

How SEAMEO CHAT Adds Value to Education and Helps Foster Global Citizenship

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Abstract

SEAMEO CHAT is one of the 26 specialist centres of SEAMEO, established in 2000. As a regional SEAMEO centre, it aims to promote cooperation in the study of history and tradition amongst member countries and develop a better identity through research, HR development, education, and public awareness programmes. These days, the centre finds ways to add value to education to help realise global citizenship.

History is a branch of study that deals with human beings—their behaviour, growth and development, relationships, resources, and the various institutions they require to function and carry on living smoothly. Families, schools, workplaces, governments, and recreational activities are aspects of life that are interrelated and interdependent. So, whether one wants to become a doctor or an engineer, we all have to live in a common society, interact with individuals who have different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, adapt to various situations and circumstances, and adhere to certain societal norms to lead peaceful and productive lives.

History also helps students become aware of their environment and teach them about the various civilisations, movements, and renaissances that have occurred over the years. This knowledge enables them to understand how the world and different societies have evolved, the important events that occurred in the past, and enduring ideas and eminent personalities that had an impact and affected the lives of people both locally and globally. It also helps them understand how different societies are structured, managed, and governed. This, in turn, helps them understand their place in the world. The centre thus strives to incorporate history into school curricula to ensure the well-rounded education of global citizens. This article discusses how teaching history can add value to education and lead to fostering global citizenship in the so-called “digital generation.”

Introduction

Education is defined as the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. It refers to helping people to learn how to do things and encouraging them to think. It provides individuals an opportunity to improve their lives, become successful members of their communities, and actively contribute to national socioeconomic development. It is traditionally valued as a key determinant of social mobility.

What Is Global Citizenship?

A global citizen is one who is aware of and understand the wider world and his or her place in it. He or she takes an active role in the community and work with others to make our planet more equal, fairer, and more sustainable. For SEAMEO CHAT, global citizenship is all about encouraging young people to develop the knowledge, skills, and values they need to engage with the world. We believe that we can all make a difference.

What Is History?

History refers to a continuous, systematic narrative of past events as they relate to a particular people, country, period, or person, usually written as a chronological account. It simply represents a basic sense or knowledge of the past. In earlier times, a sense of history encompassed both an imaginative story of events and a narrative of chronological past events.

For historians, various modern systemisations and interpretations of this continuous and connected process then become history in a new general and increasingly abstract sense. Moreover, in view of the prevailing new stress on the workings of history as human self-development, history in many of its wider uses shed its exclusive association with knowledge of the past and became directly connected not only to the present, but also to the future (Nasson, n.d.).

Does History Add Value to Education and Help Foster Global Citizenship?

History provides valuable information and perspectives embedded within a powerful analytical mode, which can be especially useful in a rapidly changing world. It helps students become better-prepared citizens of the society, capable of making informed choices about current issues and able to follow events. Looking at today's digital generation and history as a subject in a rapidly changing world, we see lack of interest in history and other art-related subjects.

Education for global citizenship should not be taught as an additional subject. Instead, it should be treated as a framework for learning, reaching beyond school to encompass the wider community. It can be promoted in class through the existing curriculum or new initiatives and activities. Its benefits should be felt in school and beyond. Global citizenship helps young people build their own understanding of world events; think about their values and what is important to them; take their learning in the real world; challenge their ignorance and intolerance; get involved in the local, international, and global communities; develop arguments and voice opinions; and see that they have the power to act and influence the world around them. Global citizenship should inspire teachers and parents, too. The young generation should have a voice. The world may be changing fast, but they can still make positive differences and help build a fairer, safer, and more secure world for everyone.

SEAMEO CHAT finds ways to help students become better global citizens and add value to education. It has long ago realised that social science subjects such as history can help students become good global citizens and that teaching the subject using a well-organised curriculum can add value to education. It believes that curricula need to be changed to achieve this, however, and so has been supporting the governments of member countries as a curriculum planner.

Teaching political ideologies, constitutional laws, citizenship, rights and duties, morals and virtues, and social codes of conduct enables students to become aware of their roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to social and civic affairs. By providing relevant information and knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the study of history prepares students to grow into active, responsible, and effective members of the society. It also teaches them to address societal and global concerns using literature, technology, and other identifiable community resources. Furthermore, learning about different religions, social and cultural beliefs, castes and creeds, nationalities and ethnicities, values, languages, festivals, food and clothing, types of families, and so on increases their awareness that the society they live in is diverse and multicultural and yet is interdependent and interrelated. History helps students recognise the benefits and challenges of living in a world with multiple cultures and ideologies. This awareness helps them understand the importance of democracy, rights and freedoms, and the fact to live and coexist peacefully, each and everyone needs to respect, trust, and balance the various opinions, values, and attitudes, lifestyles, cultures and practices, and ideologies that exist in society.

In secondary school, students are taught a variety of subjects that are supposed to guide them in their future careers and personal choices. History is one of these subjects. Tackling the curricula and teaching methods used will be of some kind of help in promoting history, that is not very interesting for students.

Bearing this in mind, SEAMEO CHAT conducted a workshop on 15–16 December 2016. Two resource persons led the workshop—one from the Philippines who has taken part in history curriculum planning and providing guidance to secondary teachers on effective teaching and the other from Myanmar who has taken part in drawing guidelines for history teachers in the lower-secondary level. Some 24 participants—curriculum specialists and secondary-level history teachers from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Myanmar—attended the workshop. Eight of the participants were teacher-trainers from Southeast Asian countries while 16 came from the Teacher Education and Curriculum Planning Departments under MoE Myanmar. The outcome resulted in very effective ways of teaching history in lower-secondary schools in Southeast Asia. The centre submitted its report for MoE use afterwards.

IT tools and devices have become ubiquitous parts of our lives, especially for the young generation. We can even say that today's generation is the "digital generation." In a rapidly changing world, things change fast. An event that happens today can be considered historical in a span of seconds. This is pushing SEAMEO CHAT to consider changing the approach to teaching history. Learning history should be fascinating and exciting. It can, however, be dry and boring if not done the right way.

As history provides valuable information and perspectives embedded within a powerful analytical mode, which can be especially useful in a rapidly changing world, SEAMEO CHAT believes that history will also make students better-prepared citizens of the society, capable of making informed choices about current issues and able to follow events. To address current needs, the centre is currently planning to conduct a workshop with the theme, "History in the Eyes of the Digital Generation," in collaboration with other centres, specifically SEAMOLEC.

Because learning history is important though considered boring by the digital generation, there is a need for more innovative and creative methods for teaching the subject. The workshop will pave the way for history teachers to apply digital technologies in research, writing, and teaching to encourage and assist them to think critically about the way historical and other cultural knowledge is constructed; develop ways to more efficiently find and evaluate information online while analysing and making sense of such findings; offer practical advice to teachers on how to make best use of IT in teaching history and find new ways of thinking about pedagogy in digital humanities; and develop a common concept of preparing history lessons so these are more attractive and better achieve desired end results. The workshop has been set to occur two days in October 2019 at the SEAMEO CHAT office.

The workshop should enhance knowledge and practices on teaching and learning history using information technology (IT) tools and devices. It will be aligned with Priority 5 of the "SEAMEO Education Agenda." It will also promote inter-centre cooperation as well in terms of sharing knowledge and expertise. It can also contribute to the policy planning of the curriculum division of the education ministries of member countries. SEAMEO CHAT plans to invite historians, IT specialists, curriculum planners, and history teachers from SEAMEO member countries. It will also request that SEAMOLEC send IT and pedagogy experts.

Tasked to promote the culture and traditions of the various countries in the region, SEAMEO CHAT will also host an impromptu talk competition in commemoration of its 18th anniversary. This aims to stimulate students' interest in history; make them realise the importance and value of learning history; encourage them to learn history using digital technologies; and introduce history teaching using digital technologies. It aims to generate renewed interest in history.

The competition will be split into two sessions—a preliminary competition and a final competition. Competitors from different universities and institutions will be invited through newspaper ads and calls for entry on the SEAMEO CHAT website. They will be tested in terms of English language proficiency and historical facts in the preliminary round by officials from SEAMEO CHAT and the Departments of History and English of the Yangon University, the National Centre of English Language, and the Yangon University of Foreign Languages. Those who will pass the preliminary screening will move on to compete in the final round.

Conclusion

The aforementioned activities of SEAMEO CHAT support, educate, and encourage the youth to increase their awareness and understanding of the wider world while helping them develop their critical-thinking abilities and comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis skills and creativity to become global citizens.

References

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