

Civic Education in Thai Social Studies Teacher Education Curriculum of Rajabhat University Group

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Abstracts

This study examined how civic education was integrated into the social studies teacher education curricula of Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. Using qualitative thematic and lexical frequency analysis, the research analyzed course titles to assess the integration and emphasis of civic-related content. The methodology involved a purposive selection of 17 Rajabhat Universities based on their established social studies teacher education programs. The findings revealed that these institutions offer an average of 5.41 civic-related courses per university, with a predominant focus on moral education, national identity, and civic responsibility, which aligned closely with the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551. Furthermore, lexical analysis confirmed a dominant emphasis on the term "Thai," whereas democratic and participatory language remained significantly underrepresented. The thematic analysis identified five key trends, ranging from a strong emphasis on national identity to an emerging but inconsistent attention to global citizenship. These results suggest that while Rajabhat curricula effectively uphold civic and moral values, there is a critical need to broaden the scope to encompass democratic literacy and active civic engagement to meet contemporary education goals.

Keywords: Civic Education, Social Studies Curriculum, Social Studies Teacher Education, Thailand, Democracy

Introduction

Civic education plays a critical role in preparing future teachers to foster responsible citizenship and meaningful participation in a democratic society. In Thailand, civic education has traditionally emphasized moral conduct, national identity, and social harmony, as articulated in the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551, particularly within Learning Area 2: Civic Duties, Culture, and Living in Society (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008). While

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this framework promotes values such as responsibility and social order, scholars have consistently noted its limited engagement with democratic principles, political literacy, and participatory citizenship (Print, 2017; Boontinand & Petcharamesree, 2018). This limitation must be understood within Thailand's contemporary political context, characterized by repeated military coups and restrictions on civic freedoms, which have contributed to a fragile or constrained democracy (Print, 2017). In such an environment, civic education in higher education has often undergone a process of "depoliticisation," where democratic discourse is marginalized in favor of state-defined moral and nationalistic agendas. Consequently, citizenship education in Thai higher education frequently functions to reinforce obedience and social stability rather than cultivating democratic agency and critical political engagement (Boontinand, 2023).

Rajabhat Universities occupy a particularly significant position within this landscape. As the largest network of teacher education institutions in Thailand, Rajabhat Universities produce a significant majority of the nation's social studies educators. Originally established as teacher training colleges, Rajabhat institutions maintain a mission focused on community service, regional development, and moral education (Rajabhat University Act, 2004; Office of the Education Council, 2017). Given their extensive reach and historical role, the curricular trends within these institutions exert a profound, nationwide influence on the quality of civic instruction in schools. Their curricula often reflect standardized structures shaped by national policies and emphasize civic duties and Thai cultural values over active democratic engagement. Despite their crucial role in shaping future educators, there remains a notable absence of comprehensive, systematic research examining how civic education is conceptualized and delivered across the entire Rajabhat system. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the civic education curricula of Rajabhat Universities, with particular attention to the presence of democratic language and its implications for teacher preparation in Thailand's current political context.

Objectives

To examine how civic education is integrated within the social studies teacher education curricula of Rajabhat Universities in Thailand.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to enable an in-depth exploration of curricula through systematic data collection and interpretive analysis. Comparative methods were utilized to examine teacher education curricula across different regions, allowing for the identification of thematic patterns and variations. Additionally, a comparative education framework was applied to uncover culturally shaped educational practices and address region-specific challenges within civic education.

Data Collection

The researchers employed a purposive sampling method to select 17 Rajabhat Universities as the target group for this study. The selection was based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. The study analyzed Social Studies Teacher Education curricula from Rajabhat Universities. The specific inclusion criteria for selecting the curricula are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Curriculum Selection Criteria

Criteria	Selection
Degree	Bachelor
Area of Learning	Social Studies and/or Civic Education
Level of Educational Institution	University
Curriculum	Teacher Education

To uphold research ethics and institutional confidentiality, the identities of the 17 Rajabhat Universities were anonymized. Each institution was assigned an anonymous code and categorized based on its geographic location in Thailand. This approach ensures that the analysis focuses on curricular trends across the Rajabhat system rather than individual institutional performance. Table 2 details the distribution of the selected universities.

Table 2 The data collection from Thai Rajabhat Universities

Region	Anonymous Code	Number of Universities
Northern	N01, N02, N03, N04, N05	5
Eastern	E01, E02	2
Western	W01, W02 W03	3
Central	C01, C02, C03	3
Northeastern	NE01, NE02, NE03, NE04	4

From the table, data collected from 17 Rajabhat Universities, originally established as teacher training colleges, continue to serve a foundational role in preparing educators across Thailand. Their mission is centered on supporting local communities and regional development, consistent with their community-based and service-oriented origins (Rajabhat University Act, 2004). As a result, Rajabhat curricula tend to follow standardized structures that align closely with national education policies and the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551. This alignment reflects their historical role and ongoing commitment to moral development, civic responsibility, and national identity in teacher education. While these institutions provide essential training for the teaching profession, particularly in rural and regional areas, their programs often emphasize stability and uniformity over curricular diversity or reform. This study examines the extent to which civic education is embedded within Rajabhat teacher education programs and how their institutional mission shapes the presentation of civic and democratic content in preparing future educators. The selected 17 universities offer social studies teacher programs under their teacher colleges, whose curricula were selected by a purposive method to this study.

2. To identify specific civic education subjects within the selected curricula, this study utilized the framework of Thailand’s Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008). Civic education is situated within the “Civics, Culture, and Living” strand of the broader “Social Studies, Religion, and Culture” learning area. This strand encompasses five key knowledge areas: peaceful coexistence in Thai and global societies; responsible citizenship; religious faith and moral development; environmental awareness; and patriotism with an emphasis on Thai national identity. Accordingly, the criteria for selecting civic education-related subjects involved the use of targeted keywords reflecting these themes, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Keywords for Civic Education Course Selection Criteria

Criteria	Keywords
Civic Education Subjects Related	Civic, Politics, Law, Community, Social Event, Citizen, Democracy and Inequality

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through a systematic manual process using worksheets to conduct both lexical frequency and qualitative thematic analysis. This involved tabulating and manually counting keywords from the identified course titles to determine their frequency, followed by thematic coding to categorize these terms into broader pedagogical trends. Finally, the results from both analyses were synthesized to provide a comprehensive overview of how civic education is structured and prioritized within the Rajabhat curricula.

Research Results

Curriculum Structure

Each table outlines the courses offered in Social Studies-related programs for teacher education. The data is organized by course titles and their frequency of occurrence across universities, providing insights into the core knowledge areas emphasized in each national context. Rajabhat Universities for 17 institutions and their civic education subjects in their curricula, then the result will be shown in the following table.

Table 4 Curricula from Rajabhat Universities of Thailand

University (Curr Year B.E.)	General Ed.	Major	
		Compulsory	Elective
1. N01 (2562) [Trans]	GEN1306 Civic and Local Community Development	SO1306 Thai Politics	SO3607 Global Education
2. N02 (2562)	2501003 Public Mind and Civic Social Engagement 2521001 Globalization and Localization 2551002 Fundamental Knowledge on Thai Politics and Government 2561001 Introduction to Laws	1231201 Thai Politics 1232203 International Society	1231202 Principles of Jurisprudence
3. N03 (2565) [Trans]		Thai Politics Introduction to Law	Global Civic Education
4. N04 (2558) [Trans]		2451101 Intro to Political Science 2451102 Thai Politics 1123705 Civic Duty and Moral	1123704 Civic Education Learning Management
5. N05 (2567)		SOED271 The Concept of Law in Teaching Social Studies SOED372 The Concept of Political Science in Teaching Social Studies	SOED434 Important Events in the Contemporary World SOED443 Global Citizenship Education
6. E01 (2562)	EED104 Potency Citizenship	ESC206 Introduction to Law	ESC403 Globalization
7. E02 (2562) [Trans]	0002325 Potency Citizen	1101206 Thai Politics 1102204 Introduction to Law	
8. W01 (2562) [Trans]	GE62302 Potency Citizen GE62305 Jurisdical Process and Law in Daily Life GE62306 Human Right, Moral, Ethic and Good Governance	SE62606 Thai Politics SE62607 Introduction to Law	SE62704 Global Education

University (Curr Year B.E.)	General Ed.	Major	
		Compulsory	Elective
	GE62307 Prevention and Suppression of Corruption GE62311 Thai Politics GE62312 Labour Law and Social Security		
9. W02 (N.D.)	215201 Thai Politics and Government	215102 Introduction to Political Science 215104 Political Theory 215120 Thai Local Government 215108 Problems of Thai Politics and Government 215304 Introduction to Jurisprudence 216321 Criminal Law 1: General Principle	216322 Criminal Law 2: Offence 216303 Administrative Law 216301 Law of Thai Administration of State Affairs
10. W03 (2562)	2221310 Ethics and Social Responsibility 2310410 Potency Citizenship 2340310 Basic Knowledge of Laws	2551101 Thai politics 2562101 Basic Laws	
11. C01 (2562)	2000101 Active Citizen	2501102 Thai Government Politic 2502102 Introduction to Laws	2543103 Environment and Demography
12. C02 (2565)	0020113 Laws and Good Citizenship 0020114 Citizenship Education, Good Governance and Corruption Prevention 0020121 Rights, Duties, and Participatory in Local Development	2551111 Introduction to Political Science 2561001 Introduction to Laws	2531505 Civic Education 2532205 Environment and Population Studies 2551112 Thai Politics and Government

University (Curr Year B.E.)	General Ed.	Major	
		Compulsory	Elective
13. C03 (2566)	GEN0103 Thai Society in Global Context GEN0107 Good Citizenship	SOI1304 Thai Politics and Government SOI2303 Introduction to Law	SOI2305 Global Education SOI4303 Current World Situation
14. NE01 (2562)	GEN3102 Law for Living GEN3103 Thai Politics and Government GEN3104 Citizenship and Social Responsibility	SOE1104 Thai Politics and Governments SOE2111 Introduction to Law	
15. NE02 (2567)	01520101 Moral and Attractive People 02550101 Power of Citizen 02550102 Current World Events 02560101 Laws in Daily Life	22531104 Thai Politics and Government for Social Studies Teachers	22563101 Introduction to law for Social Studies Teachers 32573101 Introduction to Political Science
16. NE03 (2566)	2500116 Human Rights and Civic Duties 2500117 Thai Living and ASEAN Way in Global Society	2533214 Globalization 2551118 Thai Politics and Governments 2562102 Introduction to Law and Process of Equity	1014105 Civics Learning Management
17. NE04 (2566)	9032113 Quality Citizen	1141202 Thai Politics 1142203 Introduction to Law	1144206 Global Citizenship

Table 5 presents the number of civic education courses offered within the teacher education curricula of 17 Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. A total of 92 civic-related courses were identified across these institutions. This results in an average of 5.41 courses per university, indicating a moderately consistent integration of civic education content within the Rajabhat system.

Table 5 Civic Education Course Offered in the Curricula

University Group	Total Courses	Number of Universities	Average Courses/University
17 Rajabhat Universities	92	17	5.41

Words count and lexical Analysis

The following table shows the 10 most frequent words from Thai universities’ curricula

Table 6 The ten most frequent words found.

Rajabhat University	
Words	f
Thai	23
law	18
politics	18
introduction	16
global	8
citizenship	8
social	8
government	8
education	8
laws	6

The lexical frequency analysis of civic-related course titles from Rajabhat Universities reveals a strong emphasis on national identity and foundational civic concepts. The most frequently occurring word is “Thai” (f = 23), underscoring the curriculum's nationalistic orientation and alignment with Thai identity and values. Following closely are “law” and “politics” (f = 18 each), indicating a recurring presence of legal and political education content, though likely at an introductory level.

The prominence of “introduction” (f = 16) suggests that many courses are structured as foundational or survey-style subjects, which may reflect a generalist approach to civic education rather than in-depth or specialized study. Words such as “global” and “citizenship” (f = 8 each) reflect an emerging inclusion of global perspectives, aligning with Thailand’s broader educational reforms that promote 21st-century skills and ASEAN integration. Similarly,

“social,” “government,” and “education” (f = 8 each) point to consistent thematic attention on societal structures and civic functions.

The presence of “laws” (f = 6) complements the earlier appearance of “law,” reinforcing the legal literacy component within the curriculum. Overall, the lexical analysis suggests that Rajabhat civic education curricula are characterized by a strong national focus, foundational civic topics, and growing—but still limited—engagement with global and participatory themes. When using the words frequently found to create the word cloud, which are illustrated in the following figure.



Figure 1. Word cloud of the most frequent words found in Civic Education Curricula from Rajabhat Universities

Thematic Analysis Result

The 5 themes were constructed as follows.

1. Strong Emphasis on National Identity and Thai-Centric Perspectives

The frequent appearance of the word “Thai” suggests that Rajabhat civic education curricula place considerable emphasis on promoting national values, loyalty, and cultural identity. This aligns with the goals of the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551, particularly regarding patriotic and moral development.

2. Foundational Approach to Civic and Political Knowledge

The high frequency of the term “introduction” alongside “politics” and “law” indicates a curricular tendency to offer broad, introductory-level content rather than in-depth or issue-specific civic education. This suggests that students are exposed to basic concepts of governance and law without extensive critical or participatory engagement.

3. Alignment with Legal and Political Literacy Objectives

The consistent presence of terms such as “law,” “laws,” “government,” and “politics” reflects a structural focus on understanding formal political systems and legal

frameworks. However, this focus may remain procedural or descriptive rather than analytical or participatory in orientation.

4. Emerging Attention to Global Citizenship

The inclusion of terms like “global” and “citizenship” points to growing attention to global awareness and regional integration (e.g., ASEAN), especially in response to Thailand’s education reform policies. However, these concepts are not yet dominant or consistently connected to democratic participation.

5. Underrepresentation of Democratic and Participatory Themes

Despite civic-related terminology, explicit references to democracy, democratic citizenship, or political participation are largely absent. This suggests that civic education in Rajabhat universities may prioritize conformity and moral behavior over active democratic engagement or critical thinking.

Discussion

The analysis of civic education courses in Rajabhat universities reveals a pattern that reflects the broader characteristics of Thailand’s centralized educational system and its civic vision rooted in moral and nationalistic frameworks. As demonstrated in the thematic analysis, the explicit reference to “democracy” is conspicuously absent in most curricula, aligning with concerns raised by scholars such as Boontinand and Petcharamesree (2018) regarding the limited democratic discourse in Thai civic instruction. This absence stands in contrast to international best practices which advocate for democratic literacy as a cornerstone of civic education (Heggart et al., 2018).

The alignment of Rajabhat curricula with the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 emphasizes civic duties, moral values, and national identity—areas that remain central to the university’s teacher training mission. The dominance of course titles such as Introduction to Thai Politics and Introduction to Law reflects a foundational approach, focusing more on general political knowledge than participatory democratic engagement. While these courses provide essential content, they may not equip future teachers with the critical thinking skills or democratic agency needed to promote active citizenship in a complex political environment (Zipin & Brennan, 2021).

At the same time, the presence of global citizenship education in Rajabhat universities signals an emerging trend. Courses such as Global Citizenship and The ASEAN Way in Global Society suggest curricular responsiveness to globalization and ASEAN regionalism. However, these global-oriented courses are often disconnected from domestic democratic

competencies and lack emphasis on political participation or rights-based citizenship (Bessant et al., 2016).

Another notable finding is the frequent use of keywords such as “citizen,” “citizenship,” and “civic education.” These terms appear prominently, but primarily convey ethical and nationalistic meanings, rather than rights-based or participatory frameworks. This mirrors what Heggart et al. (2018) described in the Australian context as a tension between knowledge transmission and active citizenship. The reliance on moralistic and duty-focused content may inadvertently reinforce passive civic identities rather than fostering empowered, critically engaged democratic citizens.

Drawing from the notion of “pragmatic-radical curriculum democracy” (Zipin & Brennan, 2021), this study highlights a need for greater co-construction of civic content with students and local communities. As Bessant et al. (2016) argue, co-designed civic curricula that reflect youth agency and contemporary democratic challenges are essential for political renewal. The Rajabhat model, while strong in community relevance and moral instruction, would benefit from embracing a more participatory and democratic approach that encourages students to critically engage with societal issues.

Conclusion

This study revealed that while civic-related content is moderately integrated. The curriculum remains heavily anchored in traditional frameworks. There is a predominant emphasis on national identity, moral development, and legal literacy, reflecting a strong alignment with the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551. The lexical and thematic analyses underscored a “Thai-centric” orientation, where values of social harmony and civic duty are prioritized over democratic engagement.

The conspicuous absence of explicit democratic language and participatory themes suggests that Rajabhat curricula may inadvertently foster passive civic identities rather than empowering future teachers as agents of democratic change. While emerging attention to global citizenship indicates a degree of curricular responsiveness to international trends, these concepts are not yet consistently linked to local democratic practices. In conclusion, for Rajabhat Universities to fulfill their mission in a contemporary context, there is an urgent need to evolve beyond moralistic instruction toward a more critical and participatory civic education framework that encompasses democratic literacy and active citizenship.

Recommendations

1. Integrate Explicit Democratic Content

The lexical frequency analysis in Table 6 highlights a significant emphasis on national identity through the term “Thai”, while democratic language remains conspicuously underrepresented. Curricula should be revised to move beyond traditional moral and nationalistic frameworks by explicitly incorporating subjects that address democracy, political participation, and constitutional literacy to foster critical engagement.

2. Promote Participatory and Critical Pedagogies

The data from Table 6 indicates that many courses are structured as foundational subjects, evidenced by the high frequency of the word “introduction”. Teacher education programs should move beyond these introductory, top-down transmission frameworks toward issue-focused and participatory learning environments that empower pre-service teachers to facilitate active discussions in the classroom. These would encourage more meaningful democratic experiences in the classroom.

3. Contextualize Global Citizenship

While Table 6 indicates an emerging presence of “global” and “citizenship” themes, the thematic analysis shows these concepts are not yet consistently linked to domestic democratic engagement. Future development should connect global themes to real-world civic engagement in Thai society, linking international awareness with democratic responsibilities at home.

4. Co-design Curriculum with Communities and Students

The analysis in Table 4 and institutional structures reflects a high degree of standardization and alignment with national policies over local participatory engagement. Future curricular reform should involve teachers, students, and local communities in co-designing civic education content. This approach can ensure greater relevance, authenticity, and responsiveness to emerging democratic challenges.

Research Limitations

While this study provides a systematic overview of civic education within Rajabhat Universities, several limitations should be acknowledged.

1. The analysis relied exclusively on official curriculum documents, specifically course titles. This focus may not fully capture the hidden curriculum or the actual pedagogical practices and classroom interactions that occur during implementation.

2. As a documentary research project, this study did not employ methodological triangulation, such as interviews with faculty members or classroom observations. Consequently, the findings reflect the intended curriculum rather than the enacted or experienced curriculum.

3. Although lexical frequency analysis provides an objective count of terminology, the thematic analysis remains inherently interpretive. The prioritization of themes such as national identity over democratic engagement is based on the researchers' analysis of current curricular trends.

4. Geographic and Institutional Representation: While the study covered 17 Rajabhat Universities, the findings may not be generalizable to all higher education institutions in Thailand, as Rajabhat Universities have a unique historical mission centered on local development and teacher training

Future Research

1. Student Impact and Perception: Examine how pre-service teachers interpret and internalize civic education content and its influence on their future teaching beliefs and practices.

2. Comparative Provincial or Regional Studies: Analyze how civic education varies across Rajabhat universities in different Thai regions, especially in relation to local political cultures.

3. Longitudinal Studies: Track how civic education reforms impact students' civic attitudes and participation over time, especially after graduation.

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