature of PBE extended beyond the classroom, affording students the opportunity to engage with individuals from their local community. These interactions not only provided answers to questions but also contributed to the cultivation of meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging. One participant highlighted the value of these connections, expressing that through PBE, they could establish relationships with previously unfamiliar individuals. This engagement, in turn, fueled a desire to contribute to their community, armed with the knowledge and skills acquired through the process (S1).

Participants demonstrated a keen understanding of the significance of their activities, recognizing their relevance to society. The exploration of their school campus and the subsequent engagement with issues like garbage management and environmental preservation were viewed as both enjoyable and purposeful endeavors. This awareness translated into a genuine interest in community welfare and a sense of purpose in their actions, thereby solidifying the bonds between learning and societal contribution (S3).

In conclusion, the implementation of PBE resulted in a shift in student-teacher dynamics by creating a pressure-free learning environment. This approach also facilitated meaningful connections among classmates and with the local community. Participants expressed not only heightened comfort in seeking clarification but also a sense of unity and purpose stemming from collaborative activities. PBE's emphasis on real-world engagement fostered a deeper connection between students and their communities, underscoring its broader positive impact beyond traditional learning contexts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The outcomes of this study unveiled that participant demonstrated higher performance on the posttest when compared to their performance on the pretest, under the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBE) approach. A statistically significant difference between the post-test and pretest performances was evident. Specifically, the mean scores for the pretest and posttest were 18.63 and 22.71 respectively, indicating a noteworthy enhancement in students' learning outcomes in Social Studies through the application of PBE. These findings align with Akkaya & Karakus's (2018) research, which similarly showcased improvements in achievement for both experimental groups. Nevertheless, the intervention group's achievement scores stood out significantly when compared to those of the control group. This pattern is consistent with the insights of Dorji et al. (2021), who emphasized PBE's capacity to enhance students' participation and elevate their learning outcomes.

Examining data collected via student learning behavior observations and semi-structured interviews, participants' satisfaction levels with learning Social Studies using the PBE method were notably high. Active engagement, prompt responsiveness, and the proactive clearing of doubts were evident traits. These outcomes parallel the discoveries of REC (2020) and Schroeder et al. (2015), highlighting PBE's role in augmenting learning engagement, elevating academic achievements, and augmenting participation in community endeavors. A related study by Dorji & Sivitskis (2021) similarly underscored that student displayed heightened activity and engagement within a PBE learning framework.

Prior research conducted by REC (2020) acknowledged PBE as an effective, learner-centered instructional tool. Guided by teachers, students are empowered to express their voices and exercise choices within the learning process. The qualitative data findings from this study reiterate this shift from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching in PBE classrooms. The approach facilitates hands-on experiences, which, as corroborated by Akbas & Cakamak (2019), kindles learning interest. This aligns with their research examining the impact of integrated project studies within place-based education on students' social and problem-solving skills. In a separate investigation conducted by Smith and Walsh in 2019, they proposed a new perspective on outdoor education, highlighting its significance as a fundamental element within the realm of Place-Based Education (PBE). PBE is recognized as a captivating and engaging means to instruct in the realm of social subjects. Furthermore, this approach capitalizes on experiential learning, linking classroom knowledge to real-world situations and nurturing students' self-assurance, as noted by Akbas & Cakamak (2019).

Beyond individual growth, PBE has the capacity to foster deeper connections among peers, locally and globally. Akbaş & Çakmak's (2019) research validates this assertion, revealing that PBE integration significantly bolsters students' social competencies.

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Correspondingly, Schroeder et al. (2015) identifies PBE's potential in cultivating responsible, engaged citizens capable of addressing communal needs. This aligns with the current study's findings, indicating that PBE fortifies students' sense of place and nurtures stronger school-community relationships.

Interview revelations unveiled that students perceive PBE as a form of experiential learning, offering both individual and collaborative involvement in real-world contexts, thus providing hands-on encounters. This perception corresponds with the assertions of Schroeder et al. (2015) and Corissa (2018), who similarly highlight PBE's capacity to facilitate world exploration and discovery through tangible experiences, bridging the gap between theoretical classroom learning and practical life applications. This experiential dimension further prompts active exploration, idea exchange, questioning, and interactions, fostering a positive disposition towards learning Social Studies. REC (2020) further supports this by indicating that PBE narrows the disparity between students' lived experiences and their academic pursuits.

In summary, the collective findings and insights underscore PBE's efficacy in enhancing student engagement, expanding experiential learning, and fostering meaningful community connections. This transformative approach is characterized by heightened participation, improved social competencies, and the cultivation of well-rounded citizens attuned to community needs. Notably, PBE bridges theoretical learning with tangible application, and elicits a positive attitude towards learning Social Studies, while aligning classroom experiences with students' real-life encounters.

CONCLUSION

This research underscores that place-based education serves as a catalyst for learners, highlighting the significance of strong school-community partnerships. It affords students the opportunity to engage in hands-on experiences, actively participating in local activities. This engagement not only enhances awareness, motivation, pride, and a sense of ownership but also accentuates the importance of linking classroom teachings with practical real-world scenarios. The study firmly establishes the pivotal role of PBE, not only in bolstering academic achievements but also in fostering community advancement.

The study unequivocally establishes that integrating PBE into teaching and learning amplifies student engagement, cultivating heightened interest and subsequently elevating learning accomplishments. Besides, this approach garners elevated levels of contentment among students in learning social studies through the PBE method. It is imperative for forthcoming research endeavors to delve into the extensive body of literature that encompasses Place-Based Education (PBE) under various contexts. This includes examining its presence in domains like environmental education and the cultivation of a global environmental consciousness, as articulated by Misiaszek in 2021. Furthermore, it is equally vital to explore potential intersections between PBE and alternative pedagogical methods, such as garden-based education, forest schools, museum education, and outdoor education, among others, all of which incorporate the fundamental concept of "place" in their approaches.

The inclusion of place-based education in the curriculum has been shown to not only foster a deeper understanding of social studies concepts but also to cultivate a strong sense of place attachment, environmental stewardship, and community engagement among grade four students through a thorough analysis of the literature and empirical findings.

Teachers, politicians, and curriculum designers should think about incorporating place-based education practices into grade four social studies curricula in light of the convincing data offered in this research. By doing this, we can provide our students the knowledge and values they need to be educated, accountable, and involved members of their communities and the global community, in addition to a solid mastery of social studies principles.

Finally, the "Use of Place-Based Education Approach in Teaching Social Studies to Grade Four Students" provides a viable path for revolutionizing social studies education and fostering engaged, reflective, and socially responsible students.

LIMITATIONS

The study's range was confined due to a restricted sample size of merely twenty-four participants, a choice influenced by time limitations. As a result, the study's results cannot be universally applied to all educational institutions across the nation. To establish wider relevance, future inquiries should cover multiple grade levels and involve a larger participant pool.

Major concerns that prominently emerged encompassed inadequacies in resources, a limited grasp of Place-Based Education (PBE), and minimal prior experience in incorporating PBE methods into teaching practices. These limitations hampered the study's ability to draw all-encompassing conclusions and implications. Therefore, it is suggested that subsequent research endeavors tackle these limitations while examining the effectiveness of PBE in diverse educational contexts. By encompassing a broader range of grade levels and a greater number of participants, researchers can acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the advantages and difficulties in implementing PBE strategies. This will, in turn, augment the relevance of the findings in a wider educational framework.

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