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Maldivian primary teachers activate and shape their Social Studies pedagogies through reflection

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
at
The University of Waikato
by
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Abstract

This study emerges from a deep-seated concern about the potential erosion of Maldivian cultural heritage and identity, reflected in the diminishing prominence of traditional cultural practices, language, beliefs, which are often threatened by tourism and foreign influences. The research investigates how Maldivian primary teachers perceive and teach social studies, a subject crucial for preserving cultural identity and for promoting sustainable development. As a Maldivian social studies educator, I view social studies education as an empowering force for fostering critical thinking, empathy, and global citizenship among future leaders.

The research explores how primary teachers activate and shape their social studies pedagogy through reflection, with a focus on Key Stage 1 and 2 levels. Some findings indicate that teachers face challenges due to limited access to specialised professional learning, resulting pedagogical approaches that are often teacher-led and exam-focused, rather than being inquiry-based and student-centred. This thesis sheds light on these dynamics and contributes to critical need for educational reform conversations in the Maldives on the quality of social studies education.

Conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, this largely qualitative study initially adopted a Participatory Action Research [PAR] methodology and later transitioned to Online Participatory Action Research [OPAR]. Data was collected from ten participants via a Qualtrics questionnaire and online workshops, with four teachers contributing reflective narrative texts and participating in online interviews. Thematic analysis and grounded theory guided the analysis, which uncovered key themes and generating theoretical insights drawn from the firsthand experiences of the participants within the realm of social studies education in the Maldives.

The findings highlight the crucial role of reflective practice in shaping pedagogy and fostering professional growth. Analysis of teachers' experiences suggested how reflective practice influences their social studies teaching, helping them adapt to the evolving educational landscape in the Maldives. The study also highlights strategies teachers employ to navigate challenges, and illustrated the practical impact of reflective

practice on improving teaching, learning, and ongoing professional development for Maldivian social studies teachers.

Four key implications arise from this study. First, the study highlights the importance of understanding teachers' perceptions of social studies within the National Curriculum Framework, and the need for more targeted exploration of its significance. Second, it underscores the need to address challenges in professional learning, with recommending tailored interventions to enhance teachers' social studies pedagogy being necessary. Third, the research emphasises the role of reflective practice in shaping teaching methods and urges educational institutions, including the Maldives National University, to integrate reflective strategies into teacher training. Finally, the findings advocate for policy initiatives and support structures to create an environment that fosters reflective practices, enhancing social studies education in primary schools.

Keywords: Social Studies, Reflection, Pedagogy, Professional Learning

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

~In the name of Allah (SWT), The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful~

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late grandfather, Ibrahim Khaleel and my late grandmother, Zahida Ibrahim, whose wisdom, and love continue to inspire me.

To my two loving daughters, Aishath Suha and Aminath Shara Ibrahim, you are my greatest teachers. Your presence in my life has brought joy, purpose, and a constant reminder of the importance of the journey.

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List of Acronyms

ACRONYMS	LONG FORM
K1	Key Stage 1
K2	Key Stage 2
MOE	Ministry of Education
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCSS	National Council of Social Studies
NIE	National Institute of Education
OAR	Online Action Research
OPAR	Online Participatory Action Research
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PLD	Professional Learning and Development

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Publications from this Thesis	ix
List of Acronyms	x
List of Figures.....	xvii
List of Tables.....	xix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 My Experience Leading to this Research	1
1.3 Setting of the Study.....	5
1.4 Rationale for the Study.....	7
1.5 Research Questions	10
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	11
1.7 Structure of the Thesis	12
Chapter 2: Research Context	15
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 Islamic and Cultural Backgrounds of People of the Maldives	15
2.3 History of Maldives Education	17
2.4 The School System in the Maldives.....	19
2.5 The Maldives Education System	21
2.6 Introduction to the National Curriculum Framework, Social Studies Syllabus, and School Schemes of Work in the Maldives	23
2.7 National Curriculum Framework in the Maldives	26
2.8 Social Studies Education in the Maldives.....	34
2.9 Teaching Social Studies in the Maldives.....	36
2.10 Overview of Conceptual Framework	38
2.11 Chapter Summary	39
Chapter 3: Literature Review	40
3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Exploring Social Studies Curriculum.....	40
3.2.1 The Nature of Social Studies	41
3.2.2 Maldives Social Studies Curriculum	49
3.2.2.1 Influence of Islamic Culture	49
3.2.2.2 Social Studies: Values, Skills, and Knowledge and Understanding	51

3.2.2.3 Citizenship Education	60
3.2.3 Section Summary	63
3.3 Learning Theories in Education and their relation to Social Studies Education.....	64
3.3.1 Socio-Cultural Theory	64
3.3.2 Social Constructivism Theory.....	67
3.3.3 Social Reconstructionist Theory.....	70
3.3.4 Section Summary	72
3.4 Conceptualising Teachers' Social Studies Pedagogical Practice	73
3.4.1 Student-centred learning	83
3.4.2 Inquiry-based learning approach.....	84
3.4.3 Collaborative Learning approach.....	87
3.4.4 Section Summary	90
3.5 Teachers' professional learning and development	91
3.5.1 Professional learning and development for teachers	92
3.5.2 Theories and models of professional learning and development.....	94
3.6 Reflective practice in education	99
3.6.1 Theorising reflective practice	100
3.6.2 Reflective practice as a professional learning and development method.....	109
3.7 Chapter Summary	111
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	113
4.1 Introduction	113
4.2 Research Questions	113
4.3 Choosing the Research Methodology	114
4.4 Theorising Action Research as a methodology	115
4.5 Initial Research Design of an Action Research Methodology: Participatory Action Research.....	120
4.6 Shift of methodology: From PAR to OPAR.....	124
4.7 Final Research Design of an Action Research Methodology: Online Participatory Action Research [OPAR].....	126
4.8 Setting up for Research and Research Methods	129
4.9 Research Methods and Tools	132
4.10 Data Collection Process in the Research	133
4.10.1 The First Phase of Data Collection	137
4.10.1.1 Curriculum Document Analysis.....	137
4.10.1.2 Qualtrics Questionnaire	138
4.10.2 The Second Phase of Data Collection	142
4.10.2.1 First Online Workshop.....	142

4.10.2.2 Second Online Workshop.....	144
4.10.2.3 Third Online Workshop.....	145
4.10.3 Online Reflective Narrative Texts	146
4.10.3 The third phase of data collection.....	148
4.10.3.1 Online semi-structured interviews.....	148
4.11 Data Analysis.....	150
4.12 Researcher’s Positionality.....	154
4.13 Ethical Issues	156
4.13.1 Access to participants	158
4.13.2 Informed Consent.....	158
4.13.3 Participants’ right to decline to participate and right to withdraw/withdraw data	159
4.13.4 Arrangements for participants to receive information	159
4.13.4 Language consideration.....	159
4.13.6 Anonymity	160
4.13.7 Confidentiality.....	160
4.13.8 Avoiding Harm	160
4.14 Trustworthiness.....	161
4.15 Chapter Summary	164
Chapter 5 Findings: Teachers’ Understandings of Social Studies	165
5.1 Introduction	165
5.2 Overview of the Data.....	169
5.2.1 Data from the Qualtrics online questionnaire.....	169
5.2.2 Data from the online workshops.....	169
5.3 Social Studies Teaching and Learning in Relation to the Maldives National Curriculum Policy	170
5.3.1 Teachers’ Perceptions of Social Studies.....	170
5.3.1.1 The Meaning of Social Studies	171
5.3.1.2 The Purpose of Social Studies	174
5.3.1.3 Teacher Beliefs about the Value of Social Studies.....	177
5.3.1.4 Section Summary	181
5.3.2 Teachers’ Perceptions of Teaching Strategies	182
5.3.2.1 Types of Teaching Strategies.....	183
5.3.2.2 Application of Teaching Strategies in the Classroom.....	185
5.3.2.3 Obstacles Faced by Teachers in Implementing Teaching Strategies....	190
5.3.2.4 Section Summary	195

5.3.3 Teachers' Perspectives on the Integration of Islam and Islamic Values in Social Studies	196
5.3.3.1 The Influence of Islam on Teaching Social Studies	197
5.3.3.2 The Connection between Social Studies and Islam	200
5.3.3.3 Section Summary	203
5.4 Challenges and Limitations in Social Studies Professional Learning in the Maldives	204
5.4.1 Challenges Faced by teachers in Social Studies Professional Learning .	204
5.4.1.1 Teachers' Access to Resources and Technology	205
5.4.1.2 Time Constraints versus Workload	208
5.4.2 Limitations Faced by teachers in Social Studies Professional Learning .	210
5.4.2.1 Professional Learning Constraints	210
5.5 Chapter Summary	215
Chapter 6 Findings: Reflections on Social Studies Teaching	218
6.1 Introduction	218
6.2 Overview of the data	221
6.2.1 Data from the online reflections	221
6.2.2 Data from online semi-structured interviews	222
6.3 Personal Profiles of Participants	222
6.3.1 <i>Malak</i>	222
6.3.2 <i>Balqis</i>	223
6.3.3 <i>Nora</i>	223
6.3.4 <i>Sarah</i>	223
6.4 Teacher Perspectives on Reflective Practice and Shaping Social Studies Pedagogy	224
6.4.1 Teachers' Feedback on Classroom Strategies for Engaging Students.....	224
6.4.1.1 <i>Malak</i>	225
6.4.1.2 <i>Sarah</i>	228
6.4.1.3 <i>Nora</i>	230
6.4.1.4 <i>Balqis</i>	232
6.4.1.5 Summary: Cross-Case Analysis of Classroom Teaching Strategies	234
6.4.2 Teachers' Reflection on their Teaching Practice.....	236
6.4.2.1 <i>Malak</i>	237
6.4.2.2 <i>Sarah</i>	241
6.4.2.3 <i>Nora</i>	243
6.4.2.4 <i>Balqis</i>	245
6.4.2.5 Summary: Cross-Case Analysis of Teachers' Reflections on their Teaching Practice	249

6.4.3 Awareness of Students' Learning.....	251
6.4.3.1 Adapting to Online Social Studies Teaching	251
6.4.3.2 Reflections on Students' Learning in the Virtual Classroom	254
6.4.4 Section summary	257
6.5 Teachers' Benefits of Reflective Practice in Social Studies Pedagogy	258
6.5.1 Teacher-Student Interactions	258
6.5.2 Self-evaluation of Teaching Strategies	263
6.6 Chapter Summary	268
Chapter 7: Discussion	269
7.1 Introduction	269
7.2 Navigating Teachers' Social Studies Pedagogy: Insights and Challenges	270
7.2.1 Teachers' Understandings of Social Studies	270
7.2.2 Teachers' Challenges in Social Studies Professional Learning.....	277
7.3 Enhancing Teachers' Pedagogy through Reflective Practice: Self-Observations and Impacts	283
7.3.1 Teachers' Understanding of Reflective Practice in Relation to their Social Studies Pedagogy	283
7.3.2 Teachers' Benefits of Using Reflective Practice	288
7.4 Conclusions.....	294
7.4.1 RQ 1. What understandings do teachers have of social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives NCF?	295
7.4.2 RQ 2. What challenges and limitations do teachers face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?.....	296
7.4.3 RQ 3. How does teacher reflective practice shape social studies pedagogy for student learning?	296
7.4.4 RQ 4. What benefits do teachers gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy?	297
7.5 Limitations of this Study	298
7.6 Contribution of this Study	301
7.7 Implications	302
7.7.1 Implications for the Maldives' Ministry of Education	302
7.7.2 Implication for Teacher Education	305
7.7.3 Implications for Further Research	307
References	309
Appendices	328
Appendix A - Approved Ethical Consideration granted by the UOW	328
Appendix B - Consent Letter sent to Maldives Ministry of Education	329

Appendix C - Approved Consent Letter from Maldives Ministry of Education	331
Appendix D - Consent Letters sent to Schools	332
Appendix E - Research Information Sheet sent to the participants	333
Appendix F - Consent Letter sent to the participants.....	335
Appendix G – Research Timeline	336
Appendix H - Online Qualtrics Questionnaire	337
Appendix I - First Workshop Schedule	341
Appendix J - Second Workshop Schedule	342
Appendix K - Third Workshop Schedule	345
Appendix L - First Online Reflection.....	349
Appendix M - Second Online Reflection	350
Appendix N - Third Online Reflection	351
Appendix O - Fourth Online Reflection	352
Appendix P - Online Semi-structured Interview Questions	353

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	5
<i>Map of Maldives</i>	5
Figure 2.1	21
<i>The structure of education system in the Maldives</i>	21
Figure 2.2	27
<i>The map of the Maldives National Curriculum Framework</i>	27
Figure 2.3	29
<i>The NCF vision</i>	29
Figure 2.4	32
<i>Key Competencies (NIE, 2015, p.16).</i>	32
Figure 2.5	39
<i>Conceptual Framework</i>	39
Figure 3.1	59
<i>Bloom's Taxonomy Model</i>	59
Figure 3.2	75
<i>The Three Dimensions of Pedagogy</i>	75
Figure 3.3	77
<i>Teaching as inquiry: a model of evidence-formed pedagogy</i>	77
Figure 3.4	78
<i>Shulman's (1986) Idea of Pedagogical Content Knowledge</i>	78
Figure 3.5	79
<i>Grossman's (1990) Model of Pedagogical Content Knowledge</i>	79
Figure 3.6	82
<i>The Five Pedagogical Dimensions</i>	82
Figure 3.7	97
<i>'The Continuous Professional Development' model</i>	97
Figure 3.8	98
<i>'The Professional Learning and Development' model</i>	98
Figure 3.9	104
<i>The Experiential Learning Cycle Model</i>	104
Figure 3.10	105
<i>Gibb's reflective practice model</i>	105
Figure 3.11	106
<i>Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper's reflective model</i>	106
Figure 4.1	117
<i>Sequence of Action – Reflection Cycles (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 41)</i>	117
Figure 4.2	119
<i>McNiff & Whitehead's Action Reflection Spiral (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 57)</i>	119
Figure 4.3	122
<i>Driving decisions of choosing Participatory Action Research [PAR] as the research design to supports the participants.</i>	122
Figure 4.4	128
<i>Benefits of implementing an Online Participatory Action Research approach despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.</i>	128

Figure 4.5	135
<i>Three phases of my data collection process in my research</i>	135
Figure 4.6	150
<i>Three phases of my data collection process</i>	150
Figure 5.1:	166
<i>Findings Concept Map</i>	166
Figure 5.2	168
<i>Chapter 5 Findings Concept Map</i>	168
Figure 6.1	219
<i>Findings Concept Map</i>	219
Figure 6.2	220
<i>Chapter 6 Findings Concept Map</i>	220
Figure 7.1	292
<i>Linear approach to Curriculum Delivery in Pedagogy: Insights from Research Findings</i>	292

List of Tables

Table 2.1	20
<i>Phases and key stages of schooling in Maldives</i>	20
Table 3.1	53
<i>Description of Shared Values</i>	53
Table 4.1	140
<i>Revisions made to the Qualtrics Questionnaire following the Piloting Experience</i>	140
Table 5.1	184
<i>Various activities the participant teachers implement in the social studies pedagogy</i>	184
Table 5.2	211
<i>Statistical response of professional learning activities attended by participants</i>	211
Table 6.2	226
<i>Malak’s overview of her chosen topic, Migration (Malak reflection 1)</i>	226
Table 6.3	228
<i>Sarah’s overview of her chosen topic different dialects in the Maldives (Sarah’s reflection 1)</i> ...	228
Table 6.4	230
<i>Nora’s overview on the topic My Maldivian Tale (Nora reflection 1)</i>	230

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis, my primary concern is preserving Maldivian cultural heritage and identity within evolving educational contexts in the face of contemporary social challenges and influences. The Maldives, renowned as a sought-after holiday destination, grapples with the delicate balance between tourism influx, waste management, and environmental preservation. The juxtaposition of the nation's beauty against the threats of overcrowding, tourism pressures, and climate change underscores the urgency of addressing these challenges. This research is deeply invested in exploring the role of social studies education as an enabling tool to navigate complex societal issues. Moreover, this thesis seeks to unravel the intricacies of social studies pedagogy in the context of a nation at the crossroads of cultural preservation, sustainable tourism, and environmental resilience.

This study is not just an academic pursuit; it's a passionate quest to comprehend and contribute to addressing the challenges faced in Maldives social studies education. During my time as a social studies educator, I have to appreciate that education holds the key to navigating the intricate intersections of cultural identity, societal challenges, and educational goals. This study, rooted in a personal and professional connection to the Maldives, aspires to contribute to the ongoing narrative of resilience and sustainability in the nation's educational landscape. The thesis endeavours to investigate the layers of social studies pedagogy, and to examine how education can be a catalyst for change in the face of multifaceted challenges.

1.2 My Experience Leading to this Research

My professional experience leading to my research begins with over 20 years in the field of education. I have served as an educator primarily responsible for instructing and supervising teachers in social studies education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels within the Faculty of Education at Maldives National University [MNU]. This

experience in the teaching field piqued my interest in Maldivian primary teachers' development of and approaches to, social studies pedagogies through reflection. During my years of teaching, I have learned that active learning and inquiry-based approaches are seldom used in Maldivian social studies classrooms. After reviewing the National Curriculum Framework [NCF] (NIE, 2015a) also known as '*Gaumee Manhaj*' (Dhivehi translation), I found a complexity of issues in the document regarding the facilitation of quality education for social studies. One of the issues is that the focus for learning as outlined in the NCF to achieve knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes may be poorly implemented through pedagogical practices in primary level classrooms due to teacher-centred learning. This issue has been raised by Maldivian researchers (Adam, 2015b; Latheef & Gupta, 2007; Mariya, 2012; Mohamed, 2006; Shareef, 2010) with respect to traditional practices and exam-oriented teaching in the secondary level classrooms. This perceived deficiency suggested opportunities for conducting research around the social studies pedagogy practices in Maldivian primary level classrooms.

In the Maldives, teacher shortages have led to non-linear pathways into teaching, where individuals without formal qualifications are sometimes placed in the classrooms (Aturupane & Shojo, 2012; Naseer & Nayasheen, 2024; Shiyama, 2020). This can result in pedagogical challenges, including a reliance on teacher-centric methods. While this study does not focus on teaching-out-of-field [TOOF], it is important to acknowledge its implications. Research suggests that when the teachers lack subject-specific expertise, they may struggle to develop effective pedagogical strategies (Childs & McNicholl, 2007) and often resort to teacher-centred approaches (Luft et al., 2020). Similarly, Hanushek and Rivkin (2006), highlight how assigning teachers to subjects outside their expertise can compromise instructional quality. The absence of adequate preparation and content knowledge may hinder professional growth (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), and this has been linked to reduced student performance, as demonstrated in research by (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Ghaleb, 2024). While these perspectives provide insight into broader challenges within teaching, my study is primarily concerned with how teachers develop their pedagogy through reflection within their subject areas, particularly in the context of primary social studies education in the Maldives.

My personal experience as a temporary teacher at the onset of my career supports this assertion: I found myself tasked with teaching subjects for which I had limited expertise, resulting in a more teacher-centric approach to instruction. Typically, in the Maldives, a single primary school teacher is responsible for teaching all subjects to a grades 1 to 5 classrooms. However, due to teacher shortages, primary grade teachers have been asked to teach higher grades despite a lack of professional learning in those areas. As an example, I was asked to teach social studies and general science to sixth and seventh-grade classes despite not having received subject specific training and prior experience in these fields. This resulted in using a more teacher-centred and explanation-oriented instruction. At this point in my career, I had only completed my Advanced Certificate of Primary Teaching Training Course in English Medium, and I had to teach other subjects such as Mathematics, English, Environmental Studies, Physical Education, Practical Art, Dhivehi (National Language of the Maldives), and Islam. Consequently, my expectations for students focussed on rote learning.

After relocating to Male City in the Maldives for improved education and work prospects, I obtained a Bachelor of Education and served as a primary teacher for twelve years between 1995 and 2007. Following this, in 2008, I became a teacher educator at the Maldives Centre for Higher Education (subsequently renamed as the Maldives National University [MNU]), where I trained primary teachers as a member of the Humanities department, which was later changed to the Business and Social Studies department. Here, I mainly taught Social Science Education content and learning units. My aspiration has always been to instil positive attitudes in young people towards the environment and various social aspects of the community. This has led me to question whether our teaching practices could have a more constructive impact on students' understanding of social studies concepts and their application in the world and wider society.

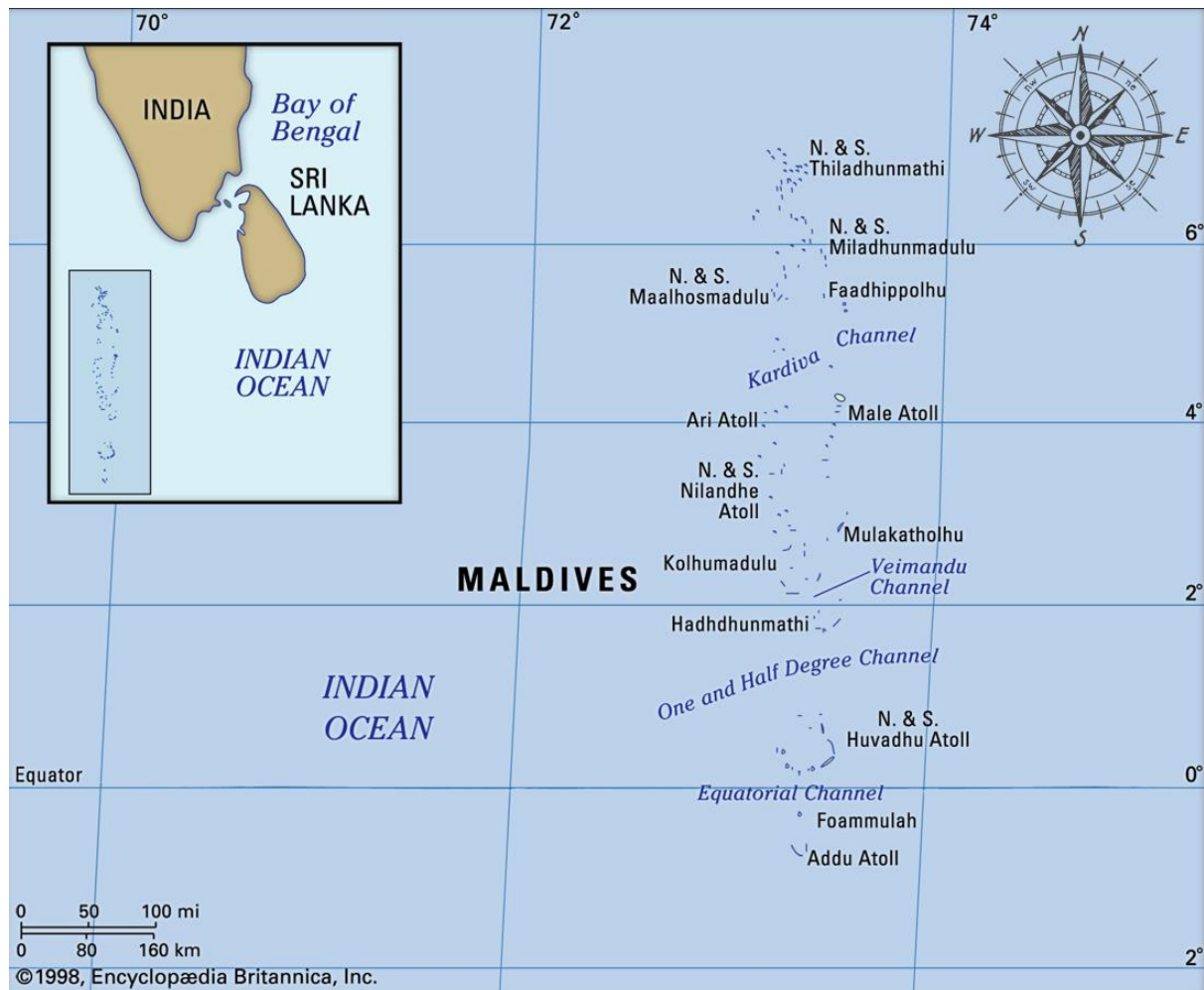
Through my analysis of the new National Curriculum Framework [NCF] (NIE, 2015a), I have developed an understanding of the complexities embedded within the document. This analysis was not conducted as a formal methodological step but rather as an exploratory approach to gain insights into the curriculum's structure, pedagogical underpinnings, and intended outcomes. The Framework outlines the desired outcomes of knowledge and understanding, skills, and values, but the implementation of these objectives by teachers who lack content knowledge, and an understanding of the

Framework may lead to a reliance on teacher-centred learning. The National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a), in its comprehensive vision, advocates for a pedagogical approach that goes beyond traditional teacher-centred methods. Phrases such as “developing skills of investigation and problem-solving”, “construct new understandings”, and “encourage children and young people to adopt deeply held values” (p.14-15) permeate the NCF document reflecting a clear intention to prioritise student engagement, autonomy, and active participation in the learning process. This alignment between the stated goals of the NCF and the principle of student-centred learning raises thought-provoking questions about the translation of these aspirations into classroom practice. Despite the Framework’s emphasis on student centred approaches, the implementation appears to face challenges which can lead to teacher-centred learning. This disjunction between intention and execution poses an intriguing avenue for further exploration and invites a closer examination of the factors influencing the translation of curriculum objectives into day-to-day instructional strategies. Given my educational background and familiarity with the Maldives National Curriculum Framework (NCF), I was motivated to investigate how primary level social studies teachers in Maldives classrooms make decisions regarding their social studies pedagogies. To that end, this research aimed to engage Maldivian primary teachers and facilitate evidence-based reflective practice among Maldivian primary teachers in order to enhance their social studies teaching practices.

1.3 Setting of the Study

Figure 1.1

Map of Maldives



Note: Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maldives>

The Maldives is an island nation situated in the Indian Ocean consisting of 1,196 coral islands distributed vertically across more than 800 kilometres over the equator from north to south in the South Asian Region (See Figure 1.1), The Maldives is located southwest of Sri Lanka and India.

The population of the Maldives, as enumerated in the Census 2022, was 515,122 (NBS, 2022). More than half of the population is currently living in Male', the capital city, and the adjacent islands which are connected via a bridge. The remainder are scattered among the other 20 administrated atolls, which include 186 islands (Athif & Pimenidis,

2009; NBS, 2022; Zubair et al., 2011). All the islands are low lying with the highest elevation being less than 3 meters above sea level (Latheef & Gupta, 2007). The Maldives' climate is tropical and humid, but the humidity varies during the monsoon and dry seasons. The white sparkling sandy beaches and crystal-clear lagoons mean that the Maldives are commonly described as a 'tropical paradise' and as one of the 'wonders of the world'. Due to three simple realities, the sun, sand, and sea; tourists see the Maldives as a 'heavenly gateway' (Kundur, 2012), highlighting its appeal as a tropical paradise. According to Adam et al. (2020), during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Maldives continued to welcome tourists from various countries, including those already grappling with COVID-19, such as China, Italy, and the United Kingdom. It wasn't until March 2020, when the Maldives reported its first COVID-19 case, that the situation prompted the establishment of an international travel ban. Therefore, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in the initial stages, the Maldives maintained its status as a leading tourist destination. However, the Maldives is also considered one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of climate, environment, and the small size of coral islands (Jaleel, 2013; Kundur, 2012).

Although the Maldives islands are widely famous for their natural beauty; there are issues (environmental, social, cultural, and economic) that need immediate action if the country is to have a sustainable future. Issues include dwindling freshwater supply, inadequate sewage treatment, and growth in the population. These issues have created sanitation problems that threaten the waters in and around the island nation (Chahibaia, 2016; Miller, 2002). Recent estimates show that the nation's freshwater supply may be exhausted soon (Chahibaia, 2016). As the tourism sector flourishes in the Maldives, it is a challenge to ensure younger generations of Maldivians grasp job opportunities. A significant number of migrant labourers from nearby countries take away these opportunities as well as create social and cultural problems within the society. The influx of migrant labourers may be driven by the availability of skilled and cost-effective labour, meeting the demand for workers in the Maldives. The capital city of Maldives, Male' is one of the most densely populated places on Earth. It has been claimed that this risks diminishing the indigenous culture of the Maldives, which in turn could lead to higher divorce rates and the number of broken families, a lack of awareness among the young, inequality in income, gangs, drug abuse, violence, and crime rates (MNU, 2022; Naaz et al., 2012). The flourishing primary economic industries of the Maldives are fisheries

and tourism. At the same time, the exploitation of natural resources leads to dumping rubbish and plastics into the sea harms the sea life and the corals. The result is a declining economy. (Dhunya et al., 2017).

The preservation of the environment is complicated due to the unique problems of an island nation in the Indian Ocean. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires an informed and socially aware population. This underscores the critical role of education, particularly within the social studies curriculum, in equipping young Maldivians with the skills needed to navigate and respond to these pressing environmental, social, cultural, and economic issues. Social studies education fosters decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, thus preparing students to engage with the real-world challenges of environmental stability, social cohesion, economic resilience, and cultural preservation (Benavot, 2014; Leal Filho et al., 2018). Despite the clear relevance of social studies in addressing these national concerns, its effective implementation in Maldivian primary schools remains a challenge (Shareef, 2010). Ensuring that teachers possess the necessary content knowledge and pedagogical strategies to deliver meaningful social studies education is essential for empowering the younger generation to contribute to sustainable and informed decision-making in the future.

1.4 Rationale for the Study

My experience suggests that primary teachers in the Maldives, who teach social studies to students in Key Stage 1 (K1) (grades 1-3, typically ages 6-9) and Key Stage 2 (K2) (grades 4-6, typically ages 9-12) may not have received explicit education or adequate training in the area of social studies education. While teaching at the Maldives National University, I became increasingly aware of the limited opportunities for teacher training and preparation tailored specifically for educators responsible for teaching social studies in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This realisation prompted a critical examination of the existing pedagogical practices and the need for enhanced professional learning initiatives in this domain.

As a teacher educator observing student teachers during their practicum, I have found pedagogical approaches such as active collaborative learning, which encourages students' engagement through hands-on activities or discussions, and inquiry-based learning which fosters exploration and critical questioning, are infrequently utilised in social studies classrooms, despite their proven potential to facilitate meaningful and concrete learning experiences (Adeyemi, 2010; Grant et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2015; Okeke & Akobi, 2023). Given the importance of student-centred approaches in social studies education, it is essential that teaching methods focus on developing knowledge, understanding skills, and values among young people (Kaput, 2018; Mascolo, 2009; Qutoshi & Poudel, 2014). These cited scholars advocate for methods that promote hands-on activities, discussions, exploration, and questioning in order to facilitate concrete learning experiences for students. This gap highlights the need for enhanced teacher education or professional learning programs that prioritises the implementation of student-centred pedagogies in social studies education.

This observation aligns with the findings from the Ministry of Education's (MoE & MoHE, 2019) research on improvements in teacher quality, which highlighted a mismatch between teachers' qualifications and their subject assignments, particularly in relation to the demands of the new curriculum. Since teacher education has not been aligned with the new curriculum implementation, there are several gaps in teacher allocations for teaching different subject areas (MoE & MoHE, 2019). This suggests that teachers may not fully understand or conceptualise the nature, purpose and concepts of social studies in the National Curriculum Framework, which poses a challenge to the effective teaching and learning of social studies in these grade levels.

Facilitating knowledge does not mean only filling young minds with content (Robinson & Aronica, 2016; Seldon & Abidoye, 2018). This notion means that education is not just about providing information to the students; rather, it involves teachers helping students to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to apply knowledge in real-world situations. In other words, education is not only about delivering facts and figures but also developing the intellectual and practical capabilities of students. Hence, in order for teachers to develop these abilities in students, they themselves need to first be able to conceptualize and understand the nature, purpose

and content of learning from these abilities and to consider what pedagogies might best develop these abilities.

Existing literature suggests that the pedagogy of social studies in K1 to K2 levels is likely to be teacher-centred, and rote learning-based with little emphasis on student-centred learning through inquiry. Many studies of primary and secondary schooling in the Maldives argue that rote learning is often observed in subjects such as Economics (Nazeer, 2006), Environmental Studies (Shareef, 2010), English (Mariya, 2012; Mohamed, 2006), and general pedagogy (Srivastava, 2011). Adam (2015a) affirms that the Maldives has a long history of rote learning and memorisation as a pedagogical tradition. Research by Di Biase (2015) in the Maldives emphasised helping students to develop conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills rather than passively receiving information transmitted by the teacher. However, that study identified challenges and tensions between reforms at the national level and implementation at the school level. Two dilemmas found in that study were a limited resource base and a lack of educated teachers. In-service education is provided for teachers in short, intensive blocks often by visiting educators, and this was seen to be not enough for schools to support the type of learning suggested by the curriculum (Di Biase, 2015). Teacher shortage provides opportunities for individuals without formal qualifications to enter the teaching profession; however, this may lead to situations where educators are teaching subjects, such as social studies, in which they may lack confidence. This may lead to teaching which is highly teacher-centric. Consequently, teachers often rely on prescriptive school schemes of work, that are crafted from the NCF, syllabus, and teacher guides, and the independent interpretation and implementation of these materials may limit the potential for more dynamic and student-centred pedagogies (Ali, 2006; Di Biase, 2015).

Hence, my research sought to explore this issue and to understand how Maldivian primary teachers activate and shape their social studies pedagogies through reflection. Beginning with an examination of teachers' conceptualization within the Maldives NCF, it probed the challenges that teachers felt they faced in social studies professional learning. Given the challenges of limited resources and the prescriptive nature of the curriculum, reflection was viewed as a means of professional learning for teachers. This would allow them to actively shape their social studies pedagogy, and thus to find better

ways to teach their classes despite these constraints. In the reflective dimension, the study also investigated the influence of teacher reflective practices. This structured progression investigated the layers of understanding, challenges, reflective practices, benefits, and curriculum complexities, thus providing a comprehensive perspective on social studies education in the Maldivian context. It is also important to note that whilst there have been broad educational studies done in the Maldives, to my knowledge, there has been limited published research about social studies teaching and learning.

This study sought to take a participatory action research [PAR] approach which later shifted to an online participatory action research [OPAR] approach to investigate the phenomenon of teachers' social studies pedagogy and how reflective practice could lead to enhancing teacher understanding of social studies pedagogy. An online qualitative methodology was used and although some elements of my data collection involved both quantitative and qualitative features, most of my research process used a qualitative approach. The following are the research questions that were constructed to guide this study.

1.5 Research Questions

This research centres on understanding of the curriculum, and how this may be activated through professional learning and reflective practice among primary teachers teaching social studies, in the Maldives. The study further sought to embed open and collaborative learning within participating social studies teachers in the Maldives, which may help to reduce professional isolation amongst teachers. The research took a qualitative participatory action research approach, investigating primary teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in using reflective practice in social studies teaching.

The main research question for this research was:

How do Maldivian primary teachers activate and shape their social studies pedagogies through reflection?

The sub-questions were as follows:

- 1. What understandings do teachers have of social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives National Curriculum Framework?*
- 2. What challenges and limitations do teachers face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?*
- 3. How does teacher reflective practice shape social studies pedagogy for student learning?*
- 4. What benefits do teachers gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy?*

Therefore, my research aimed narrow a gap by understanding how social studies primary teachers conceptualise social studies and develop as reflective practitioners in their social studies classrooms.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In the context of the Maldives, a nation at the intersection of environmental fragility and cultural richness, primary teachers play a crucial role in influencing the perspectives and values of the next generation. The study explored how Maldivian primary teachers engage in reflective practices to shape their social studies pedagogy, focusing on their instructional methods and the implications for enhancing subject-specific professional learning.

The importance of this journey extends beyond the academic realm; it can resonate with anyone invested in the future of the Maldives, its cultural heritage, and the well-being of its people. It prompts a broader conversation about the role of education in the face of global challenges, advocating for a paradigm shift that positions teachers as architects of positive societal change. By investigating how primary teachers respond to and conceptualise social studies within the National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a) implemented in 2015, this study contributes to a broader discourse on reshaping teacher education. Furthermore, it holds the potential to foster a culture of reflection within the Maldivian educational landscape, offering a pathway for teachers to enhance their instructional methods. Ultimately, this study can benefit the broader society.

By cultivating reflective practices among teachers, the study aims to enhance social studies pedagogy and equip teachers with critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the subject matter, thus improving their effectiveness in the classroom. In essence, this research endeavours not only to impact current teaching practices but also to shape the future social studies education of K1 and K2 stages in the Maldives and foster students who are not merely recipients of knowledge but active contributors to society. In addition, this study may contribute to inspiring practical changes in teacher education programs, with far-reaching implications for the socio-environmental fabric of the Maldives.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 has outlined significant aspects associated with my educational background, and the rationale of my study.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive background to the research and cultural context of my study, including the geographic, Islamic, educational, and pedagogical practice in the Maldives. The chapter further highlights the Maldives National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a), and the teaching and learning of primary school social studies education in the Maldives.

Chapter 3 examines literature that assists in understanding the field of my study, covering key areas such as social studies education, pedagogical theories, curriculum frameworks, reflective practice, and the challenges faced by teachers in the Maldives. It explores the multifaceted landscape of social studies education, aligning with international perspectives while considering the unique context of the Maldives. The review highlights the importance of reflective practice in enhancing teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes, as well as the role of curriculum frameworks in shaping pedagogical approaches. Additionally, it identifies gaps in the existing literature, setting the stage for the research conducted in this study to address these gaps.

Chapter 4 provides the methodological framework of my study that underpins the online action research methodology that was adopted in my research. The chapter examines the shift of my methodological framework from a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to an Online Participatory Action Research (OPAR). Moreover, the chapter explains the data collection phases and the tools that were utilised to conduct the study. Additionally, the chapter outlines the ethical considerations taken in my research and also identifies my positionality as a researcher during the shift of my methodological framework from face-to-face to an online virtual action approach. I conclude the chapter with an evaluation of my data collection process in regard to reflexivity, anonymity, and transparency.

Chapter 5 presents findings gathered for the first two research sub-questions collected via online data collection tools, focusing on teachers' perceptions of social studies and its impact on their pedagogical practices and professional learning. The chapter also identifies the influence of the Maldivian context on the educational surroundings through the participating teachers' experiences. Finally, the chapter examines the challenges and limitations of teachers' social studies professional learning in the Maldives, by presenting examples of the data collected.

Chapter 6 presents findings gathered for the last two research sub-questions into the topic of reflective practice, emphasising its benefits for teachers' social studies pedagogy and student learning. However, the analysis does not solely focus on positive aspects; it also discusses the limitations and challenges associated with reflective practice. Through critical examination of the data, the chapter aims to provide a balance perspective on the role of reflection in professional learning and pedagogical development.

Chapter 7 discusses the major findings of this thesis mainly focusing on the four research sub-questions of my study. These research sub-questions aim to explain and evaluate what was discovered, demonstrate its relevance to the literature reviewed, and connect it to the overarching question of my study. Additionally, each section contributes to building an argument that supports the overall conclusion from the research. The chapter further underlines the implications for the Ministry of Education [MoE] in the

Maldives, teacher education. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research in this field of study, summarising with a final reflection on my thesis.

Chapter 2: Research Context

2.1 Introduction

Exploring the research context is crucial for a thorough understanding of the study's setting. This chapter closely examines the distinctive features and influences shaping the research environment, laying the groundwork for comprehending the dynamics of teaching and learning social studies in the Maldives. Beginning with a focus on Islamic and cultural foundations, the chapter traces historical developments of Maldives education, from its origins to contemporary times. The chapter examines specific components of the Maldivian education system, including the structure of the curriculum, pedagogical approaches, professional learning and educational policies. It then focuses on key documents, including the National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a), social studies in the NCF syllabi of key stage 1 (grades 1,2,3) and key stage 2 (grades 4,5,6) (NIE, 2015b, 2015c, 2022b, 2022c) and school schemes of work, that is, the policies that guide social studies education. Furthermore, the chapter provides insights into the primary school system in the Maldives, highlighting social studies education and considering its role and importance in the broader educational context.

2.2 Islamic and Cultural Backgrounds of People of the Maldives

The Maldives, renowned as the sunny side of the world, is a group of islands scattered across the Indian Ocean where the clear waters reflect the essence of Islamic culture and traditions. With a population that fully adheres to Islam, the Islamic way of life permeates various facets of Maldivian society, influencing aspects such as daily routines, cultural practices, and social norms. The Maldivian people, known for their warm hospitality, celebrate a blend of cultural influences, creating a unique identity.

Maldives was a British protectorate until its independence on 26th July 1964 (Kumar, 2016). As an independent Republic of Maldives, its people have their own cultural and religious background. The two main factors that bring together Maldivians as one culture are their religion and language (Speelman et al., 2017). Hinduism was practised in the Maldives until an Arab scholar visited in the year 1153 AD and converted the king to

Islam. Accordingly, Islam has been practised in the Maldives since the middle of the 12th century (Faiz, 2007), and has been the only religion practiced by Maldivians. Islam, the state religion, plays a central role in shaping the daily life of Maldivians. The call to prayer echoes across the atolls, and the mosques are integral to the Maldivian way of life, reflecting the substantial influence of Islam, a key factor in their cultural identity. Islamic teachings influence social norms, shaping interpersonal relationships and community values. Festivals like Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha bring communities together, reinforcing the cultural bonds deeply rooted in religious practices. Islamic religious principles and practices have been embedded in all aspects of Maldivians' lives including education, social lives, and politics.

Maldives also has its own unique language called Dhivehi. Though the language traces its history to early Sanskrit and is similar to Sinhalese; Dhivehi also has some common vocabulary from Urdu, Arabic and English. Despite the similarities to other languages, Dhivehi is unique with its own grammar and usage. The Maldives has a unique script called Thaana which was introduced in the sixteenth century (Mariya, 2012). The language is written from right to left and has 24 letters. Although Dhivehi is the official language for Maldivians; English is spoken by most government officials (Ali et al., 2013). In addition to language, Islamic identity is broadly emphasised in the education system of the Maldives.

In the Maldives, Islam is not just a religion; it is an integral part of daily life, culture and societal norms. The Maldivian way of life is deeply influenced by the teachings and principles of Islam, with the majority of the population adhering to Sunni Islam (to follow the teaching of our Prophet Muhammed PBUH). The call to prayer (Adhan) resonates across the islands, punctuating the rhythm of daily routines with the five sacred prayer times fostering a sense of unity among the community. Islamic traditions and rituals are woven into various aspects of Maldivian culture, from family gatherings to ceremonies. For instance, the holy month of Ramadan holds special significance, where fasting from dawn to sunset is observed, and communities come together for prayers and breaking fast (iftar) gatherings. Beyond religious practices, Islamic values underscore social norms and interactions, emphasising virtues such as hospitality, respect for elders, and compassion towards others. Culturally, the Maldives bears the imprints of its seafaring history and the influences of South Asian, African, and Arab cultures. Traditional music,

dance, and art reflect the vivid history of the islands, with traditional forms such as ‘Bodu Beru Jehun’ (a traditional dance with big drums), ‘Bandiyaa Jehun’ (women carry metal water pots sing and dance to the tune of music), and ‘Fathigandu Jehun’ (popular folk music), showcasing the dynamism of Maldivian cultural expression (Jaleel et al., 2018)

The Islamic and cultural backdrop profoundly influences social studies education in the Maldives. The National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a) is intricately woven with the values and principles rooted in Islamic teaching and Maldivian culture (see Section 2.7, p. 28). Social studies, as a subject, serves as a conduit through which students explore their cultural heritage and understand the Islamic foundations that underpin societal norms (NIE, 2015a),

The education system aligns with the values of the Maldivian community, emphasising the importance of instilling moral and ethical principles alongside academic knowledge (NIE, 2015a). Social studies curriculum materials often integrate local history, cultural practices, and Islamic teachings, fostering a sense of identity and belonging among students. In essence, the Islamic and cultural milieu of the Maldives provides a unique foundation for social studies education, shaping not only the curriculum but also the broader educational philosophy that aims to nurture informed, culturally grounded, and globally aware citizens.

2.3 History of Maldives Education

The Maldives education system has evolved from its roots in informal, home-based education called ‘Edhurge’ to a comprehensive nationwide system of government schooling, that allows for transformation and adaptation to the changing needs and challenges faced by the nation According to Latheef and Gupta (2007) the education system of the Maldives has been formed through three streams such as “informal training, which children receive from the family and island community; Islamic religious instruction, provided through private tutoring and individualised teaching; and Western-style schooling which emerged in 1960 with the introduction of English-medium schools in Male” (p. 116). In line with Yasir (2004) and Duch (2005), the first two streams of informal training and Islamic religious instruction are the foundation of Maldivians

children's early education that starts from 'Edhuruje' (a home-based tutoring). They further describe 'Edhuruje' as private home-based tutoring provided by respected members in the community. The MoE (2008) highlights that, 'Edhuruje' is a semi-formal religious education wherein children are taught Dhivehi language, the Arabic script, and the recitation of the Holy Quran. Hence, the immediate function of the 'Edhuruje' is to develop a love for the Quran, to help children recite the Holy Quran properly and to inculcate proper beliefs of the religion of Islam in children. However, Duch (2005) highlights that limitations 'Edhuruje' are the heavy emphasis on rote learning and low qualifications of teachers.

According to the MoE (2008), changes became evident when the first government school, known as Majeediyya School, was established in Male' in 1927, initially for boys and later including girls. By 1945, traditional schools (makthab), existed on each inhabited island for lower primary education. A "makthab" is a term used to refer to a traditional Islamic school or elementary educational institution where students learn about Islam, the Arabic script, and Quranic recitation (Hadžić, 2021). In the context of the Maldives and its historical education system, a makthab would typically provide instruction at the lower primary level, contributing to the foundational aspects of religious and cultural education. In this time frame, 'madhrasas' also came into existence, presenting a curriculum that went beyond the scope of 'makthabs' (Di Biase & Maniku, 2021). During the 1950s, the Atoll Schools, known as 'atholhu madharusa' were founded in the main island of each atoll, with Dhivehi as the primary language of instruction (Di Biase & Maniku, 2021). The restructuring of the education system in the 1950s to meet economic demands, along with the introduction of English medium schools in 1960s, concurs with the historical narrative provided by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2008).

According to Yasir (2004) and Duch (2005) Maldivian children commence their educational journey at the age of two. Their basic education is focused on learning to read and write "three alphabets (Arabic, Dhivehi and English)" (Duch, 2005, p. 183). These three languages play an important role in the education system in the Maldives. Yasir (2004) states children are taught to read Arabic because it is a necessity to in order to practice Islam. Similarly, Mariya (2012) further explains how children are taught to read Arabic particularly, as it relates to reciting the Holy Quran. However, the

comprehension of Arabic language is not given any emphasis (Adam, 2015b). Hence, children were just taught to read Arabic scripts rather than understand them. The other two languages Dhivehi and English are taught for different purposes: Dhivehi for developing national identity which associates with teaching of Islamic principles and Maldivian local language, and “English because it is the medium of instruction in schools...” (MoE & MoHE, 2019, p. 50). The curriculum in the school system is in English medium except for two subjects, Dhivehi and Islam (MoE & MoHE, 2019). According to Di Biase and Maniku (2021), due to the unequal resource distribution the shift to English resource teaching materials and textbooks faced challenges in implementation and adaptation across different regions.

2.4 The School System in the Maldives

The Maldives recognised education as a universal human right as far back as 1932 in the first written constitution (Nazeer, 2016). Education in the Maldives focuses on creating a population with deep spiritual and cultural connections to Islam and an appreciation of the history and heritage of the Maldives (MoE, 2018). According to the Ministry of Education (MoE) there are 455 schools across the country - 212 are government, 124 are community, and 119 are private (MoE, 2018). Government schools in the Maldives, are funded and operated by the state, and coexist with community schools, which may involve local ownership, and private schools, independently owned and funded through private sources (MoE, 2018). As a result of the high value, the Maldivian government places on education, free education is available to all Maldivian children aged 4 to 18 (Nazeer, 2016). At present, the Maldivian school system is divided into main four phases of schooling; foundation, primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary. Each phase is designed to cater to distinct age groups and their key stages (NIE, 2015a). Table 2.1 below shows the structure of schooling in Maldives.

Table 2.1

Phases and key stages of schooling in Maldives.

Age	Grade	Key Stages	Phase	
18	12	Key Stage 5	Higher Secondary	
17				
16	11			
15	10	Key Stage 4	Lower Secondary	
	9			
14	8	Key Stage 3		
13	7			
12	6			
11	5	Key Stage 2	Primary	
10	4			
9	3			
8	2	Key Stage 1		
7	1			
6	UKG			
5	LKG	Foundation		Foundation
4				

Note: Table taken from the Maldives National Curriculum Framework. (NIE, 2015a, p. 22)

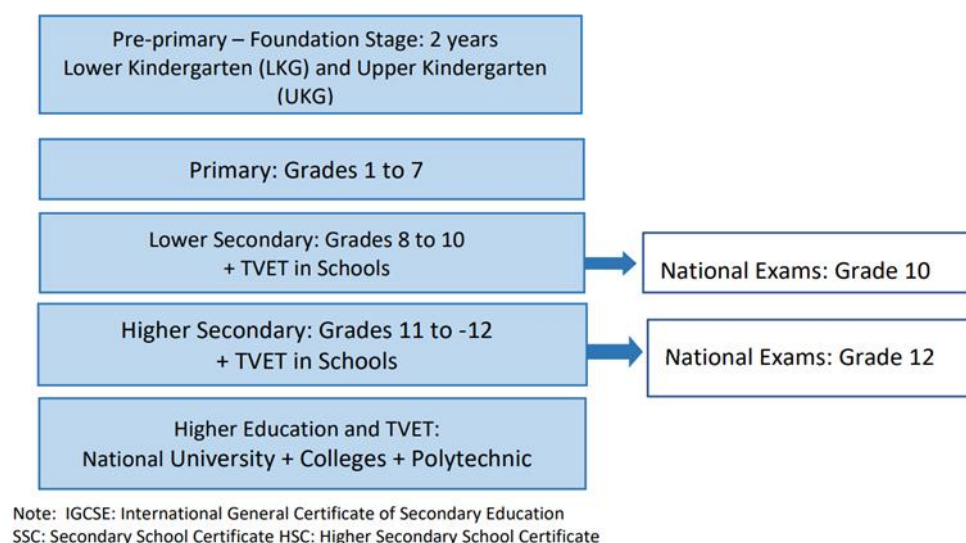
The structured schooling of key stages in the Maldives ensures a progressive and systematic learning experience, guiding students through different developmental stages with curricula tailored to their cognitive and social needs. This phased approach is crucial for building foundational skills, fostering subject-specific competencies, and preparing students for higher education or vocational pathways in alignment with national educational goals.

Maldivian children start their schooling at the age of four, and have an optional two years at pre-school, Lower-Kindergarten (LKG) and Upper-Kindergarten (UKG), which they must complete by the age of six. When children are six years old, education is

compulsory for all Maldivian children. Primary schooling lasts for six years during which children complete Grades one to six. After Grade six, they enter secondary school education which is divided into two levels, lower secondary, lasting four years (grades seven to ten) and the higher secondary lasting two years (grades eleven and twelve). However, according to the Maldives education sector analysis (MoE & MoHE, 2019) there is a slight difference in the age categories for the primary stages and lower secondary stages of schooling in the Maldives education system. The MoE (2019) shows that the structure of the education system in the Maldives (See Figure: 2.1) 2 years of Preschool education, 7 years of primary education, 5 years of secondary education. All government schools follow the NCF for foundation, primary, and secondary phases.

Figure 2.1

The structure of education system in the Maldives



Note: Image taken from the Education Sector Analysis of Maldives (MoE & MoHE, 2019, p. 22)

2.5 The Maldives Education System

The Ministry of Education plays a pivotal position in the Maldives education system, enforcing key policies and ensuring that all residents, including citizens and non-citizens, complete compulsory education.

According to Latheef and Gupta (2007), it is the “strong and abiding commitment to education which has enabled Maldives to make very significant progress during the last decade to the goals it has set itself despite the natural difficulties” (p.118). The statistics provided by Di Biase and Maniku (2021), demonstrate that the Maldives faced challenges with limited education funding (cited by UNDP, 2014). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2014) the scattered island geography of the Maldives presents challenges in terms of cost and logistical complexity that affect the provision of equitable education opportunities across the country. Moreover, Di Biase and Maniku (2021) report that the Maldivian education system, akin to challenges in other small states, copes with a scarcity of trained teachers, by relying on foreign educators, especially expatriates, in the primary and secondary grades. The Ministry of Education (MoE & MoHE, 2019) highlights that unequal resource distribution is influenced by geographical and demographic constraints. Services are centralised in Male’, so island schools encounter difficulties due to untrained teachers and restricted in-service training opportunities. These insights regarding the Maldives education system hold relevance to my research, especially the need to explore the impact of these issues on the quality and effectiveness of social studies education, particularly in the context of K1 to K2 stages.

In the Maldives, education is highly regarded, providing opportunities to its people at all levels (Majilis, 2008). The Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, ratified in 2008, formally guaranteed the right to education without discrimination, mandating the state to provide free primary and middle school education and ensuring access to higher levels of education (MoE & MoHE, 2019). Expanding on this, the Education Act No: 24/2020 (MoE, 2022), ratified in November 2020, established a legal framework to safeguard the educational rights of children and adults, in alignment with the Maldivian Constitution, the Islamic faith, and international treaties such as the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Aiming to foster an environment of quality education, training, and Islamic values, the Act emphasises the importance of maintaining peace, and national duties within the community.

Both government and private schools operate within the Maldivian education system. While private schools may follow independent syllabi, these must be approved by the

Ministry of Education and adhere to its guidelines, particularly for compulsory subjects like Islam and Dhivehi.

To ensure accessibility, the State provides free primary and secondary education to every Maldivian child. The 2008 Constitution states the right for “formal education shall mean preschool education, primary education, and secondary education following the national curriculum” (Majilis, 2008). The Act No: 24/2020 emphasises the imperative for schools to adhere to the Maldives National Curriculum Framework for the entire spectrum of formal education, thus creating a standardized and cohesive educational experience for students across preschool, primary, and secondary levels (MoE, 2022).

The overarching aim of the Maldivian education system, as stated in the Act No:24/2020, is rooted in principles such as developing intellect, individuality, skills, and physical and mental capabilities to their fullest extent (MoE, 2022). The education system strives for inclusivity, non-discrimination, and the development of pupils well-versed in religious and national duties. The system also prioritises preserving national identity, fostering peace, respect for human rights, cultural diversity, and instilling environmental consciousness. In a commitment to equality, every foreign child residing in the Maldives has an equal right to education, mirroring the opportunities provided to Maldivian children. The emphasis on a holistic education system encompasses preschool, primary, middle, secondary, and higher secondary education, with a focus on instilling values of acceptance, and environmental responsibility.

2.6 Introduction to the National Curriculum Framework, Social Studies Syllabus, and School Schemes of Work in the Maldives

The National Curriculum Framework is the guiding document for all levels of schooling. This study will mainly investigate the K1 to K2 primary phase of the Social Studies Curriculum.

According to the Ministry of Education (MoE & MoHE, 2019) with the support of UNICEF, the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was structured and introduced

in the Maldives in 2015 by the National Institute of Education (NIE). The NIE, developed in 2012, operates under the MoE to facilitate, support, and develop, revise, and improve national curricula. The NIE develops a range of multimedia teaching and learning resources for education and develops and implements assessment plans that periodically measure the impact of the national curriculum (NIE, 2022a). According to the NIE service charter (NIE, 2022a, p. 1), their vision is to become “the institute for educational empowerment, innovation, and excellence”, and their mission is to “facilitate life-long learning through collaborative research and innovation”. It is also responsible for designing and offering teacher training programs, specific curricula, training, and professional development programs to support vocational and technical education in schools. Furthermore, the NIE conducts studies and research projects nationally and periodically reports on the condition of education in the Maldives. However, despite its mandate to conduct these national projects and studies, the NIE has produced few publications or reports addressing the evolving needs and concerns of teachers and schools.

While the NCF provides a comprehensive curriculum guideline for educational content and objectives, additional guidance is provided through syllabuses issued by the National Institute of Education (NIE, 2015a). These syllabuses, grounded in the NCF, offer detailed frameworks for individual subjects, outlining expected outcomes, indicators, teaching methods, and assessment practices. In the context of my research, which focuses on the K1 to K2 stages, specific social studies syllabi developed by the Maldives National Institute of Education addresses these areas (NIE, 2015a). These syllabuses break down the social studies curriculum strands and sub-strands, and detail the expected outcomes and corresponding indicators, aligned with the broader goals set out in the NCF. Social studies, as an essential subject in the curriculum, has its own dedicated syllabuses aligned with the NCF for key stage 1 and key stage 2 (NIE, 2015b, 2015c, 2022b, 2022c). These syllabuses comprehensively cover various strands, addressing key aspects such as content, learning objectives, and assessment strategies. They play a crucial role in translating the broad educational goals outlined in the NCF into specific, actionable teaching and learning guidelines, ensuring that teachers can effectively implement the curriculum at any stage. This alignment with the NCF’s educational objectives ensures consistency with national educational goals and provides a structured approach to pedagogy and assessment.

Similarly, teacher guides in each grade from key stage 1 to key stage 2 play a significant role in guiding educators through the teaching process in the Maldivian primary education system. These guides, such as the grade 1 *'Exploring Social Studies Teacher's Guide 1'* (NIE & CUP, 2015) are instructional resources designed to help teachers deliver lessons effectively and achieve educational objectives. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the evaluation or analysis of these teacher guides was not a primary focus of this study. While participants mentioned the teacher guides as one of their resources for social studies pedagogy, a key research sub-question focused on assessing the participants' familiarity and understanding of the Maldives NCF. Additionally, it is significant to note that the availability of teacher guides in the Maldives may vary, so not all teachers have access to these resources. Consequently, teachers often turn to school schemes of work which are crafted by referencing the NCF, syllabuses and any available teacher guides. A school scheme of work is a structured plan aligned with the central syllabus, which, facilitated by textbooks, is relied upon by teachers who adapt it for lesson objectives. This demonstrates that when supported, teachers are willing to embrace new planning approaches (Di Biase, 2015).

Teachers in schools refer to syllabuses to create school schemes of work, that ensure alignment with the prescribed syllabus and facilitate effective planning and implementation of social studies education. Ali (2006) explains that "teachers interpret the syllabus and the national curriculum on their own" (p.27), further stating that the curriculum taught often differs between schools, with each school developing, distinct schemes of work and establishing unique examination standards. According to (Di Biase, 2015) research, "teachers in the Maldives tend to adopt a systematic approach, relying on a predetermined formats outlined in textbooks and schemes of work as instructional 'recipes'" (p.39). Hence, the school schemes of work allow schools to tailor their teaching plans to meet the unique needs and characteristics of their students while ensuring alignment with the national educational standards set by the NCF. The combination of the NCF, syllabus, teacher guides in the schools and schemes of work helps create a cohesive and adaptable education system in the Maldives. During my tenure in primary education as a former subject coordinator, we regularly employed specific school schemes of work in our teaching practices. Similarly, teachers involved in the study also reported using schemes of work to guide their teaching practices.

2.7 National Curriculum Framework in the Maldives

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was introduced in 2015 and its implementation started in 2016. The National Curriculum Framework ‘Gaumee Manhaj’ (NIE, 2015a) is the essential curriculum policy outlined in both English and Dhivehi language to support and facilitate quality education in the Maldives. The National Curriculum Framework is:

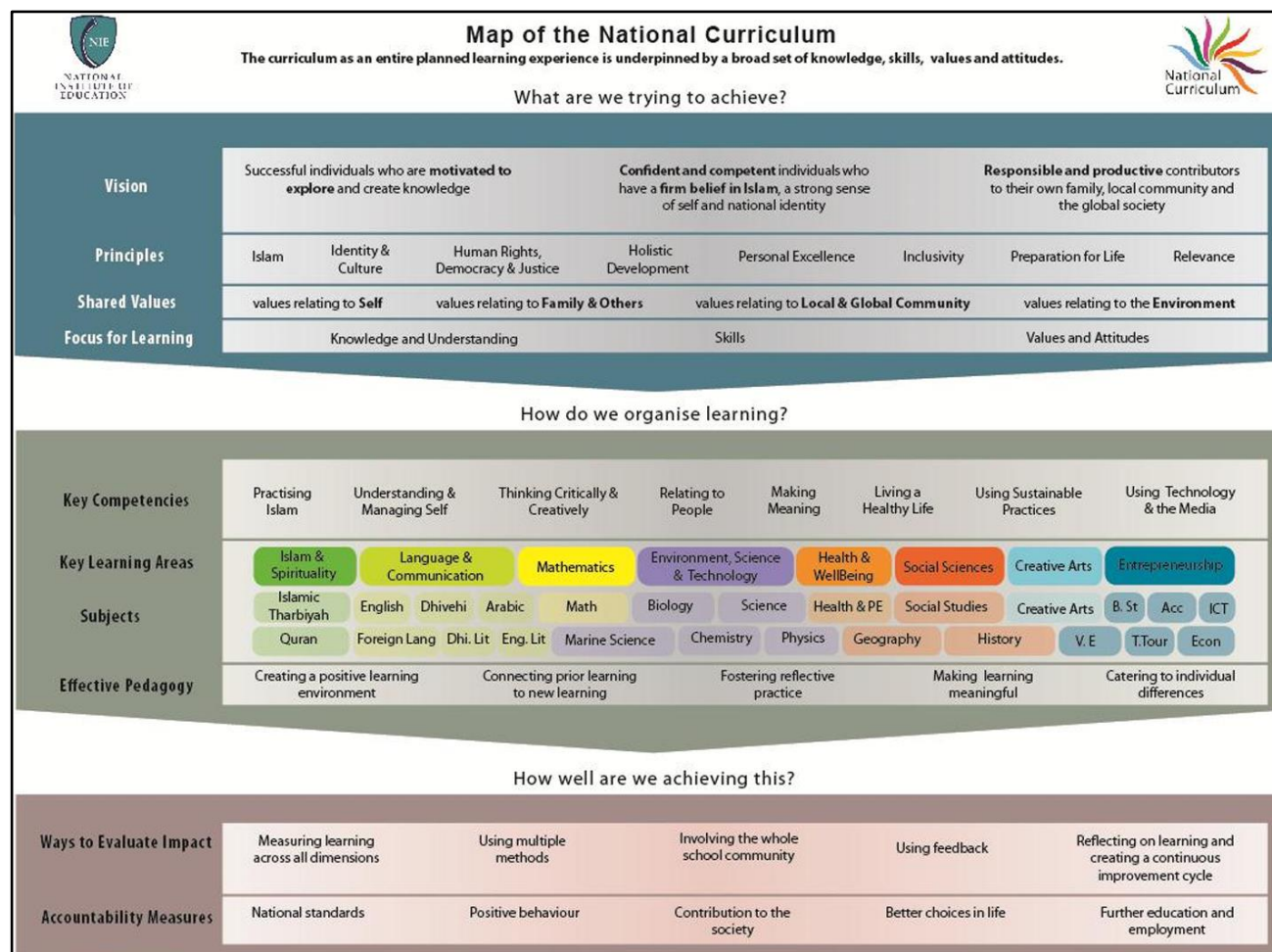
The blueprint aiming to organize the content of education in the Maldives; for that, it is considered as the most important policy framework trying to structure content to learning and to the broad education in the Maldives. The National Institute of Education of the MoE is responsible for its implementation (MoE & MoHE, 2019, p. 150).

Although the NCF is written in both English and Dhivehi, in this research I will be using the English version of the Maldives NCF. There are also specific documents dedicated to social studies education in the K1 to K2 stages respectively; namely, *Social studies in the National Curriculum* (NIE, 2015b, 2015c, 2022b, 2022c). These documents not only align with the (NCF) but also provide planning, teaching, assessment strategies, and the comprehensive integration of the six strands within social studies. The documents are examined in Chapter 5 alongside my research outcomes as part of an exploration into the intricate aspects of teachers’ social studies pedagogy and practical implementation.

The map below of the National Curriculum Framework shows the vision of the Maldivian Education system, through the principles, shared values, and focus for learning. The NCF also explains how learning will be organized by key competencies, key learning areas, the subjects and effective pedagogy. It also details how its impact would be measured and the ways to evaluate impact, and the accountability measures.

Figure 2.2

The map of the Maldives National Curriculum Framework



Note: Figure taken from the Maldives National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a, p. 7)

The map of the National Curriculum Framework delineates three prominent sections of what the NCF is aiming to achieve, how the NCF organises learning and the accountability measures that are placed to observe and ensure the effectiveness of the education system. The first section shows the NCF aims by highlighting the vision of the curriculum, the eight guiding principles, shared values, and the three focal points of learning: values, skills, knowledge and understanding. The second section describes the eight key competencies, various key learning areas in the curriculum and effective pedagogy for teaching and learning. The final and third section outlines five facets instrumental in assessing accountability and evaluating the impact of effective teaching and learning in schools.

The National Curriculum Framework for the Maldives is driven by a vision that sees every child being prepared for life (NIE, 2015a, p. 8). In the context of my study, understanding the NCF's vision is pivotal for teachers as it serves as a guide to cultivate successful individuals. This aligns with the assertions made by scholars like Khoza (2016), who emphasises the importance of subject, curriculum, and teaching visions as the foundation for why teachers teach their subjects the way they do. Understanding this vision becomes crucial to quality teaching and critical thinking (Berkvens et al., 2014). Figure 2.4 below shows the vision of NCF which emphasises the development of successful individuals motivated to explore and create knowledge. Equally important in the vision is the development of confident and competent individuals rooted in Islam with a strong sense of identity who would be responsible contributors to family, community, and global society. This vision holds particular significance in the context of my research, as it aligns with the goals of the participating teachers, who are responsible not only for supporting students' academic learning but also their moral and social development (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3

The NCF vision

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK VISION	
Every child is prepared for life	
The national Curriculum envisions the development of:	
• Successful individuals who are motivated to explore and create knowledge. • Confident and competent individuals who have a firm belief in Islam, a strong sense of self and national identity. • Responsible and productive contributors to their own family, local community and the global society.	

Note: This figure was taken from the Maldives National Curriculum Framework. (NIE, 2015a, p. 8)

The NCF's emphasis is on motivating students to learn, fostering confidence and competence, and instilling responsibility and productivity, so it is essential for teachers to tailor their pedagogical approaches effectively. The vision of the NCF reflects the importance of contemporary thinking skills needed by the students to succeed in life, and it provides guidance to teachers on how to effectively help the students to achieve this desired goal while keeping the vision as the core of the NCF. To secure this vision, the NCF is grounded in eight guiding principles. These principles are anchored in the unique context of the Maldives and include Islam, Identity and Culture, Human Rights, Democracy and Justice, Holistic Development, Personal Excellence, Inclusivity, Preparation for Life, and Relevance (NIE, 2015a, p. 10). Islam is a cornerstone, emphasising Islamic values, principles, and practices to nurture individuals who understand and practice the Muslim faith. Within the NCF, the educational principles guide the decision-making in curriculum delivery.

Moreover, the NCF places a significant emphasis on cultivating shared values among the students and young individuals, recognising their pivotal role in influencing the thoughts and actions of students. Shared values refer to "the perception, ideas, beliefs, or even behaviours that are acceptable in a society" (NIE, 2015a, p. 11). Social studies, as a discipline, seeks to cultivate informed and responsible citizens who

actively engage in their communities and the broader world. By instilling shared values that promote ethical behaviour, understanding, and cooperation, the NCF aligns with the broader goals of social studies education. Given that social studies is the focal point of my research, it becomes imperative to ascertain whether teachers comprehend these shared values outlined in the NCF. This provides insights into whether teachers comprehend and align their teaching practices with the values and objectives set for in the NCF for social studies. These shared values are categorised into four main dimensions; values relating to self, family and others, local and global community, and the environment, which guide students to distinguish between right and wrong and live harmoniously in society. Notable values across the shared values include honesty, trustworthiness, cooperation, social justice, sustainability, understanding, and tolerance (NIE, 2015a)

These four categories of shared values fall within the broader category of values, which is one of the three focal points of learning in the NCF: values, skills, knowledge and understanding. The NCF places deliberate emphasis on creating a learning environment that nurtures a multifaceted growth trajectory for students. Values, the first focal point of learning, are regarded as fundamental building blocks in the NCF. The curriculum identifies four pivotal categories of shared values (See Table 3.1), that are integrated into the policies, practices, and ethos of learning of the environment (NIE, 2015a). This table provides details these values, which are explained in depth in Chapter 3.

The second focal point of learning emphasised within the NCF, skills, acknowledges the dynamic nature of the contemporary world. In response to the ever-changing landscape, the NCF places emphasis on developing skills that empower students to successfully navigate an uncertain future. The integrated approach advocated by the NCF ensures that students can apply these skills seamlessly across different areas across the curriculum, thus facilitating active and engaged learning experiences.

Finally, the third focal point of learning, as articulated by the NCF, knowledge and understanding, reflects a commitment to active engagement and real-world application. The curriculum acknowledges that students learn best when actively involved in meaningful tasks. This encourages teachers to create knowledge-centred

environments that bridge the gap between theory and practical application. Hence, the NCF aspires to cultivate and foster critical thinking and deep internalisation of concepts through the integral component of knowledge and understanding.

Therefore, at the heart of the NCF, lies a strategic focus on fostering holistic learning experiences for students, encompassing the development of values, skills, and knowledge and understanding. The principles and the three focal points of learning embedded within the framework are not theoretical constructs, but integral components woven into the educational tapestry. This holistic approach aims not only to equip students with academic proficiency but also to mould individuals with a strong ethical compass, practical skills and a profound understanding of the world around them.

Building on this holistic approach, the NCF places emphasis on the development of eight key competencies essential for individuals to thrive as active contributors in society. The eight key competencies (See Figure 2.5) specified in the NCF are seen as essential for individuals to live, learn, and contribute as active members of the nation and the world (NIE, 2015a). The NCF states that “these key competencies provide the basis for lifelong learning and employability in a progressive and challenging world” (NIE, 2015a, p. 16). These eight competencies serve to “form the basis of the curriculum” (NIE, 2015a, p. 16) integrating cognitive and practical skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, and behavioural components.

Figure 2.4

Key Competencies (NIE, 2015, p.16).



Within the NCF, the emphasis on holistic education extends to the development of eight key competencies that encompass various aspects of a student's growth. These competencies go beyond academic knowledge; they aim to equip students with essential life skills and values. Effective pedagogy in the NCF recognises the importance of fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment. For my study, understanding how these principles, focus of learning (values, skills, knowledge and understanding), and key competencies are integrated into the social studies teaching pedagogy is crucial. This provides insights into the ways that teachers may be encouraged to go beyond traditional methods, and adopt innovative approaches that align with the broader vision of the NCF. The NCF underscores a holistic approach to effective pedagogy, guiding teachers to focus on specific skills, content knowledge, and innovative support systems for students in today's complex world (NIE, 2015a, p. 62). The curriculum is structured around five essential pedagogical dimensions, each comprising various elements crucial for enhanced student outcomes. They comprise:

- **Creating a Positive Learning Environment** means creating an inclusive, respectful, and caring environment that foster a sense of community and active citizenship. Students in these settings must feel comfortable, safe, engaged, and motivated to learn, and have an overall sense of well-being.
- **Connecting Prior Learning to New Learning** is a crucial aspect of effective teaching, that considers the diverse experiences, ideas, and knowledge students bring to the classroom. Linking new information to students' prior knowledge not only activates their interest and curiosity but also facilitates a meaningful connection between curriculum content and their own culture and experiences.
- **Fostering Reflective Practice** emphasises as an integral dimension of effective pedagogy, and in the experiential learning process. Serving as a catalyst of positive change by enhancing self-awareness, teachers should develop “metacognitive and self-explanation strategies” (p. 64) to guide students in developing an integrated understanding of the reflective practice. This involves teachers reflecting on what helps students to become aware of their own thinking processes (metacognition) and encouraging them to articulate their understanding of concepts (self-explanation). Teachers can achieve this by providing opportunities for students to reflect on their learning such as asking questions and articulating their thoughts during the lessons. By fostering these strategies, teachers empower students to take ownership of their learning and become more effective learners.
- **Making Learning Meaningful** ensures that learning is personally relevant and meaningful to students by connecting their studies to real-world applicability. The students should be exposed to diverse range of content, including local, regional, and international perspectives; this will enhance their global awareness for future educational and career endeavours.
- **Recognising Individual Differences** includes acknowledging the diverse academic abilities, learning styles, personalities, and levels of motivation among students. Teachers should employ varied methodologies in the classroom to ensure that learning is both challenging and engaging for students.

In conclusion, these five dimensions of pedagogy outlined in the NCF shed light on the multifaceted approaches required for effective teaching and learning in the Maldives. Thus, the NCF places a significant emphasis on shared values, holistic learning, and key competencies, envisioning well-rounded individuals prepared for life in a diverse and every-changing world.

2.8 Social Studies Education in the Maldives

In the Maldives, the subject Social Studies is organised under the social sciences, (see Figure 2.2). Social sciences education within the NCF is structured around six essential strands, guiding students from the foundation stage to key stage 3. As students' progress to key stage 4, the focus sharpens on the Maldivian context, with a special emphasis on civic education. In Key Stage 5, a variety of subjects, including sociology, history, geography, government and politics, psychology, and law, offer students a broader range of choices. In this study, my research applies to social studies education in key stage 1 (grades 1, 2 and 3) to key stage 2 (grades 4, 5, and 6).

Briefly, these six strands of social sciences, are:

- **Culture and identity** examine diverse perspectives of cultures and adaptability to dynamic cultural shifts.
- **People, places and environment** explores the understanding of economic activities, consumption, production, and distribution of goods and services.
- **The Economic World** teaches students about economic activities, resource management, and the impact of interdependency, and technology on decision-making.
- **Time, continuity and change** allows students unravel historical interpretations, enabling students to comprehend the past, anticipate change, and envision the future.

- **Active citizenship** involves exploring the historical evolution of power structures, governance, and societal functions, emphasising the individual rights, responsibilities, and the concept of a just society.
- **Investigation, communication, and participation** empowers students to explore interactions, make informed decisions, and engage in social action by investigating time, place, culture, resources, and systems.

In alignment with the NCF, social studies play a pivotal role in fostering informed and reasoned decision-making skills among students, thus contributing to their development as responsible and actively engaged citizens in a democratic society (NIE, 2015a). The NCF of the Maldives emphasises an active citizenship stance in social studies education. The emphasis is on fostering a sense of civic responsibility, ethical decision-making, and a commitment to social justice. This active citizenship stance aligns with the goal of preparing students to be informed, responsible, and actively engaged citizens in a democratic society. Moreover, the NCF emphasises the significance of social studies in instilling values related to ancestral appreciation, understanding of the Maldivian past, and recognising global interconnectedness, contributing to the development of citizenship education (NIE, 2015a). Furthermore, social studies, as highlighted by Myers et al. (2002) and the (NIE, 2015a), facilitates an understanding of the interplay between one's country and the broader world, thus fostering an appreciation for diverse human experiences. This subject not only aids students in self-discovery and societal comprehension but also cultivates a sense of agency, empowering them to be catalysts for positive change in their communities and beyond (NIE, 2015a). Seefeldt et al. (2010) reinforce the importance of social studies, which encompasses diverse topics such as anthropology, science, political science, sociology, citizenship, business, and elements of natural science. In the Maldives NCF, social studies stand is a mandatory subject, reflecting its integral role in shaping well-rounded and socially conscious individuals.

Based on my experience as a teacher for over a decade, I firmly believe social studies is an essential subject that helps to develop the identity of a child. The subject helps children to grow as active citizens who love nature, people, and culture and who are capable of adapting to and sustaining the ongoing changes of a fast-paced world.

Therefore, by learning social studies students can develop values such as respect for themselves and others, which in turn allows them to develop skills like appreciating diversity and being compassionate and tolerant (NIE, 2015a). However, although social studies is considered a vital subject, it was not included in the Maldives' former national curriculum for all the grades. Social studies was exclusively introduced to students during middle school (grades 6 to 7) (MoE, 2009), so this may have contributed to the limited opportunities for students to excel in the subject during their later academic pursuits.

2.9 Teaching Social Studies in the Maldives

Presently, a significant proportion of educators teaching social studies in K1 to K2 are primary teachers without specialised training in social studies education. Beyond their teaching credentials, these educators may lack a foundational understanding of social studies content and effective instructional strategies essential for achieving the prescribed outcomes of the NCF. Despite the 2016 mandate requiring a diploma as the minimum qualification for teacher registration (MoE & MoHE, 2019), recent statistics from the Ministry of Education reveal that 436 out of 9586 teachers remain unregistered due to not meeting this qualification requirement (MoE, 2018). This data underscores the persistent presence of unqualified teachers within the educational system (MoE, 2018). Regarding social studies, both qualified and unqualified teachers may find themselves inadequately equipped with the requisite skills and conceptual understanding to adeptly implement the NCF, specifically designed to facilitate inquiry-based teaching and learning methods.

Pedagogy originates from the Greek word "paidagogos", "paidos" (child) and "agogos" (leader) (Jackson, 2016, p. 4). In other words, a leader leading a child. Traditionally, pedagogy has been understood as the art and the practice of teaching. However, scholars (Jackson, 2016; Smith, 2012) conceptualise pedagogy as the dynamic interplay between the teacher, student, and subject-based instruction. Shulman's (1986) framework further refines this understanding by distinguishing between pedagogical knowledge (PK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) which involves the ability to integrate subject knowledge and appropriate instructional methods. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of social studies

instruction at the K1 and K2 stages, where effective teaching requires not only foundational teaching methods but subject-specific expertise. The effectiveness of education hinges on the competence of teachers and the methodologies employed in their teaching. Specifically, the preparation of teachers holds pivotal importance in enhancing educational quality. Notably, there exists a gap in the training of teachers for social studies instruction, particularly at the K1 to K2 stages.

In 2019, the Ministry of Education initiated the introduction of social studies in grades of K1 to K5, only to discontinue the program within a few months due to various challenges faced by schools, including a shortage of qualified teachers for the subject (MoE & MoHE, 2019). The current implementation stage of the NCF in the Maldives is fraught with specific challenges, such as inadequate resources like guides and textbooks, and a dearth of teachers familiar with the new curriculum. The reliance on expatriate teachers, while a contentious issue, poses additional concerns, as these educators may lack awareness of Maldivian cultural values and exhibit low commitment to schools, potentially resulting in high turnover and compromising educational quality (MoE & MoHE, 2019). Consequently, the envisioned social studies learning outcomes outlined in the NCF (NIE, 2015a) encompassing values, skills, knowledge and understanding may remain inadequately conveyed in the pedagogy. This deficiency implies that students may excel in learning by memorising isolated facts but leave school without the comprehensive information, abilities, perspectives, and attitudes emphasised in NCF, all of which are deemed essential for competent citizenship. Despite short, intensive in-service training sessions provided by visiting trainers, there are limited opportunities for ongoing professional learning (Di Biase, 2015), specifically for social studies education.

Based on the observations of a number of authors, including Adam (2015b), Di Biase (2015), Mariya (2012), Mohamed (2006), Nazeer (2006), Shareef (2010), and Srivastava (2011), it is evident that Maldives classrooms, as seen during teachers' practicums, tend to be teacher-centred. To bring student-centred practices to the classroom, teachers need to think of ways to involve students in their learning. In such practices, teachers need to be fully equipped with relevant teaching skills and knowledge. Therefore, teacher education plays a vital role in reforming and strengthening the teachers' abilities to engage in social studies. Presently, to my

knowledge there are no dedicated preservice or in-service programs addressing the specific needs of social studies teachers in terms of subject matter or effective teaching and learning strategies.

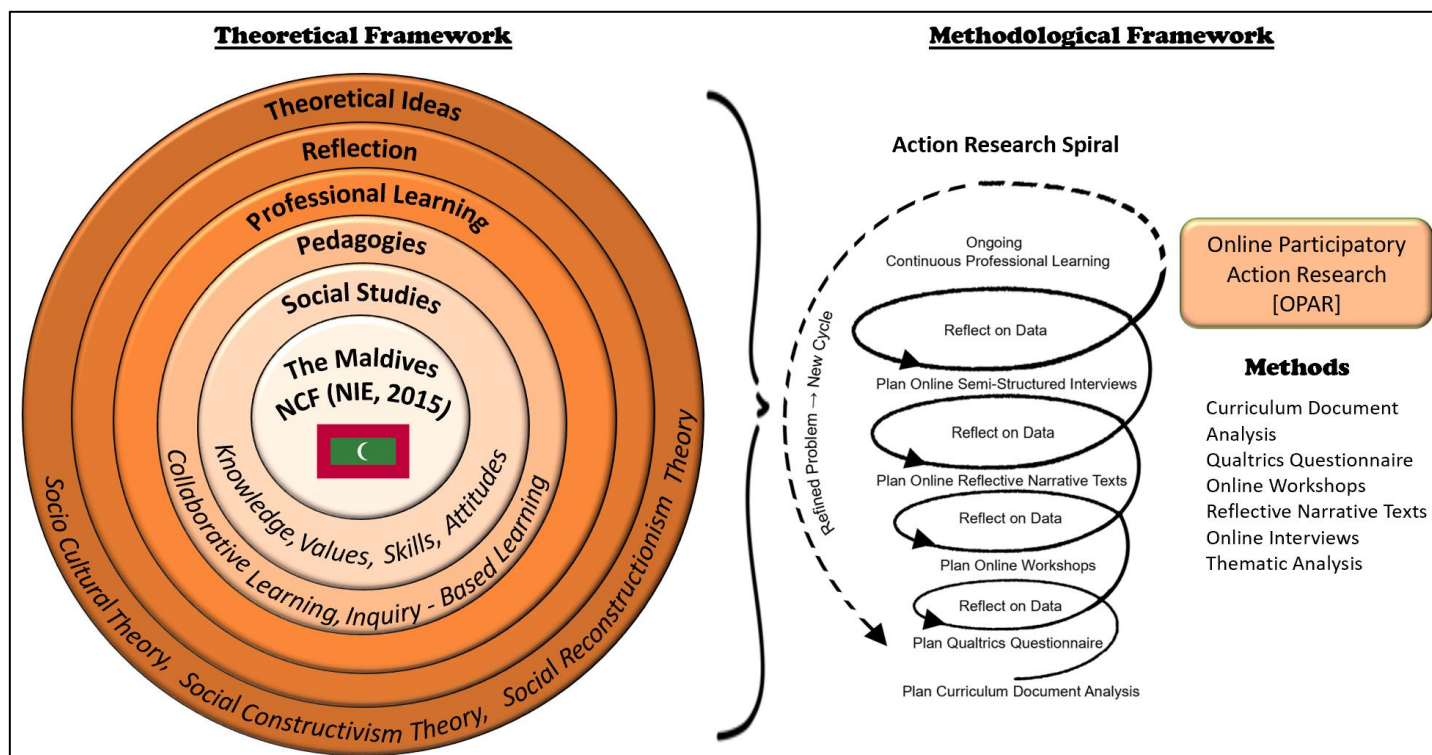
2.10 Overview of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see Figure 2.5, p. 40) of this study is grounded in the Maldives National Framework, which provides the foundation for social studies education in the Maldivian context. The framework reflects the cultural, historical, and environmental influences that shape the curriculum, with a strong emphasis on student-centred learning approaches such as collaborative and inquiry-based learning. A central aspect of this study is professional learning, particularly the role of reflection in enhancing teachers' pedagogical practices that better align with students' learning needs.

This study draws on three key theoretical perspectives that underpin social studies; socio-cultural theory, social constructivism, and socio-reconstructionism. Additionally, the study is methodologically structured around online participatory action research [OPAR], and the research process is represented through an action research spiral developed specifically for this study (See Figure 4.5, p. 135). This model illustrates the iterative, reflective nature of professional learning, where each phase of data collection is interconnected and contributed to deepening understanding and continuous improvement in practice.

While this section introduces the overall conceptual framework, its theoretical and methodological components will be further developed in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 3 examines the theoretical foundations that form this study, while Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion of the methodological approach undertaken.

Figure 2.5
Conceptual Framework



2.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter described the Islamic and cultural backgrounds of the Maldives and explored the profound influence of Islam on various aspects of Maldivian society. It highlights the role of religion in shaping daily life, social norms, and education. The chapter also provides insights into the unique language, Dhivehi, and its significance. The education system, overseen by the Maldives Ministry of Education, faces challenges such as limited funding and a notable proportion of primary teachers lacking specialised training and professional learning. The historical evolution of the education system, from informal home-based education to the current nationwide government schooling, is discussed. The introduction of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2015 is examined, emphasising its role in shaping social studies education. The NCF's vision, principles, shared values, and key competencies are detailed, reflecting a holistic approach to education that aims to prepare students for life in a diverse and ever-changing world.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented an overview of the religious, cultural context and norms that have been established in the Maldivian education system, specifically in relation to social studies education. This chapter presents a review of literature related to this subject of the study, which focuses on social studies pedagogy among primary teachers in the Maldives and is divided into five sections.

In embarking this research journey, I found myself navigating through a rich tapestry of literature that not only informed but also shaped the trajectory of my study. This foreword serves as a reflective exploration into the significance of the various aspects of literature included in the review, shedding light on why they are integral pillars supporting the foundation of my research.

The first section of the chapter focuses on the nature of social studies. By exploring various aspects of learning social studies, this section aims to make sense of the subject's nature and to illustrate what is known about the current social studies pedagogy within the Maldives. The second section focuses on how learning theories relate to social studies teaching and learning. The third section highlights how teachers conceptualise social studies pedagogical practices, and how culture and/or environment impacts pedagogical practice. The fourth section evaluates the factors influencing the development of social studies pedagogical conceptual understandings among teachers, and explored the impact of their educational contexts on professional growth. The fifth section discusses reflective practice as a form of professional learning method and its impact on shaping teachers' social studies pedagogy. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the literature review.

3.2 Exploring Social Studies Curriculum

In order to explain the social studies curriculum of the Maldives in-depth, understanding the significance and meaning of social studies is important. According

to Epstein (Harcourt et al., 2016, p. viii) in the foreword of the book *‘Teaching social studies for critical, active citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand’* there have been “multiple contested meanings” about the purpose and meaning of social studies education in New Zealand, and in other countries. Research on social studies education in the Maldives is notably limited. Recognising this gap, I turn to the New Zealand contemporary curriculum (NZ MoE, 2007), specifically as I relate to social sciences, and international literature to explore and further inform my understanding of social studies. This approach stems from the awareness that the dearth of local research on social studies education in the Maldives creates a critical need for insights about teachers’ enhancing social studies pedagogy through reflection. By engaging with international literature, this review examines different perspectives on the purpose of social studies education, in the broader context of understanding its role in shaping students’ knowledge, skills, and civic engagement. This engagement helps contextualise social studies education within the Maldivian setting, addressing gaps in existing research.

3.2.1 The Nature of Social Studies

Social studies, much like other academic disciplines taught in schools, is perceived by the NIE (2015a) to be an importance aspect of education for the young. In parallel to subjects such as Maths, English, Science, or any other language subjects that are taught, social studies seek to impart a profound understanding that students can readily apply in their daily lives. However, in many cases, students consider social studies to be among their least preferred academic subjects, with social studies teachers often encountering comments like *‘this is boring’* (Grant et al., 2022). This prompts an inquiry into the significance of social studies as a subject in our schools. Investigating the nature of social studies, involves exploring the fundamental concepts and objectives that hold relevance for students. The nature of these attitudes will affect their ability to apply these learnings in their daily lives.

Numerous authors have addressed the key question “What is the nature of social studies education?” and there has been an ongoing debate (Abbiss & Kingston, 2016; Barr, 1997; Mariati et al., 2021; Mutch et al., 2008; Russell III & Waters, 2021; Zevin,

2015). Existing literature suggests that social studies is a multifaceted and dynamic field that encompasses various disciplines (Castro & Knowles, 2015; Mutch et al., 2008), making it challenging to pinpoint a universally agreed-upon definition or “understand the contested nature and purpose of social studies” (Abbiss & Kingston, 2016, p. 2). However, an abundance of research has been conducted on social studies, providing a wealth of insights and perspectives that have enriched our understanding of the subject.

Social studies is about “understanding the world and participating in society as responsible citizens” (Barr, 1997, p. 7) and is an “integral part of the national education system to form good citizens” (Mariati et al., 2021, p. 111). It can be an integrated study of multiple fields of social sciences and the humanities, including geography, political science, and history (Mutch et al., 2008; Zevin, 2015). For others, social studies education encompasses a distinct focus on the social and civic dimensions of schooling emphasising the cultivation of democratic citizenship and inquiry-based learning (Aitken, 2005; Barr, 1996; Mutch et al., 2008). Epstein in her foreword of Harcourt et al. (2016) underlines the nature of social studies and its impact on students’ lives:-

Social studies education must help students to consider the kind of world they want for themselves and others, and how they can bring about social, environmental, and political change. This includes an examination of their own and other’s identities, values, and beliefs and the factors that have shaped them. Learning in social studies also empowers students to maintain what they already value about their communities and society. This is why we believe children and young people need a social studies education that focuses on both critical and active forms of citizenship.
(p.xiv)

This quote emphasises the impact of social studies on students’ lives by highlighting the need for students to envision the world they desire, and to critically examine identities, values and beliefs. This perspective aligns closely with the NCF, which underscores the role of social studies in fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and a deeper understanding of societal structures. The NCF’s social studies strands

similarly emphasises the development of students as informed and active citizens who reflect on the world around them while maintaining connections to their communities.

According to Mutch et al. (2008), four aspects identify the nature of social studies: (1) facilitating citizenship education effectively; (2) social studies inquiry; (3) reflective inquiry and decision-making; and (4) personal, social and ethical development and learning. In the broadest sense, social studies is “the preparation of young people so that they possess the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in society” (Ross, 2014, p. 3). The new approved definition of social studies by National Council of Social Studies in the USA (NCSS, 2023) states that “social studies is the study of individuals, communities, systems, and their interactions across time and place that prepares students for local, national, and global civic life” (p.1). The above views suggest the intricate nature of social studies education, which if implemented well can provide students with diverse and dynamic learning experiences. The subject not only emphasises the development of critical thinking, active citizenship, and engagement in societal issues, but contributes to students’ well rounded-education and lifelong learning skills.

According to Seefeldt et al. (2010), social studies cover a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, science, political science, sociology, citizenship, business and elements of natural science. As in New Zealand (NZ MoE, 2007), in the Maldives, social sciences is a curriculum learning area that has social studies as its major component within the National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a). Mutch et al. (2008) note the name ‘social sciences’ is derived from the “importance of the relationships between the key disciplinary contributors to this learning area” (p. 4). They further highlight that these disciplines provide “a broad understanding of how societies work, and how people can participate as critical, active, informed and responsible citizens with high level skills needed for the twenty-first century” (p. 4). Within the Maldivian context, the integration of social studies into the social sciences curriculum is designed to reflect the unique cultural, and historical, significance of Islamic teachings and social aspects of the Maldives (NIE, 2015a). This inclusion aligns with the broader goal of fostering an understanding of how societies function and encourage active citizenship, in line with Islamic values and global perspectives.

International literature suggests that researchers from various countries, including Barton (2001), Ho (2010), Levstik and Groth (2005), and Pike (2000), have found that the nature of history education and civic concepts is intricately linked to the unique cultural and national context of their respective nations (Castro & Knowles, 2017; Castro & Knowles, 2015). This holds relevance for social studies education in the Maldives as the National Curriculum Framework seeks to instil a deep understanding of the cultural context and values, particularly within the Islamic framework, through social studies (NIE, 2015a). Adeyemi (2010) underlines that social studies education, despite originating in the United States, has become globally relevant, being taught in various languages worldwide, e.g. Germany, Thailand, the UK, and Japan. Similarly, in New Zealand, social studies “plays a pivotal role in developing young people’s citizenry” (p.14) by equipping students to become “citizens in an uncertain, complex, and challenging world” (Abbiss & Kingston, 2016, p. 14). Russell III and Waters (2021) suggest that the purpose of social studies is to “develop good citizens for the democratic society in which we live in” (p.1). They further argue that developing civic virtue also means becoming a good citizen. Moreover, Babatunde et al. (2016) explain that social studies promotes and creates responsible citizens in society. These views reference back to perspective of Barr (1996) that the purpose of social studies as fostering informed and responsible citizenship. I agree with this significance of social studies education in both the Maldives and New Zealand because it serves to cultivate a strong understanding of cultural context, values, and citizenship. Consequently, my views align with the goals of the NCF and the societal needs outlined by various scholars (Abbiss & Kingston, 2016; Babatunde et al., 2016; NIE, 2015a; Russell III & Waters, 2021), all of which reflect Barr’s (1996) emphasis on fostering informed and responsible citizenship. According to the (NCSS, 2023), the purpose of social studies is:

...examining the past, participating in the present, and learning how to shape the future, social studies prepares learners for a lifelong practice of civil discourse and civic engagement in their communities. Social studies centers knowledge of human rights and local, national, and global responsibilities so that learners can work together to create a just world in which they want to live. (p.1)

The literature above suggests that teaching social studies cultivates enlightened minds for a harmonious and informed society. Moreover, the purpose of teaching and learning social studies is to enable students to preserve what they already value about their community and society. However, “knowledge alone is not enough” (Epstein, as cited in Harcourt et al., 2016, p. xiv). For students to efficiently apply the concepts and ideas that are explored in the social studies classroom within their lives, they must not depend on textbook knowledge, instead, they must be given the opportunity to explore the concepts practically. For instance, rather than just learning about the concept of democracy, students could participate in a classroom situation where they vote on class rules or engage in a debate about a current social issue. Similarly, instead of simply studying the geography of Maldives, students could go on a field trip to explore local landscapes and ecosystems. These practical experiences deepen students’ understandings and allow them to apply their learning in real-life contexts. Such experiences will foster a more meaningful comprehension of social studies concepts. This view is affirmed by the NCSS (2023), which further suggests that “using an inquiry-based approach, social studies help students examine vast human experiences through the generation of questions, collection and analysis of evidence from credible sources, consideration of multiple perspectives, and the application of social studies knowledge and disciplinary skills” (p.1). To become active citizens within the society, students must develop a deeper understanding of citizenship education.

According to the position paper written by Mutch et al. (2008) The Thomas Committee, established in 1942 by the New Zealand Minister of Education, produced the *Thomas Report*, which presented two distinct views of social studies. Firstly, the report utilised the term ‘*social studies*’ in the plural form, encompassing groups of subjects centred around human societies and social relationships, i.e. history and geography. Secondly, the *Thomas Report* framed social studies as a discipline aimed to equip post-war generation with the skills and knowledge necessary for active citizenship. This perspective aligns with the three broad intended student outcomes; affective, participatory, and cultural identity, that underscore the significant role of social studies in “preparing student for citizenship” (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 11). The definition of each of the three student intended outcomes outlined by Aitken and Sinnema (2008) states that:

...affective (developing desired emotional and dispositional responses to learning, especially commitment to values such as social justice and equity), participatory (developing disposition towards respectful interactions with diverse others, including productive discussion of controversial issues), and cultural identity (helping students to articulate their own personal and cultural identities and respect those of diverse others) (p.11)

Combining all of these definitions, these outcomes in social studies education contribute to the development of citizenship by shaping individuals who are not only knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities within the society but also actively engaged in promoting social justice, equity and inclusivity. In other words, social studies education fosters the development of effective citizenship among students. An 'effective citizen' is "the one who has a lively sense of responsibility towards civilised values, who can make firm social judgements, and who acts intelligently and in the common interest" (Thomas, 1944). Similarly, Adeyemi (2010) describes that an effective citizen as "one who is able to think rationally and contribute his or her quota toward the overall development of the society, in terms of skills, values, and attitudes" (p.7). Correia (2002), states that to prepare citizens for "active and effective participation" in the society means making sure they have the "knowledge, skills, and the will" to bring about change. These characteristics are known as the "products of good civic education" (Correia, 2002, p. 14). Therefore, instilling civic competence in students means immersing them in the learning and practical experiences of understanding social studies concepts.

Having introduced the concept of citizenship education, it is important to further understand what citizenship or active citizenship (NIE, 2015a) education means in the context of social studies education. Through social inquiry, the subject social studies promote active citizenship by engaging students with "real-life social issues, and problem-solving on different values, perspectives, and actions on ways in which people can contribute to social change" (Abbiss & Kingston, 2016, p. 11). Adeyemi (2010) from Nigeria, further argues that the discipline "is interpreted as a type of citizenship education with a strong dose of ethical training for character and development of citizens" (p. 5). Similarly, in the Maldives, the integration of citizenship education within

social studies curriculum underscores the emphasis on nurturing ethical values and civic responsibility among students, aligning with broader international perspectives on the purpose of social studies education. On the other hand, Mutch et al. (2008), elucidate that citizenship, as explained by Gilbert (1996), should not be confused with nationalism or patriotism. They echo Gilbert's categorisation of citizenship in four major ways:

...citizenship as a status implying formal rights and duties; citizenship as an identity and a set of moral and social virtues based on the democratic ideal; citizenship as a public practice conducted through legal and political processes; and citizenship as participation in decision-making in all aspects of life". (p.8)

The link between citizenship education and social studies is understanding "how society works" (NZ MoE, 2007, p. 30) and to "study the dynamic relationships among individual rights and responsibilities, the needs for social groups, and concepts of a just society" (NIE, 2015a, p. 45). These perspectives align with Barton (2012) view on active citizenship whereby, "democratic citizens are expected to engage in thoughtful, reasoned judgement, individually, and collectively, in order to reach well-informed decisions that form the basis for actions" (p.132). Mutch et al. (2008) echoes Gilbert's views that, what makes citizenship 'active' is the proactive engagement of individuals in exercising their rights, fulfilling their responsibilities, and participating in decision-making processes within the society. Engaging in active citizenship involves acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to enact meaningful change through action. In other words, "to make a difference is to act; to act is to make a difference" (Isin, 2017, p. 380). This statement emphasises the importance of action in effecting change. These perspectives reinforce the role of social studies education in fostering civic engagement and social responsibility. In the Maldivian context, social studies also plays a crucial role in preserving and strengthening national identity by helping students understand their cultural heritage while preparing them to engage as informed and responsible citizens (NIE, 2015a). Therefore, to inspire the children of tomorrow, social studies education is the cornerstone upon which we might build a better future. This aligns with the goals of social studies education, which aims to prepare students to

become informed, engaged, responsible and effective citizens capable of contributing positively to the society (NIE, 2015a).

Citizenship education essentially means to become responsible citizens of society by following the values of interacting with others around them with openness, transparency, and human dignity. Through citizenship education, students become aware of their capacity to be the change-makers in their communities, society and the world (NIE, 2015a). Bermudez (2015) explains that through social studies, students get to understand the different places, people, events, and factors that shape the world in which we live. These perspectives suggest that social studies education not only fosters good citizenship but also allows students to develop self-reflection, self-realisation, form better relationships, and make informed decisions by expanding their understanding of the world around them. It is notable that citizenship education within the realm of social studies doesn't create citizens, as individuals are inherently citizens. This observation aligns with Isin's (2017) contention that citizenship is not solely determined by formal education or training, instead, it encompasses legal status acquired through various modes such as: citizenship inheritance via birth, citizenship inheritance via birth regardless of parentage, and citizenship inheritance via naturalisation in a state other than one's birthplace. Isin (2017) further explains that citizenship is not merely a legal status but it also involves practices and behaviours related to "integration, multiculturalism, and nationalism" which are influenced by societal factors beyond formal education (p.369). Therefore, while citizenship education can play a crucial role in fostering civic knowledge and engagement, it does not fundamentally create citizenship; rather, it complements and enhances the inherent status and practices of citizenship.

Understanding the underlying knowledge foundations of the subject social studies is crucial to grasping the nature and purpose of social studies. The purpose and scope of social studies have been widely contested, with diverse perspectives on its role in both shaping and reflecting societal values. This section has explored these varied viewpoints, illustrating the ongoing debate about the aims of social studies education.

While some definitions prioritise the transmission of disciplinary knowledge, others emphasise the development of critical thinking and engagement with social issues. At

its core, social studies aim to equip students with skills, understandings, and attitudes needed to navigate the evolving world around them. The primary goal being to provide learners with skills, knowledge and competencies to be informed and active individuals who can think critically, make sound judgements, participate, and communicate their ideas (Uge et al., 2019). By integrating elements from the perspectives explored in this section, social studies emerge as a dynamic field that not only informs students about the world but also equips them with the tools to engage with it critically and responsibly

3.2.2 Maldives Social Studies Curriculum

In Chapter 2 of my thesis, I presented a brief overview of the Maldives education system, the Maldives National Curriculum Framework, the schooling system of the Maldives and the social studies curriculum that is taught in Maldivian primary classrooms. In this section, I explore how social studies is taught as a school-based subject in the Maldivian primary classrooms and what core aspects are found within social studies as a school-based subject. As previously highlighted, social studies is defined and taught differently in different countries, apart from the skills, values, perspectives, and civic education that are taught within each interdisciplinary aspect of social studies. In the Maldives, what makes our teaching and learning of social studies so different to other national curriculum that I have researched so far, is that we bring our Islamic teachings and culture into students' learning. As a Muslim country, teachers and educators strive to incorporate the concepts and teachings of Islam into the topics that are taught in social studies within their classrooms as cited and emphasised in the Maldives National Curriculum (NIE, 2015a). The following sub-sections describe and explain aspects of social studies that are to be taught in the Maldivian classrooms as guided by the Maldives National Curriculum Framework.

3.2.2.1 Influence of Islamic Culture

According to the Maldives National Curriculum Framework, there are eight key learning areas which define knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and values that students need to learn and develop in order to become successful, competent, and responsible individuals of the society. What each key learning area may entail has

been previously explained Chapter 2, so in this section, I specifically aim to discuss the influence of Islam in social studies education. One of the important key learning areas that students are expected to develop is Islam and Spirituality, which is one of the development key competencies where students learn and gain knowledge about the Quran, Sunnah, Islamic History, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Islamic Disciplines. Nonetheless, despite our schooling education system in the Maldives having a separate subject known as, Islam, to teach the students about the teachings and history of our Prophet (PBUH), the Islamic views and perspectives have been incorporated within social studies education to fit with the contemporary world. This was established as a part of developing an aspect of a child's growth of becoming a responsible individual in the society because the influence of incorporating the Islamic understandings will develop the six strands of the social studies education; name, (1) Culture and Identity; (2) People, Places and Environment; (3) The Economic World; (4) Time, Continuity, and Change; (5) Active Citizenship; and finally (6) Investigation, Communication and Participation. These six strands, through implementation, aim to develop a students' skills, values, and perspectives of becoming a responsible Muslim citizen of the Maldivian society.

As previously highlighted, the Islamic values, principles and practices are embedded in the Maldives national curriculum framework. As per the Maldives Constitution (Majilis, 2008), it is mandated that all Maldivians adhere to Islam. Islam is the designated as the official religion of the Maldives, forming the basis for the country's legal framework. Education is tasked with promoting "obedience to Islam, instil love for Islam, foster respect for human rights, and promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all people" (Majilis, 2008, p. 9). Presently, adherence to Islam is a requirement for all Maldivian citizens, influencing multiple aspects of the country's life such as politics, the judicial system and the education. The NIE (2015a) recognises the significance of Islam in the Maldivian society and supports the development of individuals who understand and practice the Muslim faith. This Islamic principal advocates cultivating an understanding of differing and common values that form a basis of compassion, cooperation, tolerance, and appropriate behaviour. The long extensive history of Islam in the Maldives has influenced the religious practices associated into the culture and traditions of the country (Adam, 2015b). Moreover, the Islamic heritage of the Maldives holds significant influence over educational practices

within the country (Shiyama, 2020). The Maldives Constitution strongly emphasises the need “to preserve and protect the State religion of Islam, culture, language and heritage of the country” (Majilis, 2008, p. 18), further underscoring the significance of Islamic principles in shaping educational policies and practices. The influence of the Islamic principle embedded in social studies education also advocates for exploring democratic, civic, and religious dimensions among the believers of the Islamic faith and further identifies different ethnic, socio-economic, and religious groups throughout the world and analyses their varying perspectives on the same contemporary issues and historic events. This can help develop different perspectives of what our Islam religion means to Maldivians as the followers of the Islamic faith and understanding the knowledge of the past, future and the present contemporary world. These informed understandings can help our students to become good responsible Muslim citizens of the Maldivian society.

3.2.2.2 Social Studies: Values, Skills, and Knowledge and Understanding

Social studies enable learners to value and explore their pasts, value where they come from, appreciate the interrelationship between individuals’ overtime, understand their contexts, appreciate their cultures and environment while developing civic efficacy. Through social studies, learners can understand how societies work thus enabling them to develop the skills and knowledge which will assist them in making reasonable and informed decisions. This helps the young generation by instilling good morals which makes them active and responsible citizens of a democratic society.

According to the NCF (NIE, 2015a), the focus of learning for students is structured into three respective categories: (1) Values, (2) Skills, and (3) Knowledge and Understanding. First and foremost, the NCF places a great emphasis on “encouraging children and young people to adopt deeply held values shared within our society” (NIE, 2015a, p. 14). These values refer to the “perception, ideas, beliefs or even behaviours that are accepted in a society” (NIE, 2015a, p. 14). Values are known as “deeply held beliefs about what is important or desirable” (NZMoE, 2007, p. 10) that are deep and private (Keown et al., 2005), making them “emotional, difficult to change and often unconscious” (Jaffe & Scott, 1998, p. 27). Similarly, the concept of value is also

described as “the material and spiritual elements of a society” (Alaca, 2022, p. 156), which are “personal, ethical and social feelings keeping people and the whole society alive” (Kan, 2010, p. 1). These values are conveyed through a display of thoughts and actions (NIE, 2015a), which develop our personal conduct and interaction with the people and environment that surrounds us.

The concept of values in education has maintained its significance because each discipline aims to instil values in individuals (Guttek, 2006). In the context of my research, multiple authors believe that the role of values in social studies education is deemed to be significant. The Maldives NCF (NIE, 2015a) encourages shared values (see Table 3.1) in social studies education through the six strands (see Chapter 2) and key competencies (see Chapter 2) to support students to “grow as an individual” and “thrive in our society and to live peaceably in a diverse world” (p.11). Likewise, *Social Studies in The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZ MoE, 1997) states that exploring values through social studies challenges students to “think about the nature of social justice, the welfare of others, acceptance of cultural diversity, and respect for the environment” (p.17). Through their learning experiences, the latest New Zealand curriculum states that students are able to develop, explore, understand, critically analyse values, and learn to make appropriate decisions and actions (NZ MoE, 2007). Understanding these values allows students to distinguish what is right or wrong and guide them to live a life filled with harmony. This further demonstrates how the role of values in social studies education aims to create a “generation able to continue to create a liveable world” (Katilmis, 2017, p. 1233).

Nevertheless, it is also important that values “may change over time” (NZ MoE, 1997, p. 17). Laff and Ruiz (2019) argue that “values are not static”, meaning over time values can fluctuate “across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change societal belief” (p.1). As the society continues to evolve and people learn to adapt to new circumstances, it becomes evident that values may shift over time. This is due to how people’s perspectives and values are shaped by various factors which then implies an acknowledgment that values may change over time as individuals are exposed to new experiences, information, and societal influences (NZ MoE, 2013). To empower students to navigate this evolving landscape, it is crucial to encourage them to “engage critically with societal issues” (NZ MoE, 2007, p. 30), in order to foster their

ability to analyse and respond to changing values and issues in society, a key aspect relevant to my research. Therefore, these values that the NIE (2015a) encourages students to understand, develop and hold are crucial for them growing as responsible individuals in a thriving contemporary society.

Values in the NCF are known as shared values that are divided into four categories: namely, Values relating to self, Values relating to family and others, Values relating to local and global community, Values relating to the environment. Table 3.1 below shows a description of each of these shared values taken from the Maldives National Curriculum Framework are given below.

Table 3.1

Description of Shared Values

Values relating to self	Values relating to family and others	Values relating to local and global community	Values relating to the environment
The values identified in this category relate to understanding and respecting oneself, and to empower oneself to pursue excellence.	The values identified in this category relate to understanding and respecting others; to being sensitive to individual differences as well as the rights and responsibilities of others.	The values identified in this category relate to encouraging civic responsibility and contribution; to accept diversity within a democratic society and to champion social justice.	The values identified in this category relate to understanding the preserving the Maldivian culture and heritage; and to promote ideas and conservation and sustainable development.

Note: Adapted with permission from NIE (2015a, p. 11).

From this table, we can infer that the NIE (2015a) places a great emphasis on developing these shared values into the student's learning environment. Hence, they further outline that "incorporating these into the policies, practices, and ethos of the

learning environment becomes a responsibility of the school” (p.14). This suggests that the NIE (2015a) gives a high priority to encouraging the practice of these shared values through the students’ education. At the core of social studies education, the subject incorporates and emphasises these values into the student’s learning which helps the young become compassionate and responsible citizens.

Now that I have underlined the values that the NCF (NIE, 2015a) aims to instil in students through social studies education, I also want to emphasise the importance of understanding the skills that the students need to acquire to become active citizens of the future. Living in an ever-changing world, students must be prepared for what they might encounter in different circumstances in their life. The NCF (NIE, 2015a) explains that “it is crucial that schools focus on developing skills in children and young people; skills that would essentially allow them to gain, organise, and use information appropriately” (p.14). Aslamiah et al. (2021) argue that the aim of social studies education is to develop critical thinking skills and social skills to address challenges that affect the individual and society at large. The *Social Studies New Zealand Curriculum* (NZ MoE, 1997) states that students will learn and participate responsibly in the society as they develop skills through three social studies processes: Inquiry, Values Exploration, and Social Decision-Making. The skills definition outlined in the NCF closely resembles the concepts of inquiry and social decision-making found in the New Zealand curriculum. The NCF stresses the significance of skill development, as underscored by the following quotation: “importance of processes of learning; of developing the skills of investigation and problem solving; of applying reading skills that are appropriate to the expected task, of the use of reasoning; and developing skills necessary for effective learning” (NIE, 2015a, p. 14).

As previously explored, the NCF underscores the importance of equipping students with values to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Similarly, focusing on the development of skills is essential to enable students to adapt effectively to changing circumstances. The Social-Decision Making process (NZ MoE, 1997) is about students “developing their skills as they make decisions about actions that could be taken on a range of issues and problems in society” (p.18). To cultivate this skill means “empowering students’ critical thinking skills” (Tapung et al., 2018, p. 162) and “develop the skills of investigation and problem solving” (NIE, 2015a, p. 14), by further

investigating range of “possible strategies to address the issue” (NZ MoE, 1997, p. 18). In order to develop the primary students’ understanding of social studies and foundational skills that are set to achieve (NIE, 2015a), to become “effective citizens” (Adeyemi, 2010, p. 7) and “lifelong” (NIE, 2015a, p. 16) learners, requires guiding them to “master the thinking skills” (Beyer, 2008, p. 201). This aligns with the NCF’s elaboration of cognitive skills where “applying reading skills that are appropriate to the expected task; the use of reasoning in writing; and developing skills necessary for effective learning” (NIE, 2015a, p. 14). Empowering these students’ skills through social studies enables students to grasp the material comprehensively, foster critical thinking skills, and respond critically to various social problem in the society (Tapung et al., 2018).

Additionally, through this engagement students can critically analyse and evaluate societal issues and contribute to the society (NZ MoE, 2007). Beyer (2008) states that these skills are “essential to effective citizenship and classroom learning” and teaching these skills “systematically, explicitly, and directly” would mean engaging students with the content of social studies education which can bring sustained and enhanced learning of social studies (p.201). The NCF further highlights that schools must adopt an integrated approach that pushes the students to practice these skills across their learning (NIE, 2015a). Hence, social studies, which is an integrated subject provides opportunities for student to learn and apply these skills in a variety of active learning experiences where the students can move from concrete to an abstract level of learning. At this stage, teachers would need to know how to approach the subject in a sophisticated manner to support the students’ social studies learning and understanding of knowledge.

The NCF (NIE, 2015a) emphasises the third and final focus of learning in social studies throughout the curriculum: knowledge and understanding. What this entails is that students’ learning efficiency increases based on their engagement in rich active tasks. The NCF emphasises that students “attain a deep level of understanding when connections are made to things that can relate in their daily life” (NIE, 2015a, p. 15). When the content is meaningfully taught and connected to students lives, their engagement tends to increase (Egbert & Roe, 2014). Egbert and Roe (2014) further underscore that emphasising the *why* behind the students’ learning experience is

directly connected to authenticity. This satisfies their need for genuine answers regarding their learning experiences, which also aligns with their goals, interests, and appropriate challenge levels. In other words, “putting students’ lives in the centre of learning supports achievement...” (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 56). However, without such connection, students may perceive the knowledge is neither “valued or relevant” (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 56, as cited by ; Bishop et al., 2003). Hence, authentic connections to students’ lives not only enhance engagement but also promote meaningful learning experiences.

Maldivian school students largely share a homogenous background in terms of religion, ethnicity, and language (Fikuree, 2024). As such, it is important to consider how students are exposed to and engage with the diversity present within societies. While the curriculum encourages students to reflect on values related to justice, cultural diversity, and respect for others, one may question how effectively these values are realised in practice, particularly in environments where students may not directly encounter such diversity. For instance, does the average student in school have the opportunity to experience and understand diverse perspectives? If not, how does the curriculum ensure that students are still exposed to and learn about this diversity?

Social studies, through its focus on values such as cultural diversity, aims to bridge this gap by exposing students to different histories, worldviews, and social contexts. By engaging with such topics, students are encouraged to think critically about societal issues, reflect on the complexity of these challenges, and respond thoughtfully. In doing so, social studies can serve as a powerful vehicle for promoting an understanding of diversity, even in contexts where students may not have direct or immediate exposure to it. The curriculum’s aim to foster students’ engagement with diverse ideas and people is essential in preparing them for a dynamic, multicultural world.

The goal of social studies is not just to facilitate knowledge, but to shape responsible, informed citizens who can contribute to a diverse and evolving society. To ensure this, teachers play a pivotal role. Teachers should be able to create “knowledge-centred environments” where students engage actively in the learning experience (NIE, 2015a,

p. 15). By grounding social studies concepts in real-world contexts, students are prompted to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This occurs through connecting and integrating topics, concepts, or ideas that directly relate to their daily lives. Barrow (2006) expands on Dewey's (1938) idea on experiential learning and integration of education with real-life experiences, further stating that, "problems to be studied must be related to students' experiences and within their intellectual capability; therefore, the students would be active learners in searching for answers" (p.26). For instance, this can include social studies topics like culture and identity, which are pivotal aspects of students' lived experiences and societal interactions. Therefore, for a student to gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge taught in social studies highly depends on the learning experiences that are provided in the classrooms by the teachers.

Connections can also be made when historical facts are linked to present-day circumstances, and when individuals actively participate in learning by thinking critically and applying their knowledge. This in turn makes students' learning become more meaningful and effective. The NCF further states that: -

Ideas and concepts get internalised more effectively when relations are shown between principle and practices; when facts are linked between the past and the present; and when they need to actively engage with the learning area through thinking and application (NIE, 2015a, p. 15).

Utilising the students' personal experiences as a foundation, particularly within the learning area of social studies, students can effectively understand and compare the experiences of individuals across various historical periods, geographic locations, and cultural contexts (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008). In other words, by emphasising 'cultural universals' in social studies, teachers can ensure that the content remains closely aligned with the students' life experiences, thereby making it more "meaningful to them" (Brophy & Alleman, 2005, p. 220). Cultural universals, as described by Alleman et al. (2007) are:

Cultural universals are domains of human experience that have existed in all cultures, past and present. They include activities related to meeting

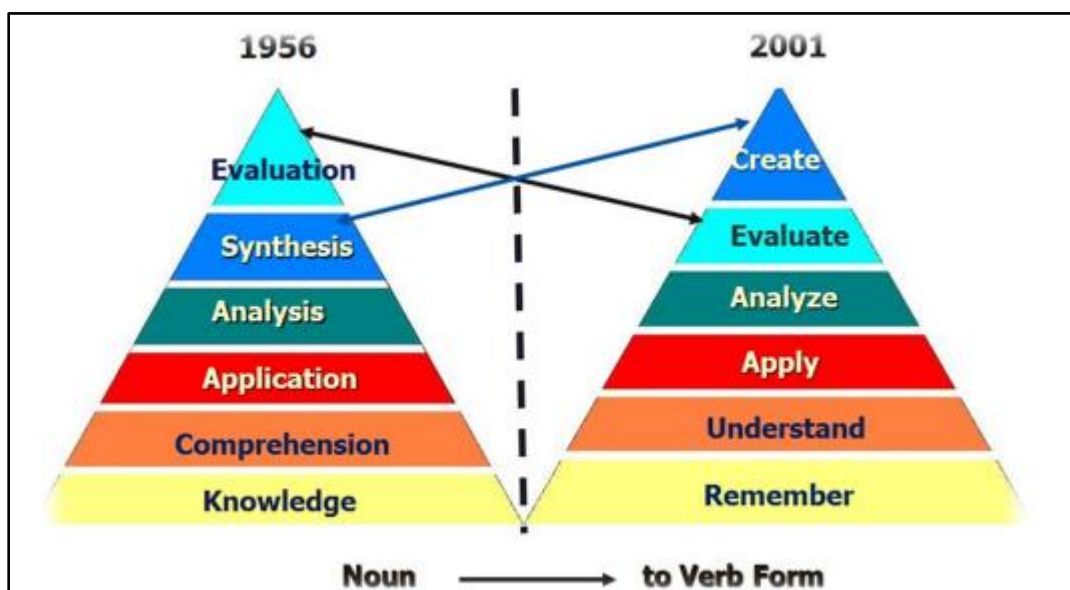
basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, as well as family structures, government, communication, transportation, money or other forms of economic exchange, religion, occupations, recreation, and perhaps other factors as well (p. 168).

How this occurs is that once cultural universals are taught with a focus on ideas and their real-life application to social studies concepts, such as “when facts are linked between the past and present” (NIE, 2015a, p. 15), students can develop fundamental understandings of “how and why it got to be that way over time” (Alleman et al., 2007, p. 169). In this sense, students can draw their own experiences from ideas and concepts which are “internalised” (NIE, 2015a, p. 15) to construct new understandings (Grant et al., 2022), while teachers, in supportive learning environments, guide students to “construct new understandings based on their prior knowledge” (NIE, 2015a, p. 15). Aitken and Sinnema (2008) state that this process of students contextualising and comparing enriches their comprehension and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

Constructing new meaning is a form of an inquiry-based learning (Schwab, 1960), which will be further discussed later in this chapter. To construct new meanings and understandings requires teachers to “provide students with learning experiences in a hierarchal manner from knowledge to synthesis level” (NIE, 2015a, p. 15). This progression from foundational knowledge to high-order synthesis aligns with the Bloom’s Taxonomy theory (Bloom, 1956). This theory involves processes of learning which evolves through different cognitive levels. The Bloom’s Taxonomy theory underwent a significant revision by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), who categorised two levels; the lower processes of remember, understand, apply; and the upper processes of – analyse, evaluate, and create. Figure 3.1 below shows the old version (Bloom, 1956) and the new version (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) of the Bloom’s Taxonomy model.

Figure 3.1

Bloom's Taxonomy Model



Note: Reproduced with permission from Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)

Understanding Bloom's Taxonomy is crucial in education, particularly in the teaching and learning of social studies. By following this framework, teachers can design lessons that cater to students' cognitive development needs. It helps to ensure that students' progress through increasingly complex levels of thinking, ultimately leading to deeper understanding and critical thinking skills. For instance, in social studies, students may begin by remembering historical facts, progress to understanding the causes and effects of events, and eventually to analysing different perspectives, and evaluating and synthesising historical evidence. In my study, understanding and applying Bloom's Taxonomy is essential for shaping teachers' social studies pedagogy. By incorporating student-centred approaches, i.e. inquiry-based learning, aligned with Bloom's taxonomy, teachers can facilitate students' construction of new meanings and understandings. This approach fosters active engagement, critical thinking, and the development of high-order cognitive skills, all which are vital for effective social studies education.

Therefore, social studies in the NCF (NIE, 2015a) encourages teachers to provide students with an in-depth understanding of the unique Maldivian culture, and an appreciation of its heritage. Additionally, it promotes national identity by embedding

Maldivian tradition and culture within the curriculum, drawing from its historical context while also addressing contemporary and future. To fully understand the connections between values, skills, knowledge and understanding, it is essential to explore how they interrelate and influence each other within the context of education. While each component plays a crucial role in the learning process, ultimately, the vision of the curriculum is that “every child is prepared for life” (NIE, 2015a, p. 8), by equipping them with the necessary values, skills, knowledge and understanding to thrive in an ever-changing world. Values serve as guiding principles that inform students’ actions and attitudes towards learning. Skills are essential for applying knowledge effectively and navigating various academic and real-world challenges. Knowledge provides the framework for understanding the world around us and forms the basis for further learning and inquiry, while understanding allows students to make sense of complex concepts, apply them in diverse contexts, and generate new insights through critical reflection. While each component is important in its own right, they are introduced together and are mutually reinforcing. Values shape the development of skills, which in turn facilitate the acquisition and application of knowledge. Understanding emerges from the synthesis of knowledge and skills, guided by underlying values and beliefs. In conclusion, the relationship between values, skills, knowledge, and understanding are dynamic and multifaceted. They work in tandem to support students’ holistic development and academic success.

Therefore, the NCF outlines specific values, skills, knowledge, and understandings that students are expected to acquire in social studies. These elements are detailed within the eight key competencies which are further developed and demonstrated in students’ learning experiences. Each learning area, including social studies, aims to achieve the key competencies outline in the NCF.

3.2.2.3 Citizenship Education

The Maldives Social Studies Syllabus Key Stage 1 (NIE, 2015b, p. 15; 2022b, 2022c) and Key Stage 2 (NIE, 2015c, p. 11) describes citizenship education as a way to “help students acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives”. Citizenship

education develops skills, knowledge, and understanding that learners require in order to play a full part in society as responsible and active citizens. Through citizenship education, students can learn about human rights, voting, and parliament as well as politics, justice, law, and the economy (NIE, 2015a). The NCF document does not explicitly state a definition or purpose to citizenship education, similar to the syllabus for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, the NCF document still reflects the concept through its emphasis on values, skills, knowledge and understanding, key competencies and strands that contribute to students' development as responsible and engaged members of society. The NCF (NIE, 2015a) discusses active citizenship as one of the six strands (see Section 2.8) that is integrated in each learning area and how the strand contributes to the students' learning experience. In social sciences, the active citizenship strand aims to:

enhance the students to understand the historical development of the structures of power, authority, and governance and their evolving functions in an individuals' society as well as in other parts of the world. Through this strand students study the dynamic relationships among individual rights and responsibilities, the needs of social groups, and concepts of a just society (NIE, 2015a, p. 45).

This quote above highlights the pivotal role of social studies education in cultivating students' awareness of historical power dynamics and governance structures, both locally and globally. It emphasises the interconnectedness of individual rights, social group needs and the pursuit of justice within the societies leading to a transformative society (Banks, 2008a) by developing critical thinking skills to analyse contemporary societal issues. By exploring these themes, it becomes evident that citizenship education involves concepts of participation and actions aimed at benefitting the society (Mutch et al., 2007). Alternatively, citizenship education fosters informed decision-making for the public good in a diverse and changing world (Barr et al., 1997). Social studies curriculum in the Maldives helps the students to explore their pasts and understand their contexts thus enabling them to value their roots or origin. The subject enables them to appreciate the interrelationship between individuals across time, cultures, and environments while developing civic efficacy (Manik et al., 2014). Through social studies, learners can develop the skills and knowledge which help

them to make sound and informed decisions that are required of an active and responsible citizen of a democratic society in an independent world (Banks, 2008b).

Moreover, social studies also help Maldivian students to appreciate their diversity and have respect for one another while learning to be tolerant and compassionate. As a Maldivian citizen, it is required to follow the religion of the nation, Islam, and become “competent and responsible citizens are informed and thoughtful, participate in their communities, are involved politically, and exhibit moral and civic virtues” (NIE, 2015b, p. 15) . In other words, this aligns with Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) understanding of how a citizen in a society is an individual who “actively participate in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels” (p.241). To secure the future of society, teachers should equip the younger generations with the skills of civic engagement and participation. The NCF aims to produce confident, competent, and responsible young people the country needs, and aims to impact the knowledge of values in the Maldivian culture and encourages the young to practice these values. This imperative task is accomplished through citizenship education, which is embedded within the framework of social studies. It provides the foundational knowledge needed to cultivate a continuous influx of engaged citizens dedicated to the advancement of a civilised society (Keating & Janmaat, 2016).

For teachers, understanding the importance of citizenship education in social studies pedagogy is essential for effectively preparing students for active citizenship. By integrating citizenship education into their teaching practices, teachers can empower students to become informed and insightful citizens in the society. Afterall, social studies has “a key part to play in equipping students to be critically literate and future-facing thinkers and citizens” (Hunter, 2016, p. 127). By providing students with the values, skills, knowledge and understanding needed to participate meaningfully in the society as Muslim citizens, social studies education plays a vital role in shaping the future of the Maldives nation. This aligns with the broader goals of the NCF, which aims to produce confident, competent, and responsible citizens who contribute to the advancement of society. Therefore, teachers should recognise the importance of citizenship education in their pedagogical approaches and strive to integrate it effectively into their teaching practices to empower students for active citizenship in a democratic society.

3.2.3 Section Summary

The literature offers an exploration of social studies education in the Maldives, emphasising its unique integration of Islamic teaching, cultural values, and citizenship education. Firstly, the review introduces the nature of social studies and provides an overview of the Maldives National Curriculum Framework (NCF), highlighting its vision for preparing students for life. Secondly, it examines the structure of the Maldivian education system, the role of the NCF, and the curriculum's focus on social studies.

Thirdly, the discussion narrows down to the specifics of the Maldivian social studies curriculum, emphasising the incorporation of Islamic teaching and culture into students' learning. Fourthly, the review further elaborates on the influence of Islam and Islamic values on social studies education, detailing how Islam is integrated into various aspects of the curriculum so that it fosters the development of responsible Muslim citizens.

Fourthly, the review investigates the values, skills, knowledge, and understanding imparted through social studies education. It highlights the NCF's emphasis on values development and the acquisition of essential skills for active citizenship, such as critical thinking and problem solving. Additionally, it underscores the importance of connecting learning experiences to students' lives to enhance engagement and comprehension.

Finally, the review explores citizenship education within the framework of social studies, emphasising its role in preparing students to be competent and responsible citizens. It discusses how the social studies curriculum cultivates awareness of societal structures, promote civic engagement, and fosters respect for diversity.

Overall, the sections under *Exploring Social Studies Curriculum* collectively underscore the holistic approach of social studies education in the Maldives, which integrates Islamic teaching, cultural values, and citizenship education to prepare students for active citizenship and participation in society while nurturing their sense of identity, values, and civic responsibility.

3.3 Learning Theories in Education and their relation to Social Studies Education

Theories relating to understanding how people learn explain the processes of how people actively engage in order to make sense of knowledge, and how they integrate that knowledge to create new meanings and understandings (Saunders & Wong, 2020). Learning theories also help us to observe, examine and analyse what engages students to learn and what learning environments enable or hinder learning (Bates, 2019). This is important to education as learning theories can significantly improve a student's ability to learn new skills, concepts, and ideas (Pritchard, 2017). The goal that exists behind understanding and applying learning theories in educational contexts, is to "understand objectively how people learn and then develop teaching approaches accordingly" (Fairbanks, 2021, p. 1). This essentially means that teachers can acquire certain techniques in order to assist their students to achieve the outcomes of social studies education.

Bates (2019) explains that there must be a great "emphasis on how learners think and learn, and the personal qualities that teachers need to have in order to do what is right for their learners" (p.254). In social studies education, as defined above, the nature of the subject is embedded in the social, so teachers can draw on theories which emphasise learning through the social. Three such theories are socio-cultural theory, social constructivism theory, and social reconstructionism theory. The following subsections examine these three theories and their significance to this study.

3.3.1 Socio-Cultural Theory

The socio-cultural theory considers how learners are impacted by their peers and how social scenarios impact their ability to get information. The theory first originated from the work of the psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). He strongly believed that learning takes place through the interactions between people and cultural tools (McLeod, 2020). Vygotsky and Cole (1978) underscored the significance of social interaction, cultural tools, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in shaping learning experiences. Chaiklin (2003) explained that Vygotsky's concept of

the ZPD highlights the gap between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with the guidance and support of more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers and peers. In the context of social studies education in the Maldives, this theory suggests that educators should create learning environments that foster collaboration and interaction, allowing students to explore topics within the ZPD with support from their peers and teachers.

According to Phillips (1995), Vygotsky and Cole (1978) emphasised cultural aspects of learning, suggesting that learning is influenced by social interactions and cultural context. In contrast, Piaget (1980) focused on the biological, psychological, and cognitive aspects of the individual learner, viewing learning as a process that occurs internally within the learner. Dewey (1929), took a more holistic approach, considering learning within the broader environment. He emphasised the importance of learning context, the role of experience, and the influence of learner communities in shaping the learning process. While Dewey's work emerged earlier and was widely available before Vygotsky's theories were translated into English (Mayer, 2008), his ideas align with aspects of both Vygotsky's and Piaget's theories. Dewey recognised the influence of individual cognitive processes while also emphasising the social and experiential nature of learning. However, socio cultural theory as articulated by Vygotsky goes beyond this by stressing the role of culture, language, and social interactions in shaping learning.

In essence, while Vygotsky focused on the socio-cultural aspects of learning, Piaget emphasized individual cognitive development, and Dewey considered the interaction between social and cognitive factors in the learning process. The socio-cultural theory of learning as articulated by Vygotsky and Cole (1978), not only focuses on how peers and adults influence learning but also highlights how attitudes, cultural beliefs, and social interactions shape how learning. This philosophy emphasises the role of culture in learning, enabling students to apply their cognitive abilities in ways that are adaptive to the cultural contexts in which they live (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This enables students to use their basic mental capabilities in a way that is adaptive to the culture in which they live. The model is used in social studies to emphasize the interaction between people and their environment. The socio-cultural theory of learning advocates for a strong relationship between the learners and the teachers based on social

interaction (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). When teachers create a conducive learning environment; the learners tend to be more engaged and cooperative. Moreover, cultural tools, including language (such as Dhivehi) and beliefs (such as Islam), play a crucial role in the socio-cultural theory. Language serves a primary cultural tool through which knowledge is transmitted, shared, and constructed. In the Maldives, incorporating Dhivehi language in social studies curriculum would not only facilitate communication but also deepen students' understanding of their cultural heritage and identity. Similarly, the integration of Islamic beliefs and values into social studies education aligns with Vygotsky's theory, as it acknowledges the influence of cultural context of learning.

Research highlights that the loss of first-language proficiency and the increasing dominance of English in Maldivian education may contribute to weaker cultural identity and disengagement from traditional knowledge (Hameed, 2020; Mohamed, 2020). Bosch et al. (2023), suggest that English-medium instruction can limit students' cognitive engagement and comprehension. Furthermore, they argue for a bilingual model that ensures education quality while maintaining Dhivehi and recognising the necessity of English. While young people express pride in Dhivehi as a marker of identity, they tend to perceive English as a more valuable for a social and economic mobility, which can further marginalise their first language in formal education (Mohamed, 2020). While English is often prioritised in educational policies, translanguaging approaches that allow student to fluidly use both Dhivehi and English could enhance conceptual understanding and learning experiences (Mohamed & Nihaadh, 2023).

By recognising the interconnectedness of socio-cultural factors and learning, educators can tailor instructional strategies to leverage students' cultural backgrounds and experiences. In the Maldivian context, this approach involves integrating Dhivehi language and more Islamic teachings and activities into social studies curriculum, thereby promoting meaningful engagement, and enhancing students' socio-cultural understanding. Moreover, socio-cultural perspectives on social inquiry pedagogy and assessment support teachers in implementing and developing inclusive pedagogies that favour every learner (Morton & Guerin, 2017). The socio-cultural approach recognizes the dynamic interactions between learning, teaching, and assessments.

The Maldives NCF's emphasis on "effective pedagogy" that "acknowledge that individuals differences exist" among every learner reflects socio-cultural principles (NIE, 2015a, p. 62). By recognising the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences, the framework supports the creation of learning environments where all students feel valued and included.

In a culturally responsive approach, the practice of learning is recognized as sociocultural. From a socio-cultural perspective, all students are valued and recognized as individuals who bring their own knowledge and experience across many contexts. While the NCF does not explicitly mention socio-cultural theory, its emphasis on values, skills, knowledge and understanding aligns with the principles of socio-cultural learning. The framework aims to develop Maldivian students as responsible and engaged Muslim citizens of the society, which resonates with the socio-cultural perspective's focus on social interactions and community engagement. Overall, the Maldives NCF reflects socio-cultural thinking by emphasising the importance of cultural context, social interactions, and community engagement in the learning process. By incorporating Dhivehi language, Islamic teachings, and active citizenship into the curriculum, the framework promotes a holistic approach to education that recognises and empowers students' cultural identities and foster their development as responsible citizens. Therefore, the socio-cultural theory offers insights into how teachers' social studies pedagogy can be enriched by considering the dynamic interplay between culture, language, beliefs, and learning experiences.

3.3.2 Social Constructivism Theory

When it comes to constructivism, there are various forms of interpretation (Phillips, 1997), however, the underlying principle is consistent (Mayer, 2004). It posits that learning is an active, contextualised endeavour in which learners construct knowledge by integrating new information with existing understanding to form structured knowledge (Adams, 2006; Mayer, 2004; Shephard, 2008).

Constructivist learning theories have been heavily influenced by the work of Dewey (1929), Piaget (1980), Vygotsky and Cole (1978). In education, constructivism

encompasses two main theories: Psychological constructivism (theory of learning), based on the work of Jean Piaget, which focuses on how individuals learn, and social constructivism (theory of knowledge production) based on the work of Lev Vygotsky, which focuses on how knowledge is constructed (McPhail, 2017). Psychological constructivism primarily concerns how individuals learn and understand the world around them (Raskin, 2008). Piaget (1973) famously asserted that “to understand is to discover, or reconstruct by rediscovery” (p. 20), which is the notion of connecting prior knowledge with new ideas to advance learning (Deshler et al., 2001; Wadsworth, 1996). The “constructivist stance maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999, p. 260). Piaget further explained this process through the concepts of “mental schemas, (dis)equilibrium, assimilation, and accommodation” (McPhail, 2017, p. 1). Thus, the constructivist framework holds that reality is constructed via one’s developmental processes, biological forces, the human mind, and cognitive structures (Berger & Luckmann, 2023).

While Piaget believed that learning is individually constructed, Vygotsky and Cole (1978) posited that learning is socially constructed. Vygotsky and Cole (1978) underscored the significance of social elements in learning, portraying students as *active* learners in their own educational journey. It distinguishes between everyday knowledge and academic knowledge, emphasising the social process of constructing knowledge systems. Vygotsky’s theory examines the development of jointly structured understandings of the world that forms the basis for shared assumptions about reality (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Thus, social factors within the learning environment are significant in the development of knowledge and understanding.

Vygotsky (1962) also emphasised the pivotal role of teachers in guiding students towards further learning through direct instruction. Karpov (2003) states that a teacher’s role is to leverage students’ everyday knowledge, which is typically unstructured, to scaffold their understanding of academic, which is more organised and structured. This process of scaffolding involves providing support and guidance as students navigate new learning experiences, gradually assisting them to bridging the gap between what they already know and what they are striving to understand. This idea aligns with “The map does not take place of an actual journey” (Dewey, 1900,

p. 198), which asserts that just as the map serves as a guide for navigating unfamiliar terrain, teachers scaffold students' learning by providing them with structured frameworks and guidance. However, that true essence of learning lies not in merely studying the map but in engaging in the authentic experiences that lead to deeper understanding and insight (Grant et al., 2022). Although Dewey's work predates both Piaget and Vygotsky, later scholars have observed conceptual parallels, noting Dewey's emphasis on experiential learning resonates with Vygotsky's social constructivism and Piaget's cognitive development theory (Shiyama, 2020). Therefore, while structured knowledge and guidance are essential components of the learning process, they must be complemented by authentic experiences that enable students to apply contextualise and internalise their learning in meaningful ways.

Social constructivism focuses on the role that social interaction plays in creating knowledge. According to this approach, knowledge is formed based on social consensus and social interaction. Hwang et al. (2015) argue that social studies teachers should urge students to collaborate, think critically, build their understanding of social concepts, and connect classroom lessons to their lives. By applying social constructivism principles in social studies classrooms, significant shift occurs in classroom management dynamics and the roles of both teachers and learners. This approach cultivates a learning environment where the focus extends beyond mere academic achievement to encompass holistic growth (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Social constructivism theories posit that learning is rooted in real-life adaptive, problem-solving processes, occurring through social interaction, discussion, and shaped experiences. In this framework, novel ideas are juxtaposed against existing knowledge, and learners engage in the process of conforming to established rules to make sense of their surroundings.

The constructivist approach emphasises the interconnectedness of key ideas within a subject area. For instance, in social studies, concepts like diversity and conflict might be used to teach units on exploration, warfare, and government at different grade levels. The choice of social constructivism for this research is apt given its focus on how knowledge is produced and validated within social contexts. In the Maldives context, where social studies education plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of society, culture, and citizenship, social constructivism provides a

framework for exploring how students' cultural backgrounds and experiences influence their learning. Additionally, social reconstructionism aligns with the emphasis on active citizenship and critical thinking skills promoted in the NCF (NIE, 2015a), making it relevant and effective theoretical lens for this research. By considering the socio-cultural factors at play, the study examines how Maldivian primary teachers reflect on their practices to create inclusive learning environments that enhance students' engagement with social studies pedagogy.

To achieve this, teachers must actively embrace strategies that promote inclusivity and collaboration. Social constructivism offers a valuable framework for achieving these goals, particularly within the realm of social inquiry pedagogy. This pedagogical approach (which will be later discussed in his chapter), emphasises student centred learning and shifts the focus from the teacher to the students (Fox & Alldred, 2015). Within the social constructivist paradigm, knowledge is viewed as dynamic and ever-evolving, reflective of the complex realities of the world. In this context, collaborative learning becomes a structured process mediated by the teacher, wherein both students and teachers participate in co-constructing knowledge and understanding. Through this approach, teachers can cultivate an environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and students are empowered to engage meaningfully with the curriculum.

3.3.3 Social Reconstructionist Theory

The social reconstructionist theory focuses on the creation of reality and how individuals view the world (Parks, 2006). It is a philosophy that aims to reconstruct society (Perez, 2020) and address social questions to create and instil positive change within the society through influence of education (Shor, 2012). According to Sutinen (2014), social reconstructionist philosophy in education advocates for the development of students who possess critical thinking skills regarding culture, can navigate or transform social situations, and contribute to establishing a new social order. Garth-McCullough (2008) states that each learner's prior experience and cultural background influences how they construct and connect with new knowledge.

Hence, it is a theory based on the understanding that a community, society, or a group of people can be *reconstructed* through the influence of education and knowledge.

Webb et al. (2010) expands on this notion stating that social reconstructionist theory encourages teachers to educate and inspire students to envision the possibilities beyond the current realities. Reality is built through the use of languages in interactions with others and is primarily influenced by society, culture, and history (Rabiah, 2018). When engaging in new learning, students bring “multiple and varied experiences to make sense of new learning” (LePage-Kljajic, 2019). The philosophy of social reconstructionist fosters the idea of changing the world to a better place. Accordingly, this urges the students to become catalysts for a change by questioning, reconstructing prevailing norms and striving to enhance societal conditions for all (Perez, 2020). Hence, students become the “critical element in bringing about social change” (Webb et al., 2010). To promote social change in the society, the social reconstructionist theory emphasises the purpose of social studies education in the Maldives by developing “the knowledge and skills which help students to make informed and reasoned decisions that are required of responsible and active citizens” (NIE, 2015a, pp. 43-45), while teachers embrace the role as “cultivating leaders for societal reconstruction” (Mayne, 2014, p. 51). Given the focus of this thesis, the application of social reconstructionist theory in social studies education holds significant importance, as it encourages teachers to adopt a facilitative rather than an instructional role in the classroom.

Within a social reconstructionist approach, students are encouraged to examine social issues through a different perspective, one that involves the reconstruction of their ideas and experiences through the lens of social studies education. This process enables them to develop a new understanding and interpretation of their role within the Maldives society. The significance of applying social reconstructionist theory in social studies education in the Maldives lies in its potential to address the pressing challenges faced by the nation, such as social inequality, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. By fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and leadership skills among students, social studies education can empower future generations to confront these challenges effectively. Additionally, promoting a sense of social responsibility and active citizenship is essential for building a cohesive and

resilient society in the face of rapid socio-economic and environmental changes. Therefore, as the vision of preparing every child for life (NIE, 2015a), social studies education in the Maldives aims to nurture responsible citizens who can envision and contribute to a better society. By employing social constructivist principles in the classroom, teachers are empowered to provide students with the opportunity to reconstruct their own understanding through meaningful learning experiences and engagement with diverse perspectives.

3.3.4 Section Summary

The exploration of socio-cultural, social constructivism, and social reconstructionist theories highlights the multifaceted nature of learning and teaching in social studies education. Socio-cultural theory underscores the importance of social interaction and cultural context in shaping learning experiences. It emphasises the dynamic interplay between learners, their environment, and cultural tools, advocating for inclusive pedagogies that value students' diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Similarly, social constructivism theory emphasises the active construction of knowledge through social interaction and collaborative problem-solving. By fostering collaborative learning environments, teachers can empower students to construct their understanding of social studies concepts and develop critical thinking skills essential for active citizenship. On the other hand, social reconstructionist theory focuses on using education as a tool for societal change encouraging students to challenge existing norms and strive for positive transformation. By adopting a social reconstructionist approach, teachers can cultivate learning environments that foster critical social inquiry and social consciousness among students, empowering them to contribute to positive societal change.

In considering the relevance of these theories to the research at hand, all three offer valuable perspectives on teaching and learning in social studies education. Together, they provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers shape their pedagogy through reflection, professional learning, and engagement with their socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Socio-cultural theory highlights the way in which cultural tools, social interactions, and historical contexts influence teaching and learning. Social

constructivist theory emphasises the active role of teachers and students in knowledge construction, particularly through reflection and collaboration, key aspects of my study. Meanwhile, social reconstructionist theory provides a critical lens on how education can serve as a vehicle for societal transformation, which is particularly relevant in discussions about the evolving role of social studies in Maldivian education.

By drawing on insights from all three theories, my research examines how Maldivian primary teachers develop and refine their social studies pedagogy. This aligns with discussions in Chapter 2, which highlights how the historical, cultural, and institutional contexts of Maldivian education shape teacher development and pedagogical practice. The integration of socio-cultural, social constructivist, and social reconstructionist theories into social studies pedagogy must therefore be understood within these broader influences, including the National Curriculum Framework, the role of Islamic and cultural values, and the evolving nature of the Maldivian education system.

3.4 Conceptualising Teachers' Social Studies Pedagogical Practice

Conceptualising teacher's social studies pedagogy involves three key aspects: defining pedagogy, examining pedagogy as practice versus pedagogy as praxis, and exploring how the development of teachers' pedagogical practice, i.e. teaching strategies and techniques, can enhance teachers' pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge in social studies for better student outcomes.

Pedagogy is the study and practice of teaching and learning methods, particularly in the field of education. It encompasses theories and principles of how people learn, as well as strategies and techniques for facilitating learning in various contexts (Learn, 2000). This implies that pedagogy is a method in which teachers learn to teach in theory and practice and improve through professional learning and development. In exploring pedagogy, it is essential to differentiate between viewing pedagogy as a mere practice and understanding it as praxis (Haffenden, 2003). While *practice* refers to the actions of teaching, *praxis* encompasses a broader engagement with theoretical ideas applied through practice within specific contexts (Smith et al., 2010). Pedagogy as praxis transcends the dichotomy of theory and practice, emphasising the active

engagement of practitioners in critically applying theoretical frameworks to their teaching contexts (Alexander, 2004). This comprehensive approach recognises teachers as reflective agents who continually refine their pedagogical approaches through ongoing dialogue and interaction with educational theories and societal norms (Nind et al., 2016). This distinction allows us to explore the multifaceted nature of pedagogical approaches and their implications for social studies education.

Defining the term 'pedagogy' is known to be complex as there are many "contradictory perspectives and paradigms..." (Soetaert et al., 2004, p. 155). Pedagogy can be metaphorically conceived as science, craft, or art (Nind et al., 2016). Each metaphor offers distinct perspectives on teaching and learning. Viewing pedagogy as science entails a reductionist approach focused on measurable and controlled behaviours, often neglecting contextual differences (Galton, 2007). Alternatively, conceptualising pedagogy as a craft emphasises teachers' practical knowledge and situational expertise, acknowledging the complexity and variability of educational contexts (Shulman, 1987). Recent authors such as Kapur (2020) underline that "pedagogy is concerned with the teaching processes" (p.1), which aligns with the idea of pedagogy as a craft, emphasising the dynamic nature of teaching practices. Additionally, pedagogy is perceived as how a teacher acts or thinks within a classroom (Anderson, 2005), suggesting a personalised and context-specific approach to instruction. Likewise, Hinchliffe (2000) states that pedagogy can be interpreted as a "learning oriented towards social goals" (p.1). Hence, pedagogy concerns the process of teaching and how a teacher implements strategies to help students learn to navigate within society. Finally, pedagogy as art underscores the creative and subjective aspects of teaching, highlighting the importance of imagination and expression in educational interactions (Shulman, 1986). These perspectives collectively contribute to a multifaceted understanding of pedagogy, emphasising its dynamic and context-dependent nature.

Pedagogy is not a static concept but rather a dynamic process that encompasses various dimensions intertwined in the teaching and learning environment. (Nind et al., 2016) proposed a model that delineates three interconnected facets of pedagogy; pedagogy as specified, pedagogy as enacted, and pedagogy as experienced, portraying an understanding of its essence (see Figure 3.2). This model moves beyond

the traditional views of pedagogy as merely an art or praxis, instead emphasizing the multifaceted nature of how pedagogy is defined, practiced, and perceived. It acknowledges the intricate interplay between planned and unplanned interactions within the education milieu, underscoring pedagogy's inherently dynamic and contextualised nature (Galton, 2007; Loughran, 2013a, 2013b). By embracing pedagogy as a process, this model illuminates the complex relationship between teachers, students, and the educational system as a whole (Alexander, 2004), paving the way for a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' social studies pedagogy.

Figure 3.2

The Three Dimensions of Pedagogy



Note: This figure has been removed from the publicly available version of this thesis due to copyright restrictions. Please refer to the original source: Nind, M., Curtin, A., & Hall, K. (2016). Research methods for pedagogy. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Drawing upon the conceptual framework, my study explores the pedagogical dynamics within the context of social studies education in Maldivian primary schools. Adopting the Nind et al. (2016) model establishes a way to study the dynamic interplay between pedagogical theory and practice within the specific context of social studies education in the Maldives. Nind et al. (2016) explains that the first-dimension, *pedagogy as specified*, entails the theoretical underpinnings and policy-driven

mandates that shaped the educational landscape. The focus here lies on the delineation of knowledge that is guided by the educational policies and teaching practices. In the context of Maldives curriculum (NIE, 2015a) and social studies syllabi (NIE, 2015b, 2015c, 2022b, 2022c), the documents outline the aims and expectation of the social studies discipline. They specify student learning outcomes and indicators, describe five dimensions of effective pedagogy that educators are encouraged to adopt, and provide guidance and resources to support curriculum implementation in the classroom.

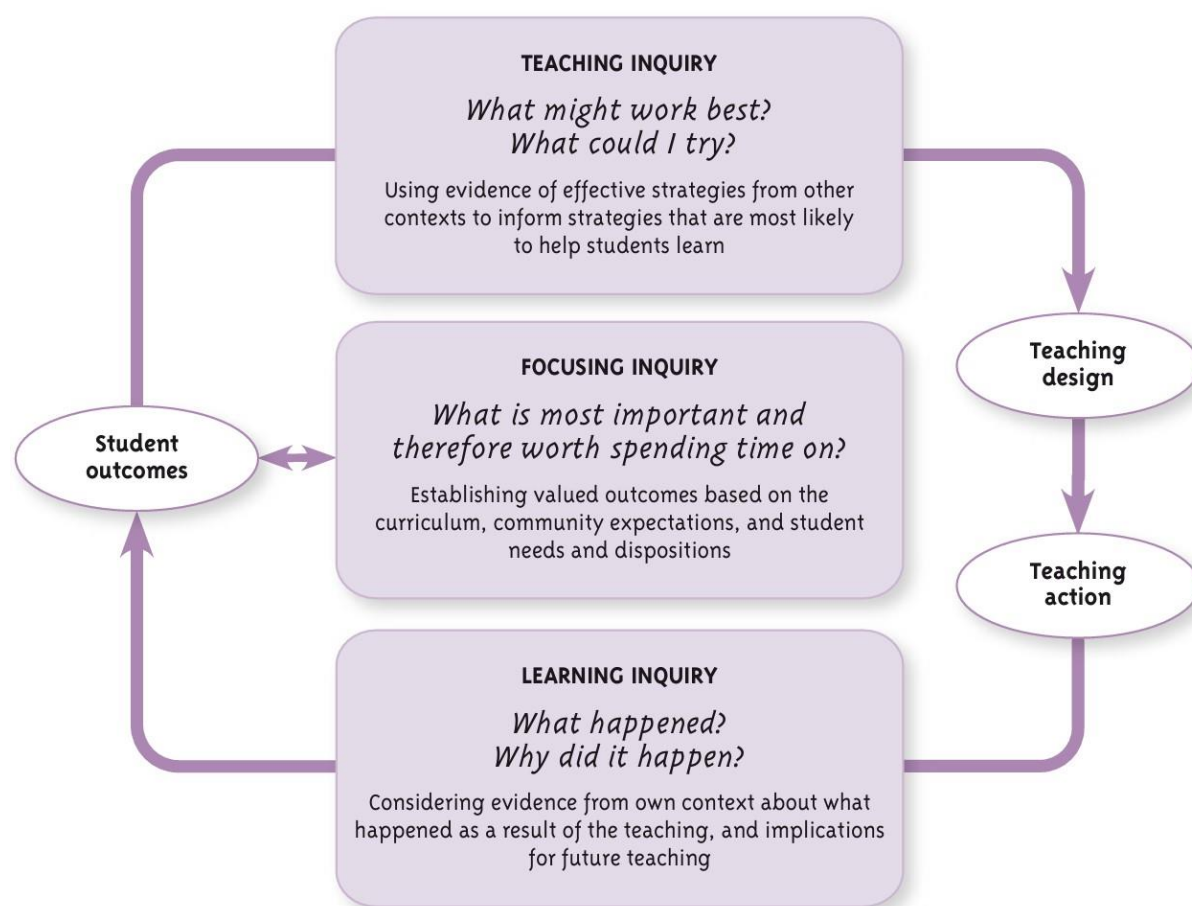
The second dimension, *pedagogy enacted*, refers to how teachers translate prescribed pedagogies into classrooms practices, and shape the way the curriculum is implemented in real teaching contexts. Teachers adapt instructional strategies and materials to suit unique individual students, embodying the theory practice nexus inherent in pedagogies as praxis. In the Maldivian context, this dimension manifests in ways teachers can interpret and implement inquiry-based approaches to teach social studies, by considering factors such as student backgrounds and classroom dynamics. Finally, the third dimension, *pedagogy as experienced*, explores the lived realities of both the teachers and students within the classroom (Nind et al., 2016). Here the focus is on how pedagogical practices are decoded and interpreted by the teachers. This exploration offers a socio-cultural perspective, highlighting the interactive nature of pedagogical processes as negotiated and realised by teachers and students alike. Hence, by integrating all three of these dimensions, this study seeks to explore how *specified, enacted, and experienced* pedagogies intersect to shape the teaching and learning of social studies education in Maldivian primary classroom.

Nevertheless, the question remains; How does pedagogy inform good teaching and learning to take place within a classroom? Within the unique dynamic setting of a classroom, characterised by its multidimensional physical layout and interactions between the teachers and students, educators are tasked with leveraging a diverse array of qualities, such as “attitudes, skills, knowledge and experience” (Macfarlane & Prochnow, 2011, p. 41). Hence, it is imperative to understand “what works”, “why”, and “in what circumstances” a specific teaching strategy proves effective (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008, p. 52). Thus, Aitken and Sinnema (2008) proposes a *model of*

evidence-informed pedagogy based on teacher inquiry, which consists of three phases of inquiry: focusing inquiry, teaching inquiry, and learning inquiry. Figure 3.3 illustrates the model of pedagogy based on teaching inquiry.

Figure 3.3

Teaching as inquiry: a model of evidence-formed pedagogy



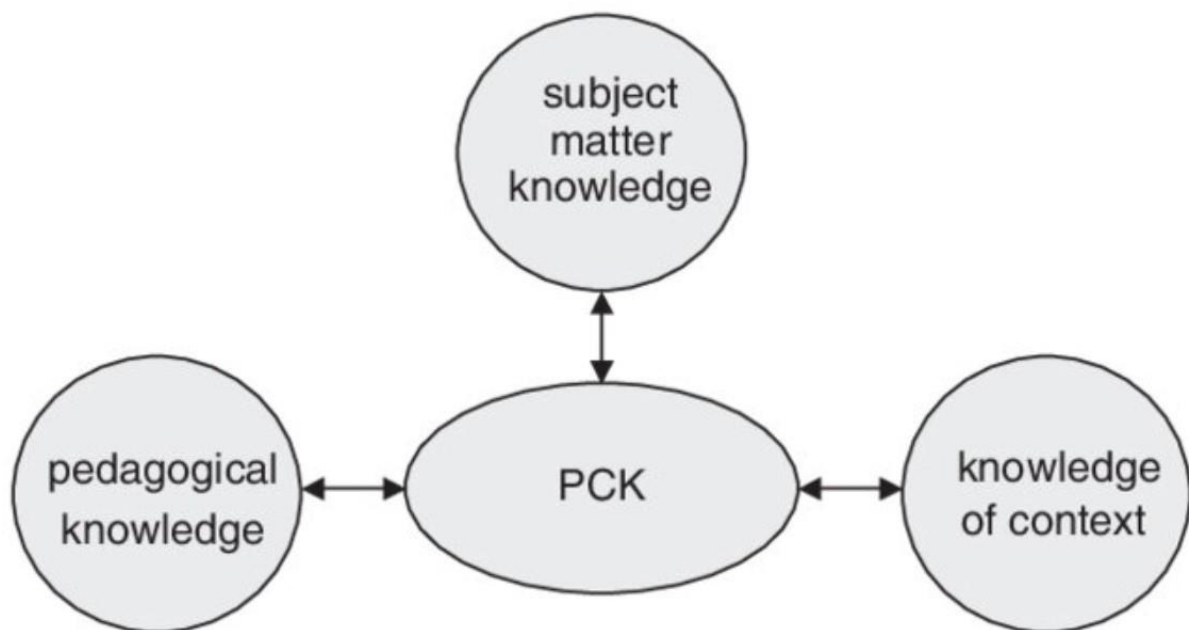
Note: Reproduced with permission from Aitken and Sinnema (2008).

The focusing inquiry helps teachers prioritise “what is most important and therefore worth spending time on?” based on curriculum requirements, community expectations, and students’ learning needs. In the teaching inquiry phase, teachers identify strategies to help students achieve these priorities by asking questions such as “what might work best? Or what could I try?”. Next, in the learning inquiry phase, teachers assess the impact of their teaching actions on student outcomes. They collect evidence to understand what is happening in the classroom and why, using questions like “what happened? Or why did it happen?”. Hence, this process helps identify areas needing improvement and helps teachers adjust their teaching strategies, accordingly,

using a framework of three explanatory mechanisms to guide their decisions. This teacher inquiry process mirrors the essence of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), as teachers consider how to adapt their instructional approaches based on students' needs, prior knowledge, and learning outcomes. The integration of various knowledge components in PCK models as illustrated in Figure 3.4 by Shulman (1986) and Figure 3.5 by Grossman (1990), holds significant relevance for understanding how teachers can enhance their teaching practices by developing their pedagogy within the context of social studies education.

Figure 3.4

Shulman's (1986) Idea of Pedagogical Content Knowledge



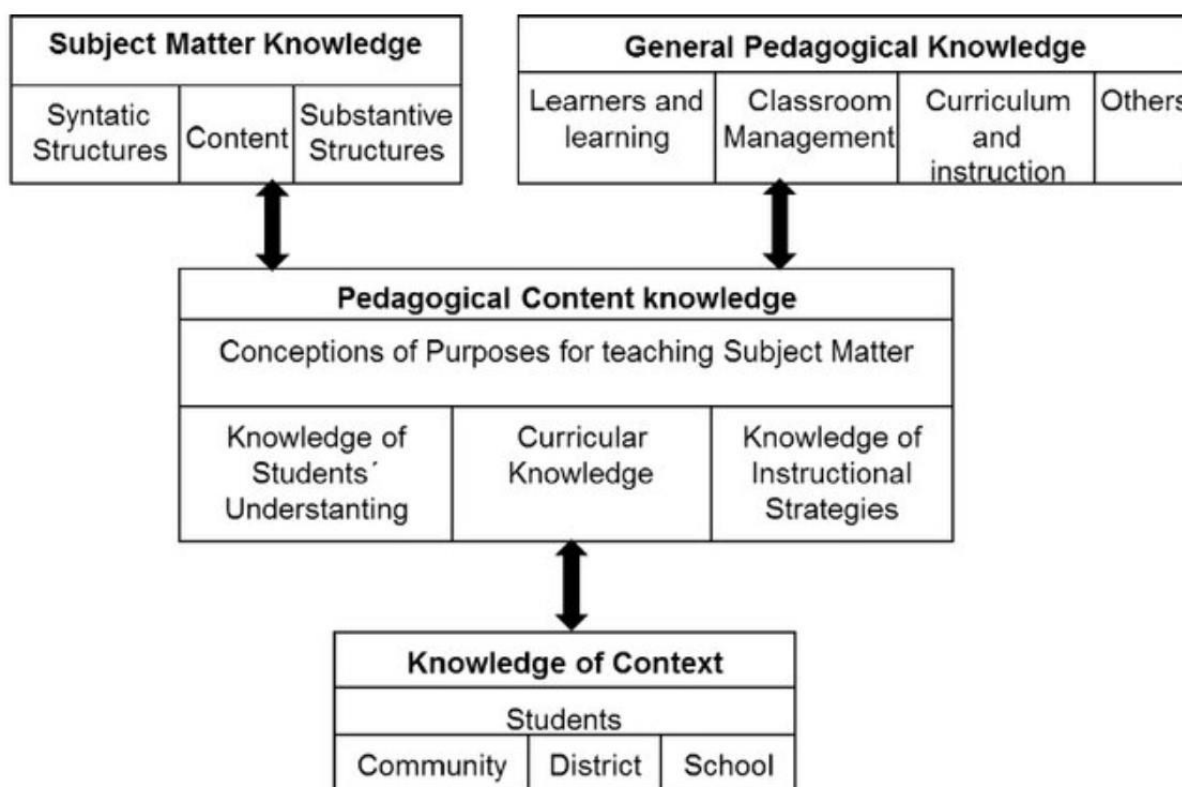
Note: Reproduced with permission from Van Dijk and Kattmann (2007, p. 889)

In Figure 3.5, Shulman (1986) notion of PCK highlights the significant relationship between subject matter knowledge, knowledge of context, and pedagogical knowledge, emphasising their collective influence on shaping teachers' understanding of how teachers can enhance their teaching pedagogy. Similarly, Grossman (1990) model expands upon Shulman's framework by delineating the interconnectedness of subject matter, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of content, and PCK. Within Grossman (1990), PCK emerges as a central component that integrates these

various knowledge domains, emphasising its pivotal role in informing instructional strategies and fostering meaningful learning experiences for students. Figure 3.6 below shows the Grossman's model of PCK developed further from Shulman's notion of PCK.

Figure 3.5

Grossman's (1990) Model of Pedagogical Content Knowledge



Note: Reproduced with permission from Grossman (1990, p. 5)

In education, a strong PCK is essential for enhancing teachers' pedagogy (Tufail, 2021). For my study, this knowledge is vital in several key areas. Firstly, it enables teachers to effectively translate complex content into engaging lessons that foster critical thinking and civic engagement (Fernandez, 2014). Secondly, a robust PCK allows teachers to contextualise learning within students' cultural backgrounds, thus promoting inclusivity and relevance (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Additionally, PCK equips teachers with diverse instructional strategies tailored to students' needs, which will ensure active engagement and meaningful learning experiences (Creasy et al., 2012). By emphasising the importance of PCK in social studies pedagogy, my research

highlights the critical role of teacher's promoting deep understanding and empowering students as informed citizens.

After reviewing various pedagogical practice models, including Nind et al. (2016), Aitken and Sinnema (2008), Shulman (1986) and Grossman (1990), it became clear that each offers a valuable framework for understanding teacher learning, pedagogical development. However, Nind et al.'s (2016), and Aitken and Sinnema's (2008) models align most closely with the objectives of my study due to their strong emphasis on reflective inquiry and teacher learning within professional practice.

Shulman's (1986) model introduced the concept of PCK, emphasising the integration of subject matter knowledge and pedagogy. His work highlights the need for teachers to transform disciplinary knowledge into forms that are accessible and meaningful for students. Grossman (1990) expanded on this identifying the key components of PCK, including the subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of context, further exploring how teachers acquire and develop their teaching expertise. Both of these models offer valuable frameworks for understanding teacher knowledge and pedagogical development, but they are not the best fit for me study for the following reasons:

1. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986): While Shulman's model provides a foundational framework for understanding what teachers need to know, it does not specifically address the process of teacher learning and development through reflective practice. His model categorises knowledge but does not explore how teachers critically engage with their experiences to refine and adapt their pedagogical approaches. Since my study focuses on how teachers develop their pedagogy through reflection, Shulman's model is insufficient in capturing this process.
2. Pedagogical Content Knowledge Model (Grossman, 1990): Grossman's model extends Shulman's by emphasising four key components of PCK, but it remains primarily descriptive rather than process-oriented. It focuses on what teachers need to know rather than how they develop and refine their pedagogy through reflection. Since my study investigates how teachers engage in reflective

practice to improve their social studies pedagogy, Grossman's model does not fully capture this aspect.

In contrast, Nind et al. (2016) and Aitken and Sinnema (2008) offer models that are more dynamic and practice-oriented, making them better suited for my study.

Nind et al. (2016) conceptualise pedagogy as an evolving process involving specification, enactment, and experience. Their model highlights how teachers refine their pedagogical practice through engagement and adaptation. While it does not explicitly reference PCK, the model focuses on curriculum, teacher competence, and reflection, which aligns with the principles of PCK. It highlights *pedagogy as enacted*, involving best practices and teacher competence, and *pedagogy as experienced*, which involves reflecting and transforming teaching practices. These aspects contribute to the continuous refinement of PCK through ongoing teacher learning and reflection.

Aitken and Sinnema (2008) present a model of teacher inquiry that centres on evidence-based decision-making, reflective engagement, and adapting teaching strategies. While not explicitly addressing PCK, their model aligns with its principles by emphasising reflection in shaping pedagogical and instructional practices. This approach closely aligns with my study's focus on how teachers develop their social studies pedagogy through reflection and professional learning.

In examining how teachers develop their pedagogical practices, it is also important to consider the NCF that guides instructional approaches. The Maldives NCF provides a structured foundation for pedagogy, outlining key principles that shape teaching and learning in Maldivian classrooms. In particular, the NCF underscores five pedagogical dimensions that serve as a guiding framework for effective pedagogy (see Figure 3.6, p. 83) which allows “teachers to focus on specific skills, content knowledge and expertise with innovative support systems to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in today's diverse and complex world” (NIE, 2015a, p. 62). These pedagogical dimensions resonate with the essence of the teaching inquiry model (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008) and the pedagogy dimensions model

(Nind et al., 2016), both of which emphasise the need for teachers to continually adapt their pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Figure 3.6

The Five Pedagogical Dimensions



Note: Reproduced with permission from NIE (2015a, p. 62).

Effective pedagogy, according to the NCF, firstly involves teachers creating a positive learning environment where students feel safe, engaged, and motivated to learn. Secondly, the framework highlights the significance of connecting prior learning and experiences to new learning where teachers can identify strategies to build on students' existing knowledge and cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, the framework underscores the value of reflective practice, a core theme of my study, where teachers encourage students to reflect on their learning experiences to gain self-awareness and independence as learning. The last two dimensions of the framework emphasises teachers to make learning meaningful by making the teaching content relevant to the students' lives and by advocating different teaching strategies in the classroom that to accommodate diverse learners and acknowledging individual differences among students.

Overall, a teacher's understanding of social studies pedagogy is an essential aspect of their ability to effectively teach social studies and prepare students to be informed

and responsible citizens. As social studies pedagogy plays a vital role in shaping the youth of the next generation of the society, this means teachers must use effective teaching strategies and techniques to create an inclusive learning environment where they can help their students to develop a deeper understanding of the world and their place in the society. The next subsections highlight important teaching pedagogical approaches for social studies that teachers can implement within their classroom.

3.4.1 Student-centred learning

Student-centred learning is an instructional approach that shifts the focus from the teacher to the students, allowing them to take an active role in constructing knowledge and engaging in meaningful learning experiences (Bayram-Jacobs & Hayırsever, 2016). Within social studies education, two key student-centred teaching approaches are widely recognised: inquiry-based learning (Grant et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2015) and collaborative learning (Adeyemi, 2010; Okeke & Akobi, 2023). These approaches enable teachers to create inclusive and interactive learning environments that support deeper engagement with social issues and historical perspectives.

Student-centred teaching approaches align closely with socio-cultural, social constructivism and social re-constructionist theories of learning (Dewey, 1929; Freire, 1970; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). From a socio-cultural perspective, learning is a social process that occurs through active participation in culturally and historically situated activities (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Social constructivism builds on this by emphasising that students actively construct their own understanding of the world through interactions with their peers, teachers, and their broader environment (Dewey, 1929; Piaget, 1980; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Meanwhile, social reconstructionism extends beyond knowledge construction to include a critical examination of societal structures, encouraging students to challenge and transform societal norms through education (Freire, 1970; Perez, 2020). In this way, student-centred approaches in social studies classrooms foster active engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative exploration of diverse perspectives.

Student-centred learning approaches focus on meeting individual needs and interests

of the individual student, rather than the teacher or curriculum (Carrington, 2023). These approaches empower students to own of their own learning, and encourages them to ask questions, investigate real-world issues, and construct their own understanding rather than passively receive information. As Carrington (2023) explains “the emphasis is on the student to actively engage with the material and construct their own understanding” (p.1).

Within the context of social studies education, inquiry-based learning and collaborative learning are particularly effective in promoting student agency, critical thinking, and engagement with complex societal issues (Gillies, 2016, 2023). The following subsections explore these student-centred approaches in depth, examining their theoretical underpinnings, practical applications and potential benefits in the social studies classroom.

3.4.2 Inquiry-based learning approach

The inquiry-based learning approach is particularly significant in social studies education because it fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and active engagement with real-world issues (Grant et al., 2022). Social studies is not merely about acquiring factual knowledge, it is about understanding societal structures, historical developments, and civic responsibilities in ways that encourage informed and participatory citizenship (Abbiss & Kingston, 2016). Inquiry-based learning aligns with this goal by enabling students to ask meaningful questions, analyse multiple perspectives, and construct their own understanding through exploration and evidence-based reasoning (Harlen, 2013; Ismail et al., 2006).

At the heart of inquiry-based learning in social studies is the concept of social inquiry. Firstly, Dewey (1963) laid the foundation for social inquiry through his progressive educational philosophy, emphasising that learning should not be confined to acquiring knowledge but should involve active engagement with societal issues. He argued that social inquiry helps students develop the critical skills and dispositions needed for active citizenship and social responsibility. Mishra et al. (2001) further supports this perspective, highlighting that when students engage in inquiry-based learning, they

not only deepen their understanding of concepts but also cultivate the ability to question, evaluate, and apply knowledge in ways that contribute to their communities.

Secondly, inquiry-based learning plays a crucial role in helping students develop the skills necessary to critically examine social issues, historical events, and civic responsibilities (Bransford et al., 2000). Rather than passively receiving information, students are encouraged to actively engage with their learning by posing questions, investigating sources, and analysing multiple perspectives, which is an approach central to social studies education. By taking control of their own learning, students enhance their ability to think critically and engage with complex social, political, and economic issues (Barkley et al., 2014).

Thirdly, this approach supports the goals of social studies by fostering active engagement with real-world problems (Albergaria-Almeida, 2010). Teachers introduce social studies concepts or contemporary issues and guide students in formulating questions that drive inquiry (Gilbert & Hoepper, 2014). This process not only encourages active engagement but also develops critical thinking skills by immersing students in social inquiry. Through the exploration of key concepts and issues, students learn, analyse, question, and investigate the subject matter in depth. Teachers facilitate this process by providing opportunities for reading, research, discussion, and experimentation, allowing students to construct knowledge through inquiry driven learning (Barkley et al., 2014). While teachers offer guidance and resources, the emphasis remains on students' own inquiry and discovery, reinforcing their ability to think independently and apply their learning to new contexts (Bransford et al., 2000). By facilitating discussions and offering feedback, teachers further help students reflect on their learning, make meaningful connections, and link their understanding to broader real-world situations (Albergaria-Almeida, 2010).

Furthermore, inquiry-based teaching in social studies holds significant importance as it enables students to actively engage with and comprehend complex social issues and historical events (Barkley et al., 2014). It is a learning experience where teachers encourage students to investigate and solve problems that increase their skills, knowledge, and understanding (Trna et al., 2012). By posing questions and embarking on investigative journeys, students can deepen their understanding of the social world,

become confident in expressing opinions (Sanjaya, 2006) and cultivate critical thinking skills (Bransford et al., 2000). The use of inquiry learning strategies “efficiently and effectively” can diminish teacher-led approach in the learning process, thereby decreasing student boredom during lessons (Mike & Asrizal, 2023). Thus, inquiry-based teaching fosters the development of crucial skills like collaboration, communication, and problem solving (NIE, 2015a), all which are indispensable for actively participating in and contributing to society (Albergaria-Almeida, 2010).

Harcourt et al. (2016) underscore that social inquiry stands apart from other inquiry learning approaches due to its foundation in the principles and methodologies of social sciences and humanities (as cited by Mutch et al., 2008). Harcourt et al. (2016) further highlight that social inquiry “has a strong emphasis on the critical exploration and analysis of values and perspectives” (p.49) a notion that resonates with Abbiss and Kingston’s (2016) emphasis on how social studies education, through social inquiry nurtures citizenship education by encouraging students to confront real-world social issues, assess diverse values and perspectives, and contemplate ways to effect social change. This corresponds with the Maldives NCF’s goal towards active participation and citizenship in the society where students should “understand their own role and how to actively participate in a democratic society” (NIE, 2015a, p. 12). To achieve this goal, democratic citizens are “expected to engage in thoughtful, reasoned judgement, individually, and collectively, in order to reach well-informed decisions that form the basis of actions (Barton, 2012, p. 132). Through social inquiry, learners not only learn conceptually but also how they can apply this learning in their own lives and in society (Wood, 2013).

Hence, this pedagogical approach facilitates students to establish connections between the social studies content and their own lives and experiences, thereby enhancing the relevance and meaning of the subject matter for them (Barkley et al., 2014). In social studies education through inquiry-based teaching, specifically social inquiry, students not only acquire knowledge but also develop the competencies stated in the NCF (see Figure 2.2) which are necessary for navigating and addressing real-world challenges. Inquiry-based teaching also aligns with the overarching goals of social studies education. Overall, inquiry-based teaching and learning helps students

become more informed and engaged citizens who are better equipped to navigate and contribute to the complex social world around them through collaboration.

3.4.3 Collaborative Learning approach

Collaborative learning is a teaching approach that involves students working together in small groups to solve a problem, complete a task, or achieve a goal (Ojie-Ahamiojie, 2014). Research indicates that students engaged in collaborative learning often achieve higher learning outcomes compared to those working individually (Sulaiman & Shahrill, 2015). For instance, a number of studies show that group-based learning leads to increased learning outcomes (Chen et al., 2018; Kyndt et al., 2013; Roseth et al., 2008). They further elaborate on how collaborative learning, by fostering peer interaction and joint problem-solving, enables students to elaborate on their understanding and reorganise their knowledge. This process not only improves comprehension but also boosts engagement and motivation, as students share responsibility for both their own and their own peer's learning (Gokhale, 1995; Van Boxtel et al., 2000). Further literature has argued that collaborative teaching can be an effective approach for promoting student learning and engagement (Baker, 2015; Gillies & Ashman, 1996; O'Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013; Stahl & VanSickle, 1992). Thus, in this approach, the teacher's role extends beyond mere instruction, but aims to create a dynamic and supportive learning environment where students can thrive through collaboration.

Now this raises the question of how does a teacher implement a collaborative learning environment in the classroom? To adopt a collaborative teaching approach in the classroom, a teacher should follow a number of steps, which are supported by Baker (2015) and Gillies and Ashman (1996) on the effectiveness of this approach. Firstly, the teacher must plan lessons and activities that involve students working together in groups or pairs (O'Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013). Secondly, O'Donnell and Hmelo-Silver (2013) maintain that collaborative activities in the classroom include group discussions, problem-solving tasks, or group projects. Bruffee (1984) believed that implementing collaborative learning could be challenging as there is no one-size-fits-all approach. This is because each student has unique needs, learning styles, and

abilities which means that teachers “must be prepared to implement collaborative learning well for diverse population of learners” (O'Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013, p. 11). Hence, teachers should employ different collaborative approaches and adapt their strategies to create a collaborative learning environment in the classroom that suit their students' specific needs and circumstances, rather than relying on a single standardised approach. Thirdly, despite the challenges of implementing this approach, Bruffee (1984) stressed the importance of collaboration for students to engage intellectually through social interactions, by engaging in consensus groups, peer reviews, and collaborative brainstorming (Bruffee, 1999). This further allows students to learn and become encouraged to share their ideas and knowledge with one another, as the teacher fosters a sense of teamwork and collaboration among the students by establishing guidelines for working together, such as taking turns speaking and listening actively to one another (Baker, 2015). For instance, a systematic review by Van Leeuwen and Janssen (2019) found that teacher guidance during collaborative learning positively influences student collaboration process and outcomes. In collaborative learning settings, teachers play a crucial role in by facilitating discussions, providing resources, and guiding students' exploration of topics through activities (Van Leeuwen & Janssen, 2019). Finally, by reflecting on the effectiveness of the collaborative teaching approach, teachers should adjust as needed by seeking feedback from students and colleagues or trying new activities or strategies to further support student learning and collaboration.

Importantly, adopting a collaborative learning environment in social studies classrooms is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it fosters critical thinking and analytical skills among students as they engage in discussions, problem-solving tasks, and group projects. Roschelle and Teasley (1995) defined collaboration as “a coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem” (p.70). Stahl and VanSickle (1992) asserted that collaborative learning in social studies helps students construct and develop communication skills, social interaction abilities, and teamwork. Applying both these views suggests that by participating in collaborative activities, students learn to contribute to their social group, develop a sense of belonging, and understand their importance of their role in society (Stahl & VanSickle, 1992). This approach helps them to recognise their power to effect change and see personal and social value of their

contributions. This connects back to the purpose of social studies education to foster active citizenship and empower students to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

To further expand on Roschelle and Teasley (1995) notion, empowering students to *construct* their understandings by developing their critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills connects back to the socio-cultural and social constructivism theories. According to Vygotsky and Cole (1978), learning is a social process that occurs through interactions with others and is influenced by cultural contexts. In a collaborative environment, students engage in social interactions, share diverse perspectives, and construct knowledge, aligning with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. Additionally, social constructivism posits that individuals actively *construct* their own understanding of the world through social interactions and experiences (Dewey, 1929; Piaget, 1973). Hence, by participating in collaborative learning activities, students actively *construct* their understanding of social studies concepts, drawing from their interactions with peers and cultural context. This approach not only enhances their academic skills but also fosters their social and cultural awareness, preparing them to become informed and active citizens of the society.

By working together, students can explore various perspectives on social issues, analyse different viewpoints, and develop informed opinions. For instance, collaborative learning activities can involve students working together to analyse primary sources, discuss historical events, or develop arguments and perspectives on social issues (O'Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013). Moreover, collaborative learning promotes active citizenship by encouraging students to engage with real-world social issues and consider ways to effect positive change in their communities. Through collaborative activities, students learn to think critically and creatively (Baker, 2015), negotiate differences, work towards common goals, and develop social and teamwork skills (O'Donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013), all essential skills for active participation in society. Furthermore, collaborative learning enhances social studies education by creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment where students can learn from each other's experiences and be encouraged to seek out additional resources and information for their own learning (Barkley et al., 2014). This approach

emphasises the importance of collective knowledge construction and empowers students to take ownership of their learning process.

Studies demonstrate that employing a collaborative learning approach in the classroom has shown to be effective. Grudnoff et al. (2018) claimed that their findings indicated that collaborative learning approach is a “powerful way to enhance teacher learning and improve student learning outcomes and opportunities” (p.38). Moreover, a study conducted by Hay-Mackenzie (2018) highlighted three improvements from employing collaborative approach in the classroom; namely, “a positive effect on teacher efficacy”, “improved teacher practice” by changing their teaching practice to meet the students’ needs, and finally an “enhanced student achievement” (p.32-33). Furthermore, Manalo and Elisa (2020), indicated “highly effective” results from observing the students’ engagement with collaborative approaches such as problem-based and project-based approaches in the classroom. These studies shows that the collaborative approach as a learning and teaching process of inquiry and constructivism enhanced teaching and learning in the classroom (Schmidt et al., 2011). Thus, incorporating collaborative learning strategies in social studies education not only enhances academic achievement and improves teacher efficacy, but it also prepares students to become informed, engaged, and responsible citizens in an ever-changing world.

In summary, the collaborative teaching approach is significant for social studies classrooms because the approach promotes active and meaningful engagement with the subject matter, helping students to develop important skills and a deeper understanding of the social studies subject. Therefore, it is significant for teachers to continue to develop their teaching practices and seek out professional learning and development opportunities that promote collaborative teaching strategies and support student engagement.

3.4.4 Section Summary

The exploration of student-centred learning approaches, including inquiry-based and collaborative learning, reveals their significance in social studies education. In the context of student-centred teaching, these approaches align with socio-cultural, social

constructivist, and social reconstructionist theories of learning, all of which emphasises active student involvement in constructing their understanding of the world. Inquiry-based learning, rooted in Dewey's principles, empowers students to explore social phenomena through questioning and investigation, fostering critical thinking and civic engagement. Collaborative learning, on the other hands, promotes collaborative problem-solving and active citizenship, enhancing both academic achievement and teacher efficacy.

While these approaches present powerful strategies for engaging students, they also highlight the need for teachers to continuously develop their skills and knowledge in order to implement them effectively. This brings attention to the critical role played by professional learning and development for teachers, in supporting them to adopt and refine such student-centred methods in the classroom.

3.5 Teachers' professional learning and development

Professional learning and development [PLD] for teachers refers to ongoing educational opportunities that support the continuous growth and importance of teachers in their careers. According to the American Educational Research Association, (AERA, 2020), the goal of professional learning and development is to stay current with the best-informed practices of the education system. This can be observed through the name itself, 'professional learning and development', where PLD informs the definition of learning and developing your profession to advance your career, typically by increasing your knowledge which will in return build confidence in the work that the teacher will accomplish. This is achieved by enhancing their skills and knowledge on their subject areas (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) and improving their teaching effectiveness (AERA, 2020). Running professional development [PD] programs can improve the "professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes" of teachers (Guskey, 2000, p. 16). International literature (Craft, 2002; Timperley et al., 2008) discusses suitable approaches to design professional learning and development for teachers to help them improve their pedagogical practices. These programs are mostly offered through interaction that fosters growth and development to improve student learning by improving teacher quality. Therefore, PLD can be used

to enhance teachers' development of their pedagogical knowledge, skills, and practices through workshops, conferences, and additional courses (Gallant, 2000). Thus, PLD programmes provide an opportunity for teachers to develop knowledge and experience that will help them to shape their thoughts and practices. The following subsection review literature on the theories of PLD, and PLD for teachers for Maldivian primary teachers in social studies classrooms.

3.5.1 Professional learning and development for teachers

The definition of professional learning and development for teachers has evolved over time, reflecting changing perspectives on the nature of teaching, learning, and professional development. In the discourse surrounding teacher professional learning and development (PLD), there exists a fundamental distinction between professional development (PD) and professional learning (PL). Timperley (2011) argues, that “professional learning requires teachers to be seriously engaged in their learning whereas professional development is often seen as mere participation” (p.5). Similarly Bishop and Denley (2007) state that prioritising PL over PD is essential, as professional learning offers a more comprehensive framework for addressing teachers' professional needs. With that being said, while the concepts of teacher professional learning and professional development are often viewed as distinct, Fullan and Hargreaves (2016), assert that they two concepts interweave and overlap each other in various ways. Embracing a professional learning element within professional development, as Stewart (2014) suggests, is essential for effective PD, emphasising the importance of learning rather than mere development activities. This integrated approach to PD and PL enhances teachers' engagement and learning outcomes.

In this study, I investigate the professional learning experiences of Maldivian primary teachers with respect to how they activate and shape their social studies pedagogies. Given the complexity of primary schooling, characterised by an overcrowded curriculum (Turford & Turner, 2018), primary teachers often seek professional learning opportunities to enhance their understanding and pedagogical practices, thereby complementing the dynamic landscape of social studies primary education.

The significance of professional learning for social studies education is twofold. Firstly, initial qualifications often inadequately prepare primary teachers to teach social studies (Tarman, 2018). This lack of preparation, compounded by the absence of specialised social studies qualifications among Maldivian primary teachers diminishes their confidence in teaching social studies (Turford & Turner, 2018). Secondly, teachers' conceptions and understanding of a subject can influence how they present social studies to students (Shapiro & Last, 2002). When teachers overlook the fundamental principles underlying social studies, focusing solely on content delivery, students' understanding and appreciation of the subject can be compromised (Duschl, 2000).

The challenges faced by Maldivian primary teachers, mirroring those observed in other contexts, highlight the urgent need for subject-specific, pedagogy focused teacher professional learning (Turford & Turner, 2018). Amid ongoing curriculum changes, primary teachers struggle to interpret new curriculum documents due to their limited content knowledge and inadequate professional learning support (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2010). The Education Sector Analysis Plan (MoE & MoHE, 2019) underscores the lack of resources as a primary cause of poor curriculum implementation, which contributes to ineffective learning in schools and highlights the teachers' lack of skills to conduct student-centred learning to adequately understand of the curriculum. Studies conducted in different countries underscore the positive impact of pedagogy focused professional learning on primary teachers' pedagogy. Based on a constructivist learning approach, these studies demonstrate how subject-specific professional learning opportunities significantly enhance teachers' confidence, pedagogical approaches, and overall professionalism (Gutierrez, 2016; Kijkuakul, 2019; Smith, 2014).

Given the challenging conditions faced by Maldivian primary teachers who teach social studies and the limited support available for teaching social studies, it is imperative to provide subject-specific professional learning opportunities to enhance teacher professionalism. Therefore, this study employs a social studies pedagogical inquiry to address the professional learning needs of Maldivian primary teachers for social studies effectively through reflection.

In the following section, I will discuss the theoretical framework and models used to explore professional learning in this study.

3.5.2 Theories and models of professional learning and development

Theorising professional learning and development for teachers involves exploring the various theories and models that have been proposed to understand how PLD works and how it can be effective in supporting teacher growth and development. There are several theories and models of PLD that have evolved over time and have made significant contributions to our understanding of the nature of PLD and its role in improving teaching and learning.

Some of the key theories and models that have been proposed by various international authors include andragogy theory (Knowles, 1980), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990), and communities of practice theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In social studies education, theories like andragogy, which focuses on adult learning, and self-determination theory, which stresses autonomy and motivation, are crucial for designing professional learning experiences that cater to teachers' needs. Transformative learning theory encourages educators to reflect critically, thus fostering more inclusive classroom practices. Communities of practice theory emphasises collaboration among teachers, promoting knowledge sharing and problems. This section also highlights "The Continuous Professional Development" model by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP, 2006) and one of Timperley's major contributions to the field of PLD for teachers; namely, her work on the professional learning inquiry and evidence-informed practice (Timperley, 2011). Research shows that each of the theories and models that have been proposed has supported teachers to become better educators through professional learning and development.

According to the theory of andragogy, (Knowles, 1980), also known as adult learning theory, adults are self-directed and motivated to learn, and they prefer learning experiences that are relevant and practical (Merriam et al., 2007). In the context of

PLD, Knowles' (1980) theory suggests that teachers are more likely to be engaged and motivated when the learning is relevant to their needs and when they have control over the learning process. By designing PLD experiences that are relevant and give teachers control over their own learning, educators can help teachers become more motivated and engaged in their professional growth. In a similar way, self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation that suggests that people are more motivated and engaged when they feel autonomous, competent, and related to others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For professional learning development for teachers, this theory suggests that teachers feel more driven when they feel that they have control over their own learning and when they believe that they are capable of learning new things. In other words, this theory allows the teacher to enhance their teaching professional satisfaction by becoming more engaged in their growth and advancement of their teaching practices.

The transformative learning theory by Mezirow (1990) claimed that people can undergo significant changes in their beliefs, values, and behaviours as a result of learning experiences. Implementing this theory into the practice of teaching professional learning and development could mean that teachers are more likely to change their teaching practices if they engage in learning experiences that challenge their assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. Lastly, the communities of practice theory by Lave and Wenger (1991) states that people learn efficiently and towards their best potential when they are a part of a community of people who share a common interest or goal. This indicates that when teachers learn from one another in a shared space by contributing their ideas and experiences, it can lead to expanding their knowledge and understanding of their teaching and practices.

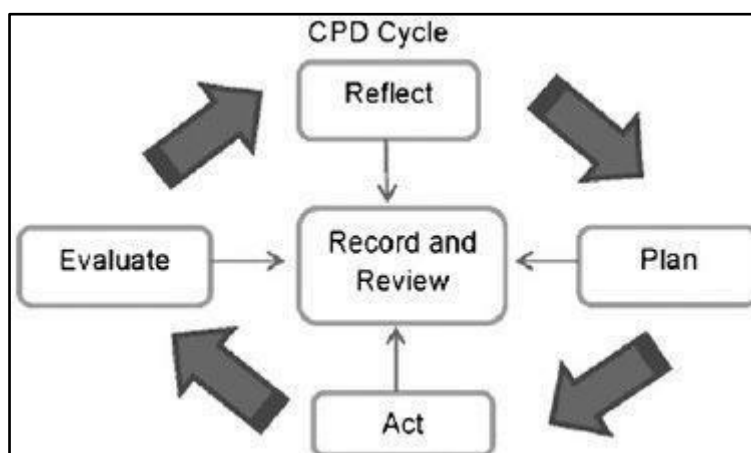
These theories offer valuable insights into how teachers engage in professional learning and how it can be effectively facilitated. One common theme across these theories is the importance of autonomy and relevance in driving teacher motivation and engagement. Teachers are more likely to be invested in their professional growth when they have control over their learning process and when the learning experiences are tailored to their specific needs and interest. This suggests that professional learning programs should prioritise personalised learning experiences and opportunities for teacher autonomy. Another key aspect highlighted by these theories

is the role of challenging experiences in promoting transformative learning. Teachers are more likely to change their teaching practices when they engage in learning experiences that challenge their existing beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning. Therefore, professional learning initiatives should incorporate opportunities for reflection and critical inquiry to encourage transformative learning among teachers. Dewey (1944) believed that the role of the teacher was to facilitate learning, rather than to simply transmit knowledge to students (as cited in Rodgers, 2002). Moreover, Dewey (1944) discussed the importance of ongoing reflective practice for teachers as a method to improve their teaching. He concluded that teachers should be able to critically analyse and adjust their own teaching based on what they learn from this reflection. Additionally, the concept of learning within the community of peers is emphasised by the communities of practice theory. This underscores the importance of collaborative learning environments where teachers can share ideas, experiences, and best practices. Professional learning programs should create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn from one another, fostering a sense of belonging and collective learning.

There are also several models of professional learning and development (PLD) for teachers that have been developed over time. Firstly, 'The Continuous Professional Development' model created by the Teaching and Learning Programme (TLRP, 2006) suggests that effective PLD involves a cycle of planning, action, review, and must focus on improving teaching and learning outcomes. This model emphasises a cyclical process of planning, action, and review which aligns well with the iterative nature of professional learning. Since my aims are to enhance teachers' social studies pedagogy and students learning outcomes in social studies, the CPD model's focus on improving teaching and learning outcomes would be beneficial.

Figure 3.7

‘The Continuous Professional Development’ model



Note: Reproduced with permission from TLRP (2006)

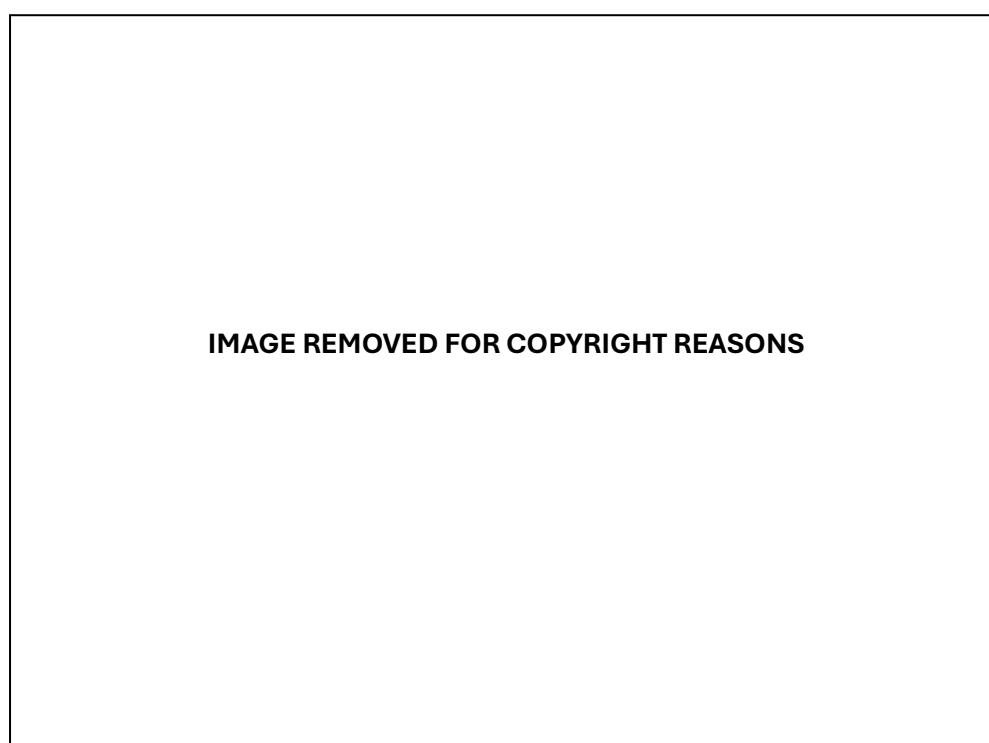
However, whether this model is directly useful for my work depends on its adaptability to the dynamic and ongoing nature of professional learning in social studies education. The CPD model's emphasis on continuous improvement aligns with the need for teachers to engage in regular reflection and refinement of their pedagogical practices. Yet, to fully meet the requirements of my study, it would be essential for the CPD model to integrate a spiral framework. Although the CPD model emphasises continuous improvement and regular reflection, it lacks a specific framework for seamlessly integrating ongoing professional learning into teachers' practice to meet evolving pedagogical needs and educational contexts.

On the other hand, "The Professional Learning and Development" model (Timperley, 2011) developed by Timperley and colleagues at the University of Auckland, underlines six components that are considered essential for effective PLD. These six components are known as; a clear focus on student learning outcomes, collaborative and reflection, the use of evidence to inform practice, building teacher capacity, building leadership capacity, and the use of external expertise. This PLD model is a comprehensive framework for understanding and analysing the professional learning and development of teachers (Timperley, 2011). This model offers a more holistic approach to understanding and analysing professional learning among teachers,

providing an ongoing spiral structured framework that aligns closely with the goals of enhancing social studies pedagogy and student learning outcomes. Therefore, the PLD mode by Timperley (2011) is better suited to my research due to its comprehensive nature and alignment with the specific needs of social studies education.

Figure 3.8

‘The Professional Learning and Development’ model



Note: This figure has been removed from the publicly available version of this thesis due to copyright restrictions. Please refer to the original source: Timperley, H. (2011). EBOOK: Realizing the Power of Professional Learning. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

There is very limited knowledge or research about the design of PD programs that would suit Maldivian school contexts. At present, the MoE has planned three days of each academic year as professional development days (MoE & MoHE, 2019). According to the policy of the education sector, every teacher is required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of professional development every year (MoE & MoHE, 2019). However, the MoE and MoHE (2019) states that "...the practical and professional realities of the teachers are often ignored in these PD's" (p. 215). This seems to indicate that these PDs are not very effectively implemented. Similarly, to make the

National curriculum more familiar for teachers, schools do conduct one-off PLD sessions rather than on-going support, even though these sessions do not appear to give much support to their pedagogical practices. According to Rizwan and Shifaza (2015) these sessions tend to fulfil the PLD requirements regardless of teachers' needs. In addition, the MoE (2019) states "...30 % of schools focus only on completing the mandatory 15 hours one off PD sessions which has no respect to the teacher's need's" (p. 215).

In this sense, Mathew et al. (2017) are of the opinion that "reflective practice is an important tool in practice-based professional learning settings where people learn from their own professional experiences, rather than from formal learning or knowledge transfer" (p. 126). Therefore, reflective practice can be incorporated as a tool of on-going PLD which can be carried out for in-service teachers in the Maldives.

3.6 Reflective practice in education

*We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience –
(Dewey, 1933)*

Reflection is a natural process that all teachers engage in to a certain degree. Reflective practice has gained significant attention and importance in the field of teacher education, being considered an essential indicator of professional competence (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). This reflection process involves looking back on our experiences, thoughts, and actions and considering what we have learned from them. It is also a process of making meaning that enables teachers to enhance their teaching practice (Rodgers, 2002). Reflective practice can be a useful tool for personal growth and development, as the act of revisiting our past experiences allows us to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. According to Farrell (2016) and Mathew et al. (2017), reflective practice is also commonly perceived as a structured and iterative process in which teachers review their teaching methods. The aim of reflection is to assess, understand, and appraise experiences for the purpose of enhancing future instructional approaches. Hence, there are many ways that an individual can practice reflection, such as writing in a journal or blog, engaging

in self-assessment activities, participating in professional learning and development workshops or courses, and seeking feedback from colleagues or mentors.

In the context of education, reflective practice is described as being focused specifically on the teaching and learning process (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). This involves teachers considering their own teaching experiences in order to improve their skills to better meet the needs of their students. According to Moon (2013), reflective practice involves “reviewing, analysing, and synthesizing information and experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the events, actions, decisions that have taken place” (p.3). This process involves looking back on past experiences, considering what worked well and what did not, and determining what changes could be made to improve future outcomes. Hence, the reflective practice process is ongoing in that it requires one to be self-aware and open to new ideas and approaches. The following subsections address the theories of reflective practice and how reflective practice can be a form of professional learning and development method.

3.6.1 Theorising reflective practice

Reflective practice has been studied and theorised by a number of scholars in the field of education. Theorising reflective practice is important because this allows us to understand the underlying principles and processes involved in reflective practice. This can help us to identify the key steps involved in reflective practice and ways in which reflection can be used to inform our action and decision-making. By considering the different ways in which reflection can be used to facilitate learning and personal growth, we can gain a better understanding of the value of reflective practice and how this can be applied in different educational contexts. This can help us to understand how Maldivian primary teachers activate and shape their social studies pedagogies through reflection.

Dewey (1933) argued that reflection is an essential part of the learning process, as the process of reflective practice allows individuals to think critically about their experiences and take meaning from them. This understanding refers to teachers developing a deeper awareness of their own identities, and how these identities

interact with the broader context in which they teach (Mockler, 2011). Such understanding is crucial as it directly impact the quality of teaching. Thus, reflective practice becomes an essential tool in, enabling teachers to critically examine their beliefs, values, and experiences in relation to their teaching pedagogy (Beauchamp, 2015; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Moreover, Dewey (1933) believed that reflection is an active process that involves considering different perspectives and synthesising new ideas. While the implementation of reflective thinking is crucial to both teachers' and students' learning, achieving systematic reflection is challenging without a deep understanding of what reflective thinking entails and how it can be effectively executed. Korthagen and Wubbels (1995) emphasise that one of main obstacles of reflective practice for teachers is grasping the concept of reflection as it can be "too big, too vague, and too general for every application" (p.2). Hence, teachers need proper guidance and facilitation of reflective practice to enhance their teaching pedagogy. Rodgers (2002) concurs with this idea and elaborates four problems that can make reflective thinking difficult:

First, it is unclear how systematic reflection is different from other types of thought. Second, it is difficult to assess a skill that is vaguely defined. Third, without a clear picture of what reflection looks like, it has lost its ability to be seen and therefore has begun to lose its value. And finally, without a clear definition, it is difficult to research the effects of reflective teacher education and professional development on teachers' practice and students' learning. (p.1)

The quote highlights the difficulties teachers face when trying to implement reflective practice in their teaching. Reflective practice involves systemically analysing and evaluating ones' teaching experiences to improve future practice. Without clear guidance and support, teachers may not fully understand what reflective practice entails or how to engage in it systematically. Although reflective practice is often framed as an individual endeavour, it frequently involves interaction with others rather than being conducted in isolation (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). Literature (Göker, 2016; Karnieli-Miller, 2020) indicates that sharing individual reflections with peers can facilitate the development of new insights for teachers regarding their teaching practices. Peers play a crucial role in this process by posing reflective questions,

providing support in understanding thoughts, offering various perspectives, and challenging assumptions about teaching. For instance, research conducted by Göker (2016) indicated that teachers engaging in reflective journaling enhanced the participants' awareness of their teaching methods and facilitated self-evaluation of their teaching practices. In this approach, participants observed each other's classrooms, collaborated to identify challenges and solutions, and experienced reflective skills by the study's conclusion. The concept of reflection was emphasised by Rodgers (2002) drawing on Dewey's earlier work. He explains that: -

“(i) Reflection is a meaning-making process..., (ii) Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry, (iii) Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others, and (iv) Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others” (Rodgers, 2002, p. 5)

To synthesise the ideas behind the criteria of his work, Rodgers highlighted that reflection is not the final destination but uses the reflective process as a tool to convert raw experiences into meaningful and informed theories that promote personal and societal moral growth. The author maintained that reflective practice is a systematic and iterative cycle, moving from practice to theory and back again (Rodgers, 2002). This statement is elaborated on further through explaining that reflective practice involves a series of precise steps such as observing and describing an experience, analysing and explaining the experiences which involves the interactions between oneself and others, and testing theories through experimentation. For teachers to evolve into reflective practitioners, they must examine their teaching experiences, pedagogy and practices with a more critical lens (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). Schön's (1983) concept of 'reflective practitioner' underlines the importance of continuous process or reflection and learning through action in order to improve practice. He argued that professionals need to reflect on their experiences in order to identify and overcome their biases and challenge their assumptions in order to make better decisions (Schön, 1983). As reflection involves revisiting past experiences to understand the actions and motivations behind them, *reflexivity* goes beyond mere reflection by prompting teachers to question their beliefs, assumptions, and to critically

examine their teaching pedagogical practices (Hofer, 2017). Hence, there is a continuous spiral of learning through reflection and experimentation, a phenomenon that Dewey entailed as continuity.

As discussed earlier, the role of the teacher in developing student values, skills, knowledge and understanding in social studies is crucial. However, to fulfil this role effectively, teachers must be supported with adequate resources and professional development opportunities. Without these supports, delivering quality social studies education can become a significant challenge. This issue was further compounded by the COVID-19 outbreak, which significantly disrupted the education system in the Maldives and the progress of my research. The pandemic necessitated an abrupt shift from face-to-face to remote teaching, affecting numerous schools, teachers, and students. Within the context of this study, participants also had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with online teaching pedagogy for social studies. In this context, the importance of reflective practice for teachers arises as it provides them with a platform to critically examine their own teaching practices and explore new strategies for improvement.

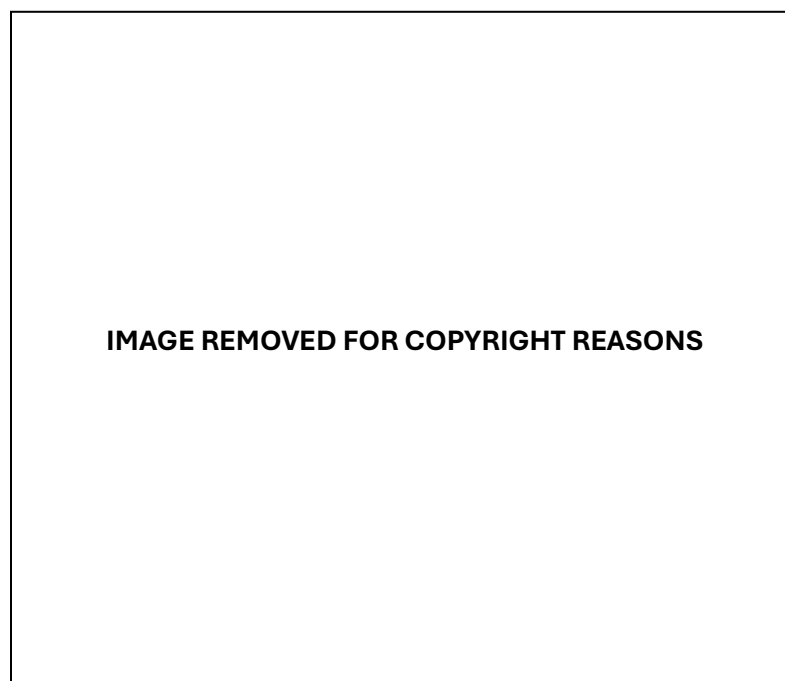
Reflective practice can help teachers build the necessary skills and competencies to effectively deliver the social studies curriculum and ultimately enhance the outcomes for their students. This statement is supported by the findings of Hattie (2008), who provided evidence through his extensive research on the effectiveness of different strategies and established that reflective practice can be an important factor in improving student learning outcomes. He established several key findings regarding the impact of reflective practice on teacher performance, including insights into how reflection can lead to improved instruction, stronger teacher-student relationships, and greater professional growth for teachers. Therefore, in order for teachers to continuously challenge and improve their practice they need to experiment with different teaching methods and strategies in their social studies classrooms.

Let us turn for a moment to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle, also known as the Lewinian Experiential Learning Model, which is widely used a framework for teacher learning and improvement. Rooted in the tradition of experiential learning, Kolb's model builds on foundational theories from Lewin's problem-solving approach,

Dewey's model of learning through experience, and Piaget's cognitive development theory. These influences shaped Kolb's conceptualisation of learning as a cyclical process involving experience, observing, thinking and acting. Central to this process is reflection, which Kolb considered an essential mechanism that enables individuals to process and make sense of their experiences. The cycle consists of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. This cycle is meant to be a continuous process that helps teachers reflect on their own experiences and build on their knowledge and skills.

Figure 3.9

The Experiential Learning Cycle Model



*Note: This figure has been removed from the publicly available version of this thesis due to copyright restrictions. Please refer to the original source: Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning. Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 41.*

In Kolb (1984)'s model, the first phase involves having a direct learning experience. In the second phase, the individual reflects on and responds to the experience. The third phase involves connecting the observations from the experience to previous knowledge and experiences. Finally, in the fourth phase, the individual determines the practical applications that can be tested and used in different situations. The fourth phase in Kolb's model involves actively experimenting with new approaches based on

prior reflection, which reinforces reflective practice through practical application. This allows the teacher to increase self-awareness, change behaviour, and acquire new skills through active engagement in the learning process.

Similarly, Gibbs (1988) has written extensively on the importance of reflection in teacher education and has indicated that reflective practice helped individuals to better understand their experiences and the events that shaped them, which leads to a deeper understanding of their beliefs, values and assumptions. According to his model below, reflection involves six stages.

Figure 3.10

Gibb's reflective practice model



Note: Reproduced with permission from Gibbs (1988)

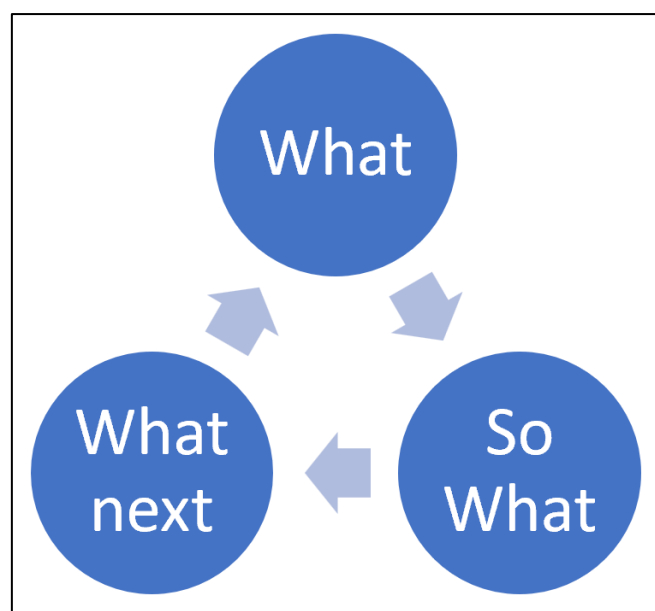
According to Gibbs (1988), the six-stage model provides a systematic and structured approach to reflection, which can lead to enhanced learning and personal development. He emphasised the importance of reflecting on one's experiences in a critical and thoughtful manner in order to gain new insights and make positive

changes. Markkanen et al. (2020) reflected on their findings when they asked eight primary teachers to reflect on challenging situations with their pupils in the classroom. They state that the Gibbs (1988) reflective practice model supported teachers with their reflection process when considering unexpected events that occurred in the classrooms, such as when something went unexpectedly poorly or extraordinarily well.

Another reflective practice model offered by Rolfe et al. (2001) is built around three guiding questions: “what?”, “so what?”, and “what next?”. Originally adapted from Borton (1970) developmental framework, this model was initially introduced within healthcare education but has since gained wide application across various professional fields, including teacher education. Recent studies (Cirocki et al., 2024; Slade et al., 2019) affirm its effectiveness in fostering reflective practice among teachers. This straightforward structure supports practitioners in making sense of their own experiences by encouraging purposeful reflection.

Figure 3.11

Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper’s reflective model



Note: Reproduced with permission from Rolfe, Freshwater, and Jasper (2001).

As shown in the figure 3.11, the first stage, “what?” prompts teachers to reflect on their teaching experiences by objectively examining events and outcomes. This involves identifying specific incidents or situations encountered during teaching sessions. The second stage, “so what?”, invites deeper analysis, prompting reflection on the significance of the experience and what can be learned from it. Finally, “what next?”, encourages action, asking how these insights can inform future practice or decisions. This stage involves proactive decision-making and planning to implement changes that align with identified areas for improvement. Rolfe’s model also complemented Kolb’s experiential learning cycle by emphasizing the role of experience and critical thinking in shaping future actions (Slade et al., 2019). Overall, this model’s clarity and practicality make it especially useful in professional learning contexts, where teachers benefit from a structured yet flexible approach to developing reflective thinking.

After reviewing, the various reflective practice models – Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (1984), Rolfe’s reflective model (1994), and Gibb’s reflective practice model (1988), it becomes evident that each offers a systematic framework for teachers to engage in reflective thinking and enhance their teaching practices.

Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper’s reflective model offer a simple yet effective approach, focusing on the essential questions of “what”, “so what”, and “what next”. This model could serve as a complementary tool for guiding teachers in reflective practice, providing a broader perspective on their experiences and actions. Kolb’s model emphasises the iterative process of experiencing, reflective, conceptualising, and experimentation, which resonates with the continuous nature of professional learning and development for teachers in the context of social studies education. Kolb’s model provides a systematic framework for teachers to engage in reflective practice, allowing them to enhance their self-awareness, change behaviours, and acquire new skills through active engagement in the learning process. Both of these models offer valuable frameworks reflective practice, but they are not the best fit for my study for the following reasons:

1. Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper’s reflective model (Rolfe et al., 2001): Rolfe’s model simplifies the reflective process into three stages, which may not adequately address the multifaceted nature of teaching and learning in social

studies education. While this model offers a straightforward approach to reflection, it may oversimplify the complexities of teaching pedagogies and the challenges that teachers may face in social studies classrooms. Moreover, the model, with its simplified “what”, “so what”, and “what next” structure, focuses more on the outcomes and actions resulting from reflection rather than exploring into the underlying thought processes and considerations of teachers as they reflection of their teaching practices.

2. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle Model (Kolb, 1984): While Kolb’s model emphasises the importance of direct learning experiences and subsequent reflection, it may not fully capture the aspects of teaching pedagogies in social studies classrooms. This model focuses more on personal learning experiences rather than the complexities of teaching practices and the interactions between teachers and students within a classroom setting. Therefore, it may not provide the depth of analysis needed to examine how reflective practice impacts teachers’ activation of their teaching pedagogies in social studies classroom.

Ultimately, Gibb’s reflective practice model (Gibbs, 1988) is the one best suited for my study because it provides a more systematic and structured approach to reflection, which aligns with the complexities of teachers’ experiences in social studies education. Unlike Rolfe’s and Kolb’s model, Gibb’s model consists of six stages, allowing for a more thorough exploration of teachers’ reflective processes. This comprehensive approach enables teachers to look deeper into their experiences, critically analyse them, and gain new insights into their teaching practices and pedagogical strategies.

Moreover, Gibb’s model (Gibbs, 1988) emphasises the importance of reflecting on one’s experiences in a critical and thoughtful manner, which is essential for identifying areas for improvement and making positive changes in teaching practices. The systematic nature of Gibb’s model also facilitates enhanced learning and personal development, which are crucial aspects of professional growth for teachers in the field of social studies education. Furthermore, the formation of reflective narrative texts in my study (see Appendixes L, M, N, O) aligns with the stages of Gibb’s model, allowing for a thorough examination of teachers’ reflective thought processes. This alignment

enhances the relevance and applicability of Gibb's model to my study, making it a better fit for investigating the improvement of teachers' social studies pedagogies through reflection. Therefore, in this present study, I aimed to examine how reflective practice may impact teachers' activation of their teaching pedagogies in their social studies classrooms.

3.6.2 Reflective practice as a professional learning and development method

Reflective practice, as explored in the literature, is a critical tool for improving teaching and learning. The concept has been widely examined in education research, with scholars emphasising its role in facilitating teacher growth and systematic self-examination (Dewey, 1944; Schön, 1983). Reflective practice is not only a means for teachers to critically assess their pedagogical strategies but also a method for fostering professional learning and development (Gudeta, 2022). When used effectively, reflective practice helps educators understand their own teaching experiences, build awareness of their teaching identities, and adapt their pedagogical approaches for better student outcomes (Beauchamp, 2015; Mockler, 2011).

International literature reveals that reflective practice has been widely adopted as a professional learning and development method for teachers because of its effectiveness in promoting ongoing growth and improvement (Boud et al., 1985; Dewey, 1944; Gibbs, 1988; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2004; Markkanen et al., 2020; Mathew et al., 2017; Moon, 2013; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Schön, 1983; Shulman & Shulman, 2004). The basis behind reflective practice is that by taking the time to reflect on one's own experiences and actions in the classroom, teachers can gain a deeper understanding and insight into their teaching practices, identify areas for improvement, and develop new strategies for helping students learn. However, research indicates that reflective practice can be a challenging undertaking, especially without clear frameworks and support. Robinson and Rousseau (2018) highlight that many teachers struggle to engage in reflection due to its vague and broad nature, and their disparate views and understanding of reflective practice, making it difficult to apply in practice. Similarly, Rodgers (2002) identifies several barriers, including the

lack of clarity on what constitutes systematic reflection and the challenges of assessing this reflective process.

In contexts like the Maldives, where reflective practice is not yet a common or systematic part of teacher professional learning, these challenges may be even more pronounced. Recent Maldivian literature underscores this gap, indicating there is limited collaboration and reflection in professional learning (Mohamed et al., 2018; Naseer, 2018). Furthermore, reflection remains underutilised among teacher educators (Nasheeda et al., 2024), and teachers often focus primarily on lesson planning and content delivery rather than using reflection to enhance teaching practices (Moosa, 2018). These findings suggest that while reflection is widely recognised as a valuable professional learning tool internationally, its implementation within the Maldivian education system remains limited. This lack of structured reflective practice may limit a teacher's ability to critically evaluate and improve their pedagogical approaches (Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024), highlighting the need for a more deliberate and systematic integration of reflective practices within professional learning frameworks.

The importance of reflective practice is emphasised in Schön's (1983) work, where he argued that it is an essential aspect of professional practice, because it allows practitioners to "think on their feet" and adjust their actions in response to changing circumstances. Building on this, Vermunt (2014) asserts that "educational innovation succeeds or fails with the teachers that shape it" (p.84), emphasising that when educational institutions modify teaching approaches, teachers are expected to adjust to their methods accordingly. In the context of this study, teachers are responsible for translating social studies concepts into tangible learning experiences for their students. While the curriculum outlines the desired learning outcomes, teachers need to develop a deep understanding of both curriculum content and how to apply appropriate pedagogical strategies. Reflective practice supports this process by enabling teachers to critically engage with their teaching and refine their instructional methods.

Shulman and Shulman's (2004) *Fostering Communities of Teachers as Learners* [FCTL] Model further reinforces this perspective, describing the complex knowledge

base that effective teachers possess, including content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of learners and their characteristics. According to this model, teachers should be active learners, continually seeking to improve their knowledge, skills, and practices (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Effective teaching requires not only a deep understanding of subject matter but also the ability to translate knowledge into effective teaching strategies tailored to students' needs. Teachers serve as the "interface of the transmission of knowledge, skills, values" (Mathew et al., 2017, p. 126), and therefore need to continuously evaluate and adjust their teaching strategies. Hence, engaging in reflection enables teachers to make informed decisions about how to enhance their instructional approaches.

As the quality of education is directly linked to the quality of effective teaching practices, "awareness is essential for behavioural change" (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 2). However, attaining this level of self-awareness is a challenging task. Nonetheless, reflective practice remains a powerful tool for professional learning and development. In the Maldivian context, where systematic reflection is underutilised, fostering a culture of reflective practice could potentially enhance teachers' pedagogy.

Reflective practice as a professional learning method contributes in several ways. It enhances teachers' self-awareness, leading to a deeper understanding of their teaching and learning processes, and helps them identify areas for improvement. Regular reflection on teaching experiences encourages ongoing professional learning and development, ultimately improving student learning outcomes. Hence, integrating reflective practice systematically within professional learning frameworks can serve as a powerful tool for teachers in social studies education to refine pedagogy.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a review of the literature related to social studies education in the Maldives, focusing on the curriculum, effective teaching approaches related to theories, and mechanisms of teacher professional learning and development through reflective practice.

The review began with an overview of the Maldives social studies curriculum and the significant facets of the curriculum and established the need for effective teaching practices to enhance students-centred learning experiences. Subsequently, learning theories were discussed, emphasised the importance of incorporating these theories in pedagogical practices in social studies classrooms. Following this, two pedagogical models that align with the study were introduced, illustrating how structured teaching frameworks can enhance classroom practices. The literature suggests that adopting student-centred approaches, such as inquiry-based and collaborative learning, can further improve the quality of education provided to learners. It highlighted the challenges Maldivian teachers face in implementing these approaches and the broader socio-cultural and policy influences shaping curriculum delivery.

Furthermore, mechanisms of teacher professional learning and development were explored, with a focus on reflective practice. Reflective practice emerged as a crucial aspect of teacher growth, suggesting that iterative reflection enable teachers to enhance their self-awareness and continually improve their pedagogical practices. The chapter synthesised various theories and model proposed by different authors, identifying inconsistencies and summarising existing knowledge and research in the field of Maldivian primary teachers' improvement of social studies pedagogies through reflection. Gibb's reflective cycle was introduced as a guiding model for reflection, because it provides a structured approach for teachers to assess and refine their pedagogical strategies. Additionally, recent studies on reflection in Maldivian education were incorporated, offering insights into how teachers perceive and apply reflection in their practice. The chapter also highlights gaps in the existing literature, paving the way for further exploration and research into the use of reflection.

This literature review serves as the foundation for the rest of the thesis and informs subsequent discussions, analyses, and conclusions. The insights gained from this review guides the investigation into how Maldivian primary teachers can enhance their social studies pedagogy through reflective practice, ultimately contributing to improved student learning outcomes in the Maldives.,

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology of my study and the data collection and analysis process. The chapter begins by restating the research questions to contextualise the study. The next sections introduce the theoretical background of Action Research and discusses the initial Participatory Action Research [PAR] research design methodology used in the study. The shift of methodology from PAR to OPAR [Online Participatory Action Research] as a result of COVID-19, and the setting up of the research sample for the data collection follows. The research tools and methods utilised in the data collection, and the three phases of the data collection process are then described. My role in the study is then explored and followed by discussion of the analytical approach and process. Finally, I explain the ethical processes and trustworthiness steps taken in the study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

4.2 Research Questions

The main research question for this research was:

How do Maldivian primary teachers activate and shape their social studies pedagogies through reflection?

The sub-questions were as follows:

- 1. What understandings do teachers have of social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives National Curriculum Framework?*
- 2. What challenges and limitations do teachers face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?*
- 3. How does teacher reflective practice shape social studies pedagogy for student learning?*
- 4. What benefits do teachers gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy?*

4.3 Choosing the Research Methodology

The research methodology of my study provides theoretical perspectives about the research design (Creswell, 2007). Kothari (2004) explained that the methodology of research does not only describe the research methods adopted in the study but also “the logic behind the methods that we use in the context of our research study” (p. 8). Hence, the methodology of a study aims to answer the questions concerning the reasons why a study has been undertaken, how the research problem has been defined, how the data has been gathered and the particular methods adopted in the study.

My research adopted a qualitative approach that explored primary teachers’ perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of social studies teaching using reflective practice. In this research, I aimed to understand how teachers conceptualise social studies in the context of the National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a), their pedagogy, and ways to assist them in growing as reflective practitioners in teaching. Hence, as a researcher in my study, I observed, analysed, and interpreted the teacher’s experiences. Therefore, qualitative research was a good fit for what I wanted to accomplish. This is notable because this study inquired into individual (teacher) experiences (Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2006), the meanings they ascribe to their teaching of social studies and use of reflective practice in their specific context. Qualitative research integrates the methods, approaches and techniques that involves observing, analysing, and interpreting human behaviour (Gillis & Jackson, 2002). Kothari (2004) expands on this idea stating that qualitative research focuses on phenomena related understanding the reasons for human behaviour and the underlying motives and desires. Qualitative methodology reveals the features of an individual’s feelings, views and patterns (MacDonald, 2012). Hence, if the researcher wishes to explore how experiences are viewed by an individual or a group of people, quantitative methods may not be nuanced enough. Berg and Lune (2012) argue that “certain experiences cannot be expressed by numbers” (p. 3). My research involved enabling participants to understand their social studies teaching pedagogy through interpreting their social studies teaching experiences. Therefore, reflective practices

guided and illustrated to the teachers their teaching experiences, which further enabled them to understand and interpret their practices.

Whilst my research was mainly qualitative, there were some elements of quantitative methods within my data collection, specifically in the Qualtrics online questionnaire. However, as my research objectives were to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the issues related to the Maldives Social Studies Curriculum and to interpret teachers' pedagogical knowledge of Social Studies and reflective practice, choosing a qualitative methodology seemed to be best suited for this study. According to Ritchie et al. (2013), qualitative approaches involve describing the understanding of the aim, ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values of people on an issue. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that qualitative research is "a situated activity," locating researchers in the researched natural settings (p.3). This means qualitative methods are based on data collection and analysis, which focus on interpreting the meaning of social phenomena based on the views of the participants of a particular social reality. This resonated with my interest in how teachers use pedagogies and reflective practice in their social studies classroom teaching and learning opportunities for them to reflect and make meaning of their pedagogy. I sought to understand the participant teachers' experiences within their school and classroom contexts. This exploration sets the stage for the subsequent section, where I examine action research as a methodological framework for this study. As a research approach, action research provides a lens to explore the interplay between pedagogical practices and reflective teaching strategies in the context of Maldivian primary schools.

4.4 Theorising Action Research as a methodology

Action research is considered "one form of research among many" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 26) , and is a type of qualitative research (MacDonald, 2012), among a plethora of research approaches under the umbrella of qualitative methodology (Burns, 2009). On the one hand, action research is described as "sloppy research" (Dick, 2004, p. 437), and a "messy and weak form of research because it has been practiced without appropriate rigour" (Cardno, 2003, p. vii). On the other hand, action research can be seen as "the transformation of individual practitioners"

(McTaggart, 1991, p. 30) and as “a means of liberating the oppressed... to reveal the disempowerment and injustice created in industrialized societies and by social class, gender and ethnicity” (Cardno, 2003, pp. 5-6). Bartlett and Piggot-Irvine (2008) explain these two different interpretations of action research “such disparity is perhaps inevitable when a research approach is so widely used in such a variety of circumstances” (p.16). Their understanding of ‘variety of circumstances’ include “education and health sectors, information and communication technology, community development, and assistance groups, and private and public organisations” (Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008, p. 17).

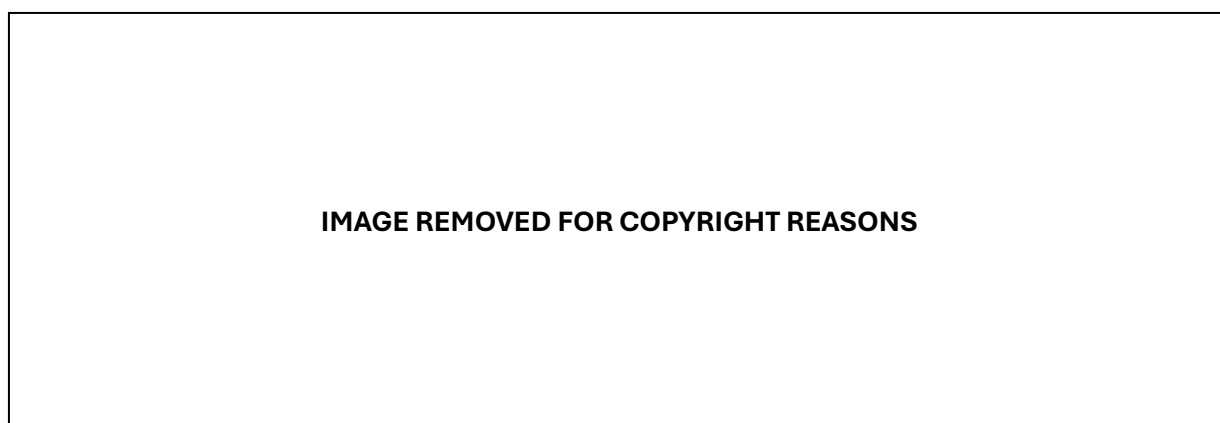
The term *action research* is said to have first originated from Kurt Lewin (Adelman, 1993; Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008; Burnes, 2020; Burns, 2009; Lewin, 1946; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002), who was a German American social psychologist, and from John Collier, who was a US commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945 (Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008). It is not my intention here to dive deeper into the historical development of action research as a field of research, because a substantial amount of study has been done on the topic during the last three decades (Adelman, 1993; Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008; Dick, 2004; Elliot, 1991; Kemmis, 1988; McTaggart, 1991; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Instead, my aim is to concentrate on understanding the meaning behind the term action research, how it is implemented to bring about improvement to practice as a research approach (MacDonald, 2012; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011) and how the concepts of action research theories and models relate back to the roots of my research process.

The early influencer of action research, Kurt Lewin, “developed a theory of action research as a spiral of steps involving planning, fact finding (reconnaissance) and execution and which later generally came to be understood as an action reflection cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 41). The cycle is demonstrated to then “go on to the next cycle of replanning, acting, observing, and reflecting, and perhaps produce a new cycle” and that there is a “change in thinking as well as a change in action” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 42). Figure 4.1 illustrates the sequence of action-reflection cycles as presented by McNiff and Whitehead (2002, p. 41). Although the model is not a direct representation of Lewin’s (1946) original diagram, it based on his concept of action research as a spiral

process. McNiff explicitly states that the diagram is her own contextualised example, constructed to demonstrate the cyclical nature of reflection and action as initially conceptualised by Lewin (1946).

Figure 4.1

Sequence of Action – Reflection Cycles (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 41)



Note: This figure has been removed from the publicly available version of this thesis due to copyright restrictions. Please refer to the original source: McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2002). Action research: Principles and practice (2nd ed.). Routledge Falmer.

This approach aligns well with my research process, as teachers can explore the practice of reflection and change by experiencing a change in their understanding of social studies pedagogy and as well as bringing change in their teaching practices. Furthermore, action research aligns with my research goal, as distinct from process, because I explored how teachers learn and improve their thinking and pedagogical understanding formed by their own reflective practice.

Stenhouse (1975) contributed to the discussion by seeing teaching and research as closely connected and teachers as being critically self-reflective, and systematic in their pedagogical practice as a form of curriculum theorising. As McNiff and Whitehead (2002) explained, Stenhouse's (1975) notion was that "teachers should be the best judges of their own practice" (p.43). Stenhouse's interpretation of teachers developing their practices through researching their skills, relates to the subject of my study as I incorporated reflective practice to explore how teachers might improve their social

studies pedagogical thinking and understanding. Stenhouse further explained his idea of how teachers should become a researcher through:

The commitment to systematic questioning of one's own teaching as a basis for development; the commitment to and the skills to study one's own teaching; the concern to question and to test theory in practice by the use of those skills. (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 144)

Action research methodology is a methodology that enables teachers to develop their pedagogical and curriculum practices, so I chose action research to understand and make sense of the participants' development or changes of their social studies curriculum knowledge and practices.

Models of action research moved from cycles to spirals. Kemmis' model of action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982) "shows a self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and re-planning as the basis for understanding how to take action to improve an educational situation" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 46). This demonstrates that action research brings action and reflection together in a spiral form to discover solutions to the issues in various contexts.

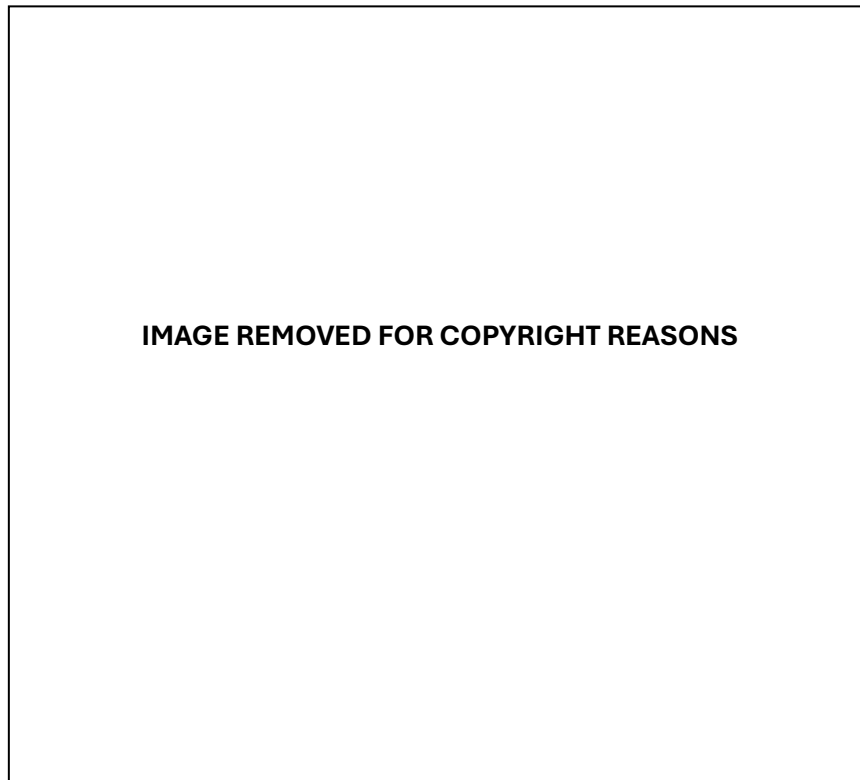
This was further developed by McNiff and Whitehead (2002) who expressed their theory of action research as a "spontaneous, self-recreating system of enquiry" (p.56). McNiff and Whitehead (2002) described this action reflection spiral to be an "exponential development process" (p.56) and deemed the model to form a state of balance within a disequilibrium without losing focus on addressing multiple issues. They further highlighted:

The spirals of action-reflection unfold from themselves and fold back again into themselves. They attempt to communicate the idea of a reality which unfolds all its previous manifestations yet which is constantly unfolding into new versions of itself, constantly in a state of balance within disequilibrium. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 56).

They represented their argument visually through an action research spiral:

Figure 4.2

McNiff & Whitehead's Action Reflection Spiral (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 57)



Note: This figure has been removed from the publicly available version of this thesis due to copyright restrictions. Please refer to the original source: McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2002). Action research: Principles and practice (2nd ed.). Routledge Falmer.

This model shows that there is constant planning, acting, reflecting, planning, and observing throughout the process. This develops opportunities in different contexts to approach issues knowing for certain that there will be uncertainties in situations. Hence, in this model, McNiff & Whitehead demonstrate action research to be preparing for uncertainty while also maintaining the focus on “the one and many” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 56). Applying the understanding of the action research model into the educational context of my research process, has allowed my participants to develop their understanding of the social studies curriculum and teaching practices by implementing a plan, action, and observation for any possible outcome via constant reflection. Reason and Bradbury (2001) added to the model by stating that action research, theory and practice bring solutions to problems in certain contexts, noting that “it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory, and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing

concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities". (p. 1)

While both action research models by McNiff and Whitehead (2002), The Sequence of Action Reflection Cycles and the Action Reflection Spiral emphasise iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, they differ in their structure and adaptability. The Sequence of Action Reflection Cycle model follows a structured cyclic sequence aimed at systematically solving problems, making it more linear in its progression. In contrast, the Action Reflection Spiral model takes a more dynamic and fluid approach, presenting action research as an evolving spiral that embraces complexity and ongoing learning. This distinction is particularly relevant to my study, as the flexibility of McNiff & Whitehead's model aligns more closely with the interpretive nature of my research, where continuous reflection, adaptation, and knowledge construction were essential. Their emphasis on practitioner agency and self-reflective inquiry allowed teachers in my study to engage deeply with their pedagogical development rather than simply following a fixed problem-solving sequence.

These action research theorists led me to a definition of action research that underpinned my study: Action research is an action-reflection approach where participants use research methods to improve an issue through implementing a change with their understanding of their practices and environment. Specifically, in light of the McNiff and Whitehead (2002) spiral action and reflection model, this involves participants bringing together the action and reflection with theory and practice in a spiral sequence where the participants can discover solutions to issues based on their surrounding context.

4.5 Initial Research Design of an Action Research Methodology: Participatory Action Research

Action research can take many different forms. A research design that provides a framework for the collection and analysis of evidence in this study is participatory action research [PAR].

Participatory action research is considered as a subset of action research (MacDonald, 2012) and is a qualitative research methodology that involves a collaboration between researchers and participants to understand, interpret social issues and act to bring about social change (Baum et al., 2006). The origins of PAR can be traced to the work of Lewin (1946). The roots of PAR can also be traced from Paulo Freire, who believed that critical reflection was crucial for personal and social change (Maguire, 1987; McIntyre, 2007; Selenger, 1997). However, in this case, my research was not based on critical theory. This was because at this particular point of time in my research, the purpose of my study was not a critical examination of the situation for research.

PAR has been described as “an ongoing organisational process, a research approach that emphasises co-learning, participation and organizational transformation” (Greenwood et al., 1993, p. 177). Similarly, Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008) explained that it is an approach to action research emphasising participation and action by the members of groups affected by the research. A researcher using the PAR approach seeks to understand the issue by trying to identify the solutions in order to bring about change collaboratively following reflection (Kemmis, 2006). As my research was based on understanding the education pedagogy which primary teachers respond to and conceptualise Social Studies in the National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a) of the Maldives. Utilising a PAR approach established a collaborative learning network of sharing among the teachers, who teach social studies across the participants’ schools in the Maldives.

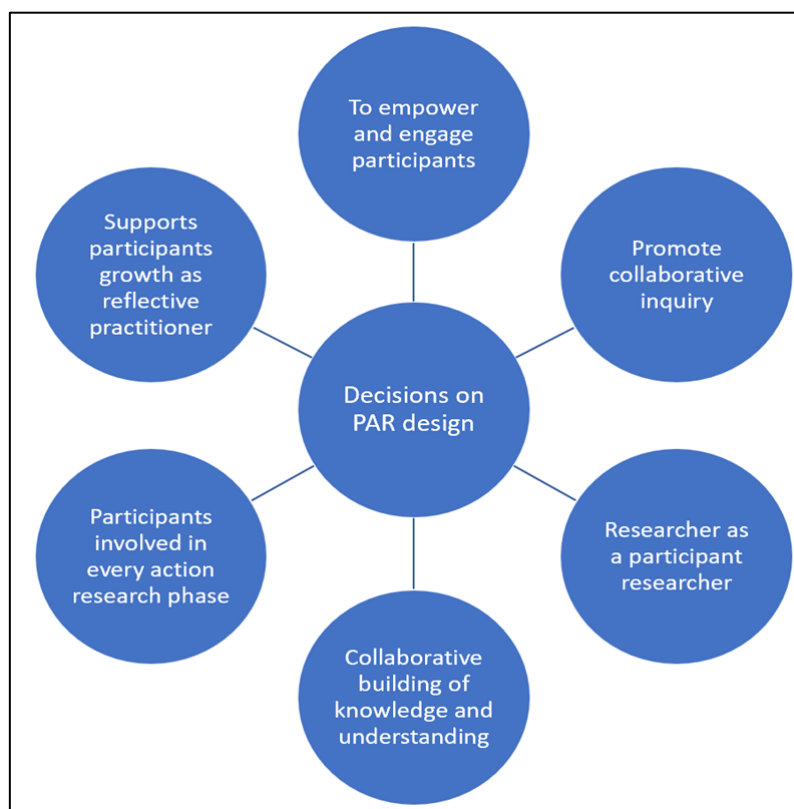
Another reason why I considered PAR to be the best-fit approach for my research was that it meshed with researchers who reported PAR to be a cyclic learning process that consists of actions like observing, reflecting, acting, evaluating, and modifying (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The process is cyclic as this allows for the active participation of all the participants to learn from each other and continuously improve on their pedagogical practice. Patton (2010) emphasised the importance of the cyclic process in PAR and further argued that this allows for continuous adaptations and refinement of the research process. Therefore, PAR is a design which facilitates participants to act as practitioners as well as researchers, engaging and re-inventing how they are

learning, reconsidering their actions and making decisions involving the four stages; planning, acting, observing, and reflecting as suggested by Kelly (2005).

Hence, in this research I used the PAR approach to provide teachers with opportunities to grow as reflective practitioners using the original four stages of Lewin's action reflection cycle of: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Tynan et al. (2008) discuss these four stages and further explained how these stages would be best applied when there is a high level of collaboration, planned group and individual reflection. The purpose of my research was to explore Maldivian teacher's social studies teaching and learning approaches and sets of beliefs, opinions, perceptions of activating and shaping their social studies pedagogies through reflection. Figure 4.3 below highlights the driving decisions to implement PAR as the research design of my study as a practitioner researcher.

Figure 4.3

Driving decisions of choosing Participatory Action Research [PAR] as the research design to supports the participants.



Following a PAR approach allowed me to work closely with the participants as a practitioner. This meant that I was able to collect evidence by working collaboratively with the participants and carefully observing their reflective practices. Furthermore, PAR allowed me to be included within the research as an active participant, closing the gap that may have been present between the participants and myself as a researcher. Building a connection or relating with my participants in my study was essential because sharing their personal thoughts, ideas and experiences in the teaching field meant being able to understand and recognise their individual point of view. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, the decisions to adopt a PAR design was guided by key principles that aligned with the goals of my study. These included empowering and engaging participants, promoting collaborative inquiry, positioning myself as a participant researcher, fostering the co-construction of knowledge and understanding, ensuring participant involvement in every phase of the action research process, and supporting their growth as reflective practitioners. By embedding these elements within my research design, the PAR approach facilitated a deeper, more meaningful engagement with participants, and reinforced their agency and reflective capacity throughout the study.

In adopting PAR as the methodological approach for this study, it was essential to acknowledge the ontological perspective underpinning this research. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) ontology is the study of what exists and what we consider to be real. In research, it refers to the beliefs we have about reality, whether there is one objective truth, or multiple perspectives shared by people's experiences (Baghramian & Coliva, 2019; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). These beliefs shape how researchers' approach and interpret data. As Scott and Usher (2010) explained, ontology is important because it helps us to understand the nature of the world and how we make sense of it. This study is rooted in a relativist ontology, which recognises that reality is socially constructed and shaped by individuals' experiences and interactions. This perspective aligns with PAR's emphasis on collaborative knowledge construction, where teachers' reflections and shared experiences contribute to a nuanced understanding of social studies pedagogy in the Maldivian context. The study does not assume a single objective reality about how social studies should be taught; rather it recognises multiple, context-driven realities that emerge through teachers' narratives and reflections.

PAR was utilised in this research because I wanted to work with the participants as a practitioner myself, to gather data and investigate evidence of approaches to social studies pedagogy. As the participants worked together within the research as a partnership, we were able to inform each other's teaching through discussions in the workshop. PAR is a research design which allows participants and the researcher to evaluate their work in partnership and systematically investigate that work, monitor processes, gather data and find ways to evaluate the process, and generate evidence (Lawson et al., 2015; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Therefore, PAR was considered to be a suitable research design that aligned with the research objectives of my study.

4.6 Shift of methodology: From PAR to OPAR

My data collection process was planned to be activated in the Maldives. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic's closure of borders and lockdowns in both New Zealand and the Maldives, I was compelled to search for alternative digital methods of data collection for my research. As such, several factors contributed to the shift of my research to Online Participatory Action Research [OPAR]. These factors impacted the overall research objectives and the timeline of my research. This study was originally proposed to engage participants in a face-to-face collaborative professional learning environment to actively review their social studies pedagogies through reflective practice. However, due to the spreading pandemic, I had to adjust by virtually developing a collaborative network between the participants to share and reflect on social studies pedagogy. These factors also contributed to an extended duration of my research timeline which delayed data collection by eight months.

Considering the trajectory of my research methodology, I refined the terminology from Participatory Action Research [PAR] to Online Participatory Action Research (OPAR) (Saeed, 2022). I note that the theoretical frameworks that underlie this shift are deeply rooted in the foundational principles of action research and its adaptive potential in the face of unforeseen challenges. This adjustment was made after recognising that while the four participants engaged in ongoing reflection, the traditional action research component, involving trying out interventions and reflective on outcomes, was not fully

realised. Instead, participants actively contributed to the research process by sharing their experiences, insights, and perspectives in a manner that reflected the essence of participatory action research.

Action research inherently fosters collaboration, requiring the involvement of multiple stakeholders who actively contribute to every stage of the research process, from data collection to implementing solutions and assessing outcomes (Noor & Shafee, 2021). Rather than being passive subjects of inquiry, participants take on a dynamic role, shaping the progression of the research through contributions (Noor et al., 2023). To maintain continuity of my research in the face of unprecedented disruption OPAR emerged as a pragmatic response to the evolving technological landscape and the possibilities it presented for remote collaboration and data collection. However, as the research progressed and participants engaged in the online environment despite technical disturbances, it became evident that their contributions went beyond the conventional role of research subjects. Participants emerged as active partners, sharing their experiences, insights, and perspectives in a manner that reflected the essence of online participatory action research.

As a researcher during a global pandemic, it was challenging to overcome the anxiety of collecting the data in time to develop and complete my thesis. As my initial methodology of PAR aimed to collaboratively inquire with the participants by actively engaging and empowering them, I was concerned about how my data collection process would proceed while being unable to travel or meet the participants in a face-to-face setting. However, I overcame this challenge by taking the opportunity to consult with my supervisors to move to remotely based data collection through online tools. At first, my supervisors had mixed feelings about this idea, until I was able to convince them of the significance of proceeding with my online data collection process. Their mixed feelings were mostly around the management of participants and methods of online data collection, technical snags, and quality of the data possible through an Online Participatory Action Research process. Some of the technical snags included poor internet connection within the Maldives, which led to audio issues and frozen screens during the workshop and interviews (Saeed, 2022).

Nevertheless, due to proposed measures of maintaining the quality of data collection, and ensuring authenticity and confidentiality of my participants, my supervisors supported me to commence my online data collection. Proposed measures of maintaining the quality of my data include encouraging participants' attention throughout the research, ensuring that the participants coherently understood what was asked of them, and using online tools for video conferencing and online collaborative group tasks that the participants were more familiar with. Despite finding an alternative methodology approach and research methods to commence my data collection, bridging the virtual gap and building effective relationships between the researcher and the participants through online tools was another challenge in my research. I have elaborated on this under the data collection phases presented in Section 4.8 (see p. 129).

4.7 Final Research Design of an Action Research Methodology: Online Participatory Action Research [OPAR]

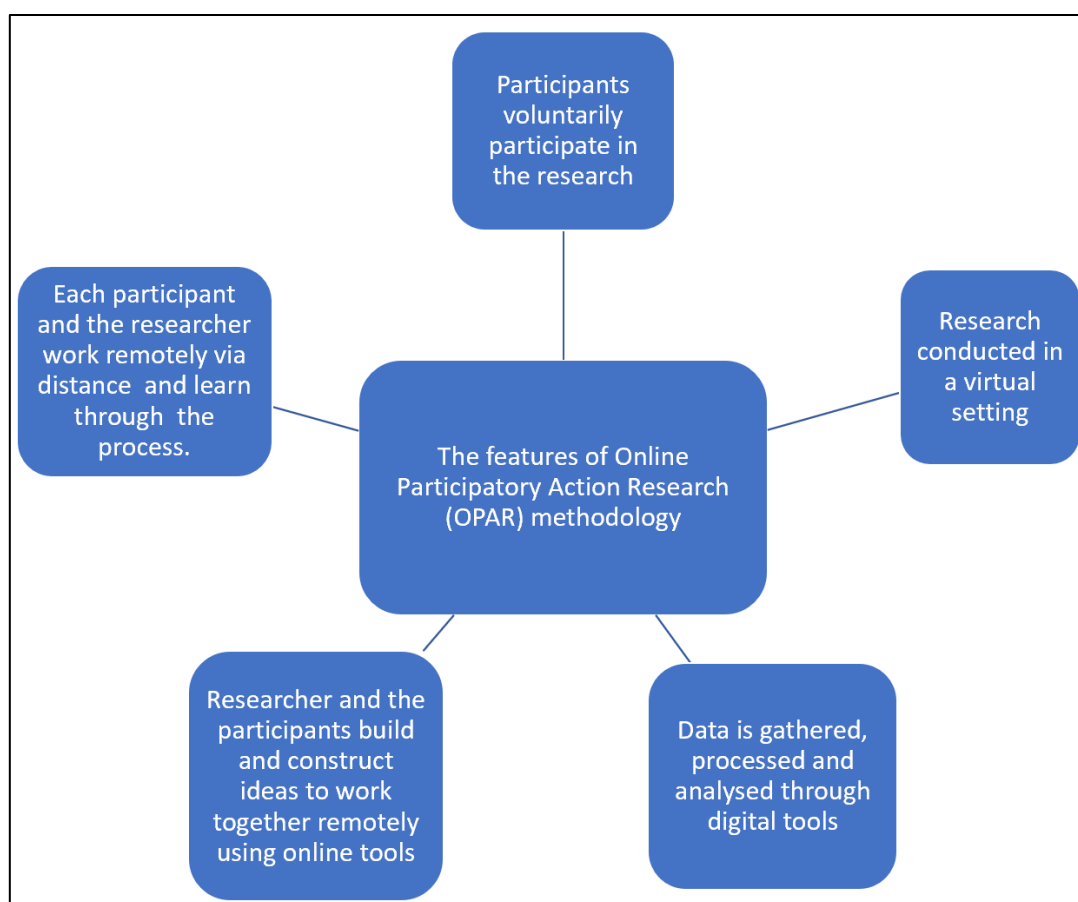
Initially, I aimed to shift my data collection process from a PAR methodology to Online Participatory Action Research [OPAR] methodology. This would have allowed me to continue with PAR to OPAR, as I was only including the online element into my methodology. However, while undergoing my data collection process, I recognised that the participatory element of my data collection posed significant challenges. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the technical difficulties that occurred at the participants' location, and their full-time teaching job commitments under COVID-19 made the research more challenging. Despite the challenges posed by the online circumstances, it is crucial to emphasise that this research remained fundamentally a participatory action research (PAR), albeit with a shift in focus from traditional action research. The active involvement of teachers in workshops, interviews, and reflective narrative text writings was integral to the success of this study, as their valuable contributions provided insights into their reflective teaching experiences, making this research still a collaborative and participatory endeavour. Therefore, I describe my approach as OPAR as this methodology. The foundations of action research are the same for OPAR. This is because action research strategy is mainly involved with actions and participation in the field (Altrichter et al., 2002), where

the research and participants build and construct ideas to find a solution for the new problem.

As I have stated previously, action research is participative and collaborative due to the advantage of on-the-ground, iterative interactions between the researcher and participants (Clark et al., 2020). Hence, action research is a research strategy that is combined with actions and participation in the field (Cohen et al., 2017). With the advancement of communication technology, researchers can video conference and utilise digital tools to conduct online data collection using an Online Participatory Action Research approach to overcome challenges such as financial and time restrictions, and geographical dispersion in the context of the research (Gray et al., 2020). The restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic have threatened many doctoral researchers with the timelines of their study and have forced researchers to explore, understand and communicate by using digital tools (Sah et al., 2020). Thus, the use of Online Participatory Action Research appears to be prominent and growing, and was especially so during the COVID-19 pandemic (Safta-Zecheria et al., 2021). Therefore, I introduced and implemented OPAR into my study due to being able to build an interconnection between the researcher and participants strengthened by the use of online tools. Below, figure 4.3, demonstrates the features of an OPAR methodology approach in my research despite the COVID-19 circumstances.

Figure 4.4

Benefits of implementing an Online Participatory Action Research approach despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Moving from PAR to OPAR, pushed me to collect my data through virtual meetings with my participants through the help of online research tools. Despite the difference between the methods of data collection between PAR and OPAR, there were a number of benefits with the latter, such as cost-effective data gathering and effective time management, as I was able to gather evidence to formulate my findings. As illustrated in Figure 4.4 (p. 129), the OPAR methodology introduced key features that shaped my research process. These included voluntary participation, conducting the research entirely in a virtual setting, utilising digital tools for data collection, processing, and analysis, and fostering collaborative knowledge-building through online platforms. Additionally, OPAR enabled both the participants and me to work remotely, learning and adapting through the process despite the challenges of physical distance. Implementing OPAR not only ensured the continuity of the research during the COVID-

19 pandemic but also allowed for a flexible and accessible approach that aligned with the participants' contexts and technological capabilities.

4.8 Setting up for Research and Research Methods

The study was conducted with participants from six government schools in Male', the capital city of the Maldives, where a number of schools are located. Choosing the research setting to be based at Male' was influenced by the considerable number of teachers who work in Male' in contrast to the islands. Hence, government schools operating in Male' which provide social studies education to Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 levels were chosen.

The selection of participants was carefully done as subject selection in qualitative research is purposeful (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). This was because participants selected within qualitative research are those who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study (Sargeant, 2012). Consequently, identifying appropriate participants was one of the most significant tasks to accomplish within the research design phase. The criteria for the selected participants in the research were: primary teachers who were working in government schools, teaching social studies to any level from Key stage 1 (K1) (ages 7-9, grade 1 to grade 3) to Key stage 2 (K2) (ages 10-12, grade 4 to grade 6) for more than two years. As a result, two teachers needed to be selected from each of four schools: one K1 and one K2 level teacher.

The selected schools were chosen based on their willingness to be involved within my research and there was a specific criterion to be able to participate in my research. Before reaching out to the schools, I had to get the approval for conducting my research project in my choice of government schools from the Ministry of Education in Maldives. Once my research project had been approved, the successful participants were chosen upon their expression of interest towards my project through the appointed leading teacher by the principal of each school. The appointed leading teacher was the focal point of communication to the participants during the beginning of my research. The purpose of the appointed leading teacher was not only for keeping

in contact with the participants but also to make sure which participants were interested in my research project and if their teaching schedules aligned with the workshops and activities of my research project. This was done because the participants were working as primary teachers in their respective grades with school workload. Hence, the leading teacher chose the participants for my research project who aligned with the interest and were able to participate in my project.

Six schools were willing to participate in my study. Among many of the schools in Male' city, I carefully considered options and invited those six government schools as I had received the permission from the Ministry of Education in Maldives to conduct my research project in those schools. Moreover, I chose government schools as they adhere to the national curriculum, unlike private schools who may implement their own curriculum (with the exception of subjects related to Islam, Quran, and Dhivehi) with the approval by the Ministry of Education. From each school, two willing teachers were chosen to be part of my study. The gender of the selected twelve primary teachers was not considered to be a variable of interest, and those who were willing to take part in the research were included as participants. Usually, in qualitative research, small samples of participants are known to be selected from the population (Allsop & Saks, 2019). According to Marston (2014), the researcher must choose samples only if the participants have knowledge in the selected subject area, which will potentially increase the reliability of the research. In this study, participants who were willing to share their opinions and experiences were crucial to the research.

Furthermore, recruiting potential participants who had experience in the field of social studies teaching in primary grades in the study was equally significant. There was one school where more than two teachers expressed their interest to be involved in the research. Based on this situation, I selected the teachers with more years of teaching experience in the field. If all of them met the criteria, and in this case, all three of the teachers had more than two years of teaching experience, I accepted them as the participants in the research as I did not want to make them feel excluded, and I saw it as an ethical issue. Thus, thirteen teachers who had been working in a school for more than two years were selected for this study initially by a purposive convenience sampling method. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest employing purposive convenience sampling, which involves a blend of purposive and convenience sampling

techniques. This approach proves beneficial when the researcher aims to target a specific population, striving for representation, while also prioritising accessibility and ease of recruitment in the sample selection process.

Following my invitation to participate, the teachers were willing to commit to work with me and share their experiences through the use of online data collection tools in the teaching field. In addition, as the research design was developed on the theory of participatory action research but shifted to online participatory action research, I worked with the participants as a participant researcher in the study. My knowledge and experience were engaged in this research as a former primary teacher in the Maldives schools and as a lecturer in teacher education in the Maldivian National University.

Setting up my research under an online participatory action research approach required me to make sure that each participant felt safe. I needed to provide a positive environment where the participants were able to share their opinions, beliefs, ideas and experiences. Salmons (2021) highlights that a researcher must choose, find, or create a safe, neutral research setting to gather data from the participants. He further underlines that an ideal location would be private with minimal distractions or interference where the setting should not contribute as a factor influencing the participants' responses during the data gathering process.

As the research setting of my study was through online technology, making careful decisions about which online tools and methods to use was a key decision when conducting online research (Paulus et al., 2013). It was especially important to protect the rights of participants which falls under one of the ethical considerations – namely confidentiality. Wiles et al. (2008a) describe that confidentiality includes keeping private the shared experiences and the information between the researcher and the participant. Hence, it was my responsibility as the researcher in the study to make sure that all the information regarding each participant was kept safely in password protected files that can only I could access. Choosing the online tools and methods influences the characteristics and feeling of the online setting that serves as the research setting (Salmons, 2021). As a researcher, I chose five data collection methods, namely national curriculum framework document review, an online mixed

qualitative and quantitative data Qualtrics questionnaire, online reflective narrative texts, online semi-structured interviews and observations, and my reflections on the virtual participatory workshops' activities.

4.9 Research Methods and Tools

The study investigated how Maldivian primary teachers activate and shape their social studies pedagogies through reflective practice about their social studies teaching in the classroom. The data collection was accomplished remotely through online research methods and tools, and for this purpose, a systematic data collection process was adopted to enhance the quality of the research and for the convenience of the participants. In the course of my data collection, it was significant for me to develop knowledge about the use of online tools. The online research methods and tools employed within the research were used to gather data; the upcoming sections describe how these tools were developed and implemented in this study.

Mensah (2020) describes that utilising the right research tools to gather the data allows the data analysis “to lead to the formulation of convincing and credible answer(s) to research questions/objectives” (p.1). Hence, it was significant for me as a researcher to employ research tools that were tied to the methodology of my research and guided by the objectives and questions of the study. Qualitative researchers often use interviews, observations, field notes or document analysis/review (Ary et al., 2010). For further in-depth investigation, researchers may also use interviews as a data collection tool to understand “the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Hence, analysing transcriptions of interview and workshops with careful attention to every detail and aspect of the recordings can help a researcher to understand and interpret the participants' behaviours and meanings of their experiences.

Following the requirements of my qualitative research approach methodology, and the objectives of my study, I gathered online data from the participants using the online tools Qualtrics software, Zoom and Google Docs. I facilitated communication with participants through alternative online platforms including Viber and Email, to enhance

their inclusion throughout the research process. The online activities that were held within the online workshops used different online programs such as AWW board and Jamboard for the participants to share their ideas and express their opinions in a creative way. AWW board served as a collaborative whiteboard where participants could visually organise their thoughts, sketch ideas, and engage in collective brainstorming in real time. However, following the discontinuation of AWW board in early 2021, I transitioned to using Jamboard which allowed participants to post sticky notes, respond to prompts, and interact with each other. This fostered a dynamic and interacting space for sharing perspectives.

Hence, each of the main online tools that were utilised in this research had a specific purpose under their respective online data collection methods of capturing the perspectives of the participants' beliefs, opinions, and experiences of teaching social studies. Thus, with the help of technology, I was able to collect data and gather information to interpret the participants' actions in detail and make further observations.

4.10 Data Collection Process in the Research

My Online Participatory Action Research design followed three phases of data collection (see Figure 4.4, p. 136). In each respective phase, the data gathering process led to a growing awareness and interpretation about my participant teachers' understanding of social studies pedagogy. My data collection process model draws inspiration from the McNiff and Whitehead (2002) action reflection spiral model, which aligns seamlessly with my research process. Much like their model, my approach involved a continuous spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting on the findings, and planning the next steps in my data collection, albeit with some limitations in fully realising the participatory aspect. This methodology fully supports the participatory nature of my research, where much like the participants, I, as the researcher actively engaged in the process. For instance, the participants, contributing to the planning phase, provided insights through the Qualtrics questionnaire, shaping the direction of subsequent actions of forming the questions in my next data collection round. The online workshops served as a platform for joint actions, allowing participants to share

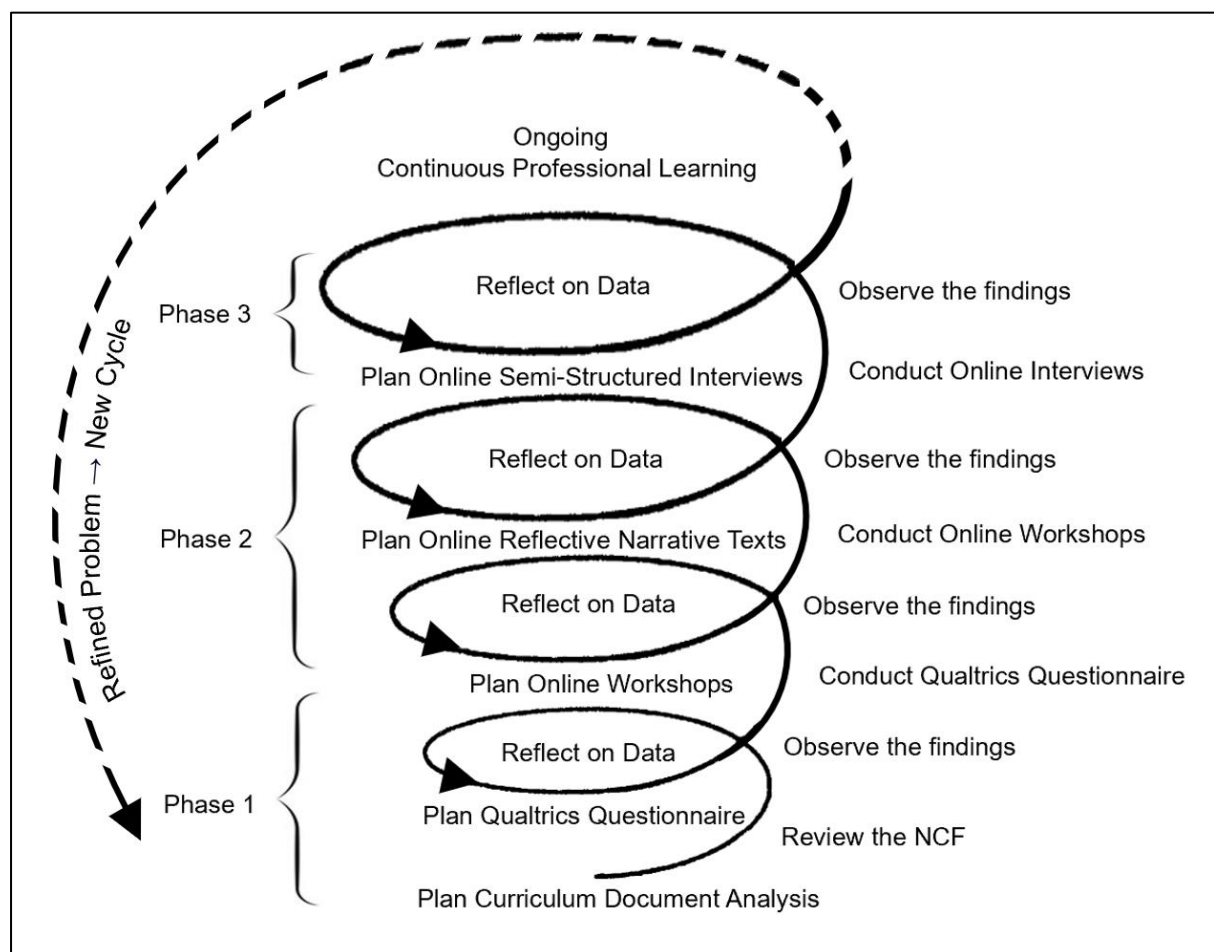
experiences and generate collective ideas, thereby contributing to the iterative nature of the process. Reflective narrative texts, submitted online, became a valuable tool for both observation and reflection, capturing participants' evolving perspectives. Online interviews further facilitated interactive reflection, providing a deeper understanding of participants' experiences.

This participatory engagement, grounded in the action reflection spiral model (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) allows for dynamic and reflective exploration of the complexities within the teaching and learning of social studies in the Maldives classrooms. The action reflection spiral model (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002), which emphasises a spontaneous and self-recreating system of inquiry, had influenced my approach to navigating uncertainties and maintaining a balance within the research process. Moreover, the model had inspired the conceptualisation of my data collection process model as an evolving and interconnected framework. The continuous unfolding and folding back into itself in the action reflection spiral mode (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002) resonate with the ongoing nature of my data collection, fostering a sense of dynamism and adaptability.

As I applied this understanding to my research, the iterative nature of the action reflection spiral became a guiding principle, ensuring that each phase informed and shaped the subsequent steps in the data collection journey. Figure 4.4 below demonstrates the three phases of my data collection process in a spiral model.

Figure 4.5

Three phases of my data collection process in my research



The research process followed a cyclical and iterative action research model, informed by the conceptual principles of action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002), but uniquely developed for this study. As action research is inherently ongoing and evolving, the model represents this process through interconnected spirals, illustrating continuous professional learning. This iterative design allows both the research and the participants to engage in ongoing inquiry and professional growth.

The model is visually represented as a conical spiral, expanding progressively from one phase to the next. This widening shape symbolises the deepening understanding that emerged through the study, both in terms of the researcher's growing insights into the participants' experiences and the participants' evolving self-awareness through reflective practice. As the study progressed, this mutual development was marked by increasingly rich and complex pedagogical understanding.

A curved arrow from the end of Phase 3 looping back to the beginning of, labelled '*Refined Problem → New Cycle*', captures the generative power of reflection. Rather than serving as a final step, reflection is positioned as a starting point for further inquiry, emphasising that professional learning is not linear, but continuous and responsive. This element highlights how new understandings and questions can emerge through the reflective process, leading to potential re-entry into the cycle. Reinforcing this ethos, the phrase '*Ongoing and Continuous Professional Learning*' is positioned at the top of the model. It serves as a visual reminder that professional growth extends beyond the formal structure of the research phases, reflecting the lifelong, adaptive nature of teacher learning.

Each phase: Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3, formed a complete cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection, reinforcing the iterative nature of the study. The first phase mainly focused on the NCF curriculum document analysis and the Qualtrics questionnaire. The second phase involved conducting participatory online workshops for social studies K1 to K2 teachers in the six selected schools along with collecting teachers' online reflective narrative texts. In the third phase, each participant teacher was interviewed for about 30-45 minutes to gather further insights on their teaching and reflective experiences. The research process of each phase is explained in the following sections. The research design emphasises continuous refinement through data-driven decision-making, with reflection serving as a crucial step after each action. Beyond the structured phases, the extended spirals at the top of the model indicate that professional learning does not conclude with the completion of the research but remains an ongoing process of growth and adaptation.

4.10.1 The First Phase of Data Collection

4.10.1.1 Curriculum Document Analysis

Document analysis was one of the data collection methods I chose to implement in my research data gathering process because the Maldives curriculum framework analysis was significant for informing data instruments and workshop content and triangulating my findings. According to Browne et al. (2019), a curriculum framework analysis or review explains how and why authorities work to achieve specific goals and policies. Hence, I chose to undertake an exploratory curriculum document analysis as one of the data gathering methods to further understand the learning outcomes and goals that the Maldives education system aims to instil within the students' learning areas. Furthermore, as the curriculum demonstrates succinctly what each learning area is about and how the learning area is structured, I wanted to investigate how social studies was structured as a learning area for the primary school in the Maldives.

The document analysis of the curriculum helped me to understand the teachers' perceptions of what and how they were expected to teach social studies, and whether the teachers felt that they were able to meet these expectations. Gay et al. (2012) stated that when a researcher examines the curriculum adopted by a school, it allows the researcher to identify any gaps or inconsistencies between the intended curriculum and the (reported) implemented curriculum, which is the curriculum as it is taught in the classroom. By researching any inconsistencies, in intention and/or implementation, I was able to identify challenges within the curriculum or teaching methods, which could further inform the development of more effective and efficient teaching strategies.

While Gay et al. (2012) highlighted the benefits of curriculum document analysis, Garet et al. (2001) counterargued that this method may not effectively capture the actual curriculum implemented in classrooms. They contended that such analysis of static documents may overlook the specific needs of students and fail to account for the dynamic nature of teaching and learning.

With these viewpoints in mind, I chose this as a research method with the understanding that the purpose of my research was not specifically to investigate any inconsistencies or gaps found within the curriculum, but to explore the teachers' reported alignment of the social studies curriculum objectives and learning outcomes to the teaching and learning in the social studies classroom. Therefore, with the reflections that the teachers shared within the data collection, I was able to potentially gather and explore valuable insights into how the curriculum aligns with needs of the students and how it shapes their learning experience in practice. I was also able to gain insight into how teachers navigate and adapt the curriculum to meet their students' needs. Furthermore, an analysis of the policy documents enabled me to investigate whether the planning, teaching, and assessment of social studies in the K1 - K2 school, as reported by the teacher participants, appeared to respond to learning content and strategies which the curriculum framework documents promote.

The curriculum review included the National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015a), and the social studies syllabus of the National Curriculum Framework (NIE, 2015b, 2015c, 2022b, 2022c), is the latter being the official government policy that guides social studies primary teaching in schools, Social Studies textbooks and teacher guides, based on SS teaching in learning in K1-K2 schools in the Maldives. The social studies textbooks and teacher guides were only looked through briefly after the participants' shared their ideas within the questionnaires, workshops, reflections and interviews. The purpose of this was to check the topics that the teachers taught within their social studies classrooms and use this knowledge to create discussion in the workshops and interpret their responses to reflection and in the interview. Hence, my focus was primarily on reviewing and analysing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (NIE, 2015a), as this includes the key learning areas of social studies (p.43), organisation of learning (p.54), curriculum management (p.57), values, principles and shared values (p.8-15), effective pedagogy (p.62-66), and roles and responsibilities of teachers (p.71).

4.10.1.2 Qualtrics Questionnaire

The first phase of online data collection involved administering the Qualtrics online questionnaire and conducting the first online workshops with the participants. The questionnaire was given out during the 1st week of November 2020 (see Appendix G). The purpose of the first phase of my data collection was to explore the teachers' understandings of social studies concepts and their perceptions of the National Curriculum Framework [NCF]. Furthermore, the Qualtrics questionnaire (Appendix H) was given out to the participants in my research to learn the teachers' backgrounds such as their teaching experience and school norms.

My initial tool for producing the questionnaire was Google forms; however, it lacked satisfactory features for my online questionnaire such as forming complex online questionnaires, which compelled me to choose Qualtrics as the appropriate online tool for my research. It is known that the Qualtrics software enables users to set up refined questionnaires, publish, and collect the results efficiently (Barnhoorn et al., 2015). Hence, as a researcher new to collecting online data, I overcame this challenge by learning about the software with trial-and-error attempts along with the feedback of my supervisors, and by piloting the online questionnaire with three primary teachers who were not within the research as participants from the Maldives. The piloting experience allowed me to observe issues found in the questionnaire, the time taken to complete it, and any further changes required such as revising some questions.

The piloting experience ensured that there were no technical issues in my questionnaire and that the time taken to complete it was reasonable. However, I found that some questions in the questionnaire needed to be revised for coherence, so that they were clear, consistent and logical in relation to the overall purpose of the questionnaire. The Table 4.1 below shows the section of the questionnaire, what I changed and reason for my making the change required for clear understanding.

Table 4.1

Revisions made to the Qualtrics Questionnaire following the Piloting Experience

Section of Questionnaire	Question	What I changed	Reason for bringing change
Section C, Question 3	Did you teach social studies during the COVID-19 lockdown? If so, what did you teach? If not please indicate the reason.	Omit emphasis on “lockdown” and instead made question more open Changed question: <i>How has COVID-19 impacted your teaching of Social Studies?</i>	This was because the teachers expressed that throughout the lockdown period of three months, the schools were closed, and they started teaching only when the schools reopened through online classes.
Section D, Question 3	Students work on a project that takes at least two class periods to complete	Added the word “individually” Changed multiple choice statement: <i>Students work individually on a project.</i>	(Students work individually on a project that takes at least two class periods to complete) so adding the word individually will be easier to differentiate the three questions and analyse them.
Section B, Question 5		Added a new question	“What are your thoughts about the impact of teaching Social Studies in the English language compared to in the students’ mother tongue?” *I just wanted to see the teachers view about teaching social studies in the English language

Formulating a questionnaire with different types of questions can be used in education research, such as multiple-choice, rating scale, or open-ended questions (Cox & Cox, 2008). When it comes down to structuring questions, it is significant to build less structured and more open-ended questions that are appropriate to capture a diverse set of answers to a particular context (Cohen et al., 2017). Likewise, Reja et al. (2003) commented that open ended questions in a questionnaire lead to respondents being able to express their thoughts, ideas and beliefs “without being influenced by the researcher” whereas closed questions “limit the respondent to the set of alternatives being offered” (p.161). Hence, they explain the importance of being explicit when structuring the questions.

The questionnaire in my research consisted of 17 items, divided into three respective sections. Section A covered the quantitative elements of the questionnaire, for instance, question 7 asked, “How long have you been teaching Social Studies?”, followed up with multiple choices between the numbers of teaching years from one to ten. Section B inquired about the participants’ understanding of social studies as a subject, the purpose of social studies as a subject in the curriculum, and how they engaged students to explore and learn the social issues in the Maldivian context. Section C explored the participants’ professional learning experiences of developing their teaching skills, social studies knowledge and expertise and further inquired into the participants’ understanding of reflective practice.

A total of 13 participants were involved in the research having given their informed consent. Ten respondents completed the questionnaire. However, after the Qualtrics questionnaire, the number of active participants reduced to 10, as three participants chose to withdraw because of the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic, which impacted the participants’ ability to continue with the research.

4.10.2 The Second Phase of Data Collection

4.10.2.1 First Online Workshop

The second phase of data collection involved the first, second and third online workshops. Before implementing the online workshops, I conducted a pilot workshop to test the effectiveness of the tools and refine the structure of the sessions. The first workshop, conducted during the 2nd week of November 2020 (see Appendix G), was held to take the opportunity to get to know the participants through a video conferencing call via Zoom and be able to create connections with them. The workshop was held based on the time and date of convenience for the participants as they continued to work as full-time primary teachers in online schooling amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of six participants out of the ten who completed the questionnaire joined the workshop via Zoom. Four participants were not able to attend the workshop due to personal reasons and COVID-19 issues and they notified me prior to the workshop.

The first online workshop (Appendix I) focused on getting to know all the participants and setting up the scene for them to know what was asked of them within the research. In addition, I was able to listen to their teaching experiences and explore their understanding of their social studies pedagogy knowledge through our virtual discussion. Likewise, the participants were able to engage in the workshop by participating in the activities I had prepared on Jamboard, which is a digital interactive whiteboard where participants were able to draw and note down their ideas and thoughts during the workshop. However, as this was my first online workshop with the participants, there were some technical difficulties at the participants' end. Although I emphasised that the participants required a reliable internet connection, some participants faced connectivity problems during the online workshop which caused further delay into the timeline of the workshop. Despite these challenges of delay in time and connectivity problems with the first online workshop, I was able to connect with the participants and gather their shared experiences. The data from the workshop were gathered by consensually recording the workshop discussions and activities that

were conducted through Jamboard which allowed me to collect the participants' shared experiences.

The Zoom application was used to conduct online workshops and online semi-structured interviews. Selection of Zoom as a video conferencing tool went through a rigorous process as there were other choices to decide from such as Google Meet and Microsoft Team. Google Meet was an application that all the participants were familiar with, however, it lacked satisfactory features such as breakout rooms for group tasks which was accommodated in Zoom. On the other hand, despite Microsoft Teams being better for online collaborative projects, none of the participants were familiar with Microsoft Teams. Thus, choosing Zoom as a video conferencing tool in my research depended on the participants' familiarity and having satisfactory features needed to accomplish the objectives of my research. Thus, Zoom was a cost-effective alternative online tool that allows for qualitative online workshops and online interviews remotely (Gray et al., 2020).

Utilising Zoom as a tool to conduct my virtual workshops in my research project has allowed me to navigate and overcome various challenges. Archibald et al. (2019) have stated that utilising Zoom "as a platform for qualitative data collection can guide decisions about its possible application and also inform strategies to overcome context or platform specific obstacles to support positive partnerships between researchers and participants" (p.2). Firstly, Zoom allows for flexibility in scheduling, which aided me in overcoming obstacles related to participants availability. Secondly, during my workshops I was able to share my screen and use breakout rooms to create small groups of participants, allowing them to work together more effectively and encouraging meaningful engagement with each other and the research process. And finally, Zoom has a feature of recording the workshops sessions which helped me to overcome obstacles related to data collection and analysis because this meant that I always had a backup of my workshop data available in hand if unfortunately, an issue occurred where I lost my data. Overall, Zoom's features such as breakout rooms, recording options and the ability to share screens greatly supported the smooth execution and success of conducting my workshops in my research process.

4.10.2.2 Second Online Workshop

The purpose of the second and third workshops was to reflect on the teachers' experiences in teaching and to generate ideas of social studies pedagogy. Furthermore, these workshops were held to give the teachers an opportunity to learn from and analyse their own reflective thinking. The second workshop was facilitated in the 2nd week of January 2021, because the 1st term school holidays commenced in December 2020 (see Appendix G). As I finalised the times and dates of each online workshop based on the participants' convenience, it was significant for me, as a researcher, to respect the participants' wishes of no involvement in the research owing to their work holidays. Through this process, the participants and I, were able to form a healthy participant and researcher virtual relationship despite the COVID-19 challenges.

The second online workshop, which also commenced in November 2020, consisted of six participants. Participants who were not able to attend the online workshop due to personal reasons and/the COVID-19 virus had informed me beforehand. Towards the end of the workshop, the number of participants decreased from six to five as one of the participants was facing internet connectivity problems throughout the workshop. I made sure to commence the Zoom meeting 15 minutes beforehand, thus I was able to stay on track to the timeline of the workshop and go through every activity with the participants.

The focus of the second online workshop (Appendix J) was quite similar to the first workshop of getting to know one another and setting up the scene for the participants to share their teaching experiences. However, the second workshop opened a way for the participants to rethink and reflect in-depth on their teaching experiences in their social studies teaching and learning. The topics discussed in the second workshop were foundational concepts to be explored in the third online workshop. Participants engaged in key discussions on social studies pedagogy, teachers' experiences, and reflective practices. Challenges in teaching specific social studies strands, information collection, and resource utilisation were addressed. Emphasis was placed on the significance on social studies in the Maldivian curriculum, and connecting theoretical knowledge with practical application. Activities such as sticky note exercises facilitated

active participation, which fostered collaborative idea generation on social studies pedagogy. Additionally, the concept of reflection was introduced, encouraging participants to share thoughts through an online platform. These discussions significantly informed subsequent research phases, providing valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with teaching social studies in the Maldives.

4.10.2.3 Third Online Workshop

The purpose of the third online workshop (Appendix K) introduced the four reflective practice narrative texts to the participant; it was planned for these to be accomplished within two weeks. The third workshop was held during the 4th week of January 2021 (see Appendix G). Reflective narrative texts were personal texts that the participants had to not only recount their teaching experiences but also to analyse how they have changed or what they have learned. Moreover, engaging in virtual discussions via Zoom allowed me to explore the participants' familiarity with reflective practices and their frequency of incorporating reflection into their daily teaching routines, particularly considering their relative newness to this form of introspection. With these shared experiences, opinions, and ideas of reflective practice on social studies teaching and learning, I was able to gather more information on the participants' understanding of social studies pedagogical content knowledge and professional learning.

Although I was able to gather information on the participants' social studies pedagogical understanding through our virtual discussion across the first, second and third online workshops, there were many difficulties that occurred among the three workshops. One significant challenge was fully achieving the true essence of the workshops; the true essence being the participants and myself actively engaging in the workshops and gathering data and insights collaboratively in person. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite gathering extensive data for analysis, every participant, myself included, had to remotely engage throughout the three online workshops which posed a unique set of obstacles. Due to the continual internet connection problems, I had to figure out an immediate solution. Hence, I endured talking to participants' Zoom screens with their cameras off, which affected maintaining rapport. This is because observing the non-verbal language of the participants is

significant to building rapport and to improve their ability to relate, engage and establish meaningful interactions (Phutela, 2015). Nevertheless, I tried to connect with the participants by using various facial expressions, varying the tone of my voice, and using filler words such as 'hmm', 'yeah', and 'uhm' as a strategy to engage the participants. Due to the participants' inexperience in using Zoom, it also challenged me to maintain the fixed duration of the online workshop and online interview while guiding them to use the features of Zoom and other collaborative online tools such as Google Jamboard and AWW board. At the end of the data collection, I presented certificates for voluntary participation to each participant who was involved in the research process to recognise their achievement.

4.10.3 Online Reflective Narrative Texts

Narrative writing in the form of reflection is understood to be any form of writing or text that is developed through the writer's recounting their own past experiences using their reflection and creativity to open themselves to new perspectives (Jasper, 2005). Bolton (2006) emphasised that a powerful approach to reflective practice and reflexivity is found in the exploration of personal and professional narratives, as this fosters a rich engagement with one's own stories and experiences. As I aimed to investigate the enhancement of teachers' social studies pedagogy through the act of reflective practice, narrative writing, that is a way of storytelling (Pennebaker, 2000), offered the teachers a chance to recount their teaching and learning experiences through the act of reflection. Therefore, the purpose of including teacher narrative texts in this study as one of the data collection tools was to engage and shape primary teachers' social studies pedagogy, through narrative writing in the form of reflective practice texts that could help them to reflect their thoughts.

Similarly, reflective practice narrative texts involve the researcher and participants in an online platform setting such as Google Docs where the participants share their experiences and stories (Clandinin, 2019, 2022; Downey & Clandinin, 2019). There was a total of four reflective narrative texts for each of the participants to accomplish, and each reflective text highlighted an aspect of the research questions to guide me in collecting information for my analysis (see Appendix L, M, N, O). The reflective

narrative texts were collected from February 2021 to June 2021 (see Appendix G). The purpose of the reflective practice narrative texts was to be able to gather teachers' written texts of their reflections on their teaching in social studies which articulate their reasonings behind their actions when teaching. Moreover, through these texts, I was able to analyse and account for teachers' planning for the next lesson while further investigating Maldivian primary teachers' professional learning opportunities. At this stage of my research, there were only four active participants who completed each of their respective texts. This was a significant participant dropout rate of 60% in my research. The reduction in the number of participants was mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic where most of my participants became victims of the spreading virus.

As COVID-19 hindered many opportunities and goals in my research, it was even more distressing to witness my participants, and their family members fall ill to the disease. Hence, despite Gillis and Jackson (2002)'s assertion that workshops and interviews where the participants must remain engaged, provide an opportunity for them to describe their lived experiences without interruption, COVID-19's impact not only physically affected my participants' health but also mentally. The pandemic had induced mental health challenges, as expressed by Tsamakis et al. (2021), who note that distress, uncertainty, and the prolonged nature of the pandemic has given rise to issues such as panic, anxiety, and depression. This not only underscores the multifaceted effects of the pandemic on individuals but also adds a layer of complexity to the understanding of their experiences. The effects of the pandemic may have not been as transparent within the research due to the virtual gap between the participants and I; however, the participation of the teachers in the research and the consistency of work that went into the research among all the participants were lacking. The lack of consistency in the number of participants also negatively affected my progress with the timeline of my research. However, maintaining continual communication through e-mail and Viber strengthened my researcher and participant relationship. Although the attrition of the participants was due to difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings of my research that I have gathered across constant observation and communication with my four consistent participants in my study had value due to the process I put in place.

4.10.3 The third phase of data collection

4.10.3.1 Online semi-structured interviews

The third phase of my data collection was somewhat shorter than the first and second phases, however, it was one of the most crucial parts of the data collection. The online interviews were conducted from the 3rd week of September 2021 to the 3rd week of October 2021 (see Appendix G). With the four active participants who continued to stay on this research journey with me, I was able to have a one-on-one interview with each of them to understand their reflective practice perspectives and their own insights of social studies in Maldives education.

Prior to the interviews, the teachers were provided with the interview questions, thus establishing convenience and preparedness. These questions were crafted based on the responses provided in the participants' written reflections. This proactive approach aimed to ensure that the interviews stayed focused. The interview questions covered various aspects such as the teachers' perception of social studies, the teaching and learning of social studies in relation to the National Curriculum, the teaching strategies used, experiences with reflective practice, and recommendations for professional learning (see Appendix P). By interviewing these participants who had experienced both normal and virtual classroom settings, the data gathered was used to investigate into specific ideas and trends in greater detail; for instance, the adaptation of teaching strategies through reflective practice, professional learning needs, and teacher-student relationships and support. The data from the interviews served to describe and elaborate on the previously gathered data, contributing valuable insights to the overall research findings.

Online semi-structured interviews were chosen as one of the data collection tools to gather information for this research because they enabled participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live in and to express how they personally regard certain situations (Cohen et al., 2007). The online semi-structured interviews were to collect human experiences where the participants were fully engaged, and to provide an opportunity for the participants to describe their life experiences without

being interrupted (Gillis & Jackson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are also known as guided conversations where broad questions are asked (Newcomer et al., 2015). However, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the semi-structured interviews took place online where I had a one-on-one meeting with each of my four participants.

Online semi-structured interviews were used for this research because it enabled the interviewees to express their ideas and experiences openly (Cohen et al., 2007). I planned for the interviews to be set in a comfortable and casual setting for the participants for them to feel safe to share their personal insights and social studies teaching experiences with me. The focus of each of these interviews was to also observe how the participants demonstrated reflective practice in relation to their social studies lessons, and their thoughts on how reflective thinking has contributed to their teaching pedagogical knowledge and professional learning. The pre-planned questions helped me as the interviewer to stay on topic and on track but also allowed the participants the freedom to describe their feelings and thoughts while not being influenced by my opinions and biases (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The questions were formed in such a way that useful information could be gained in accordance with the research purpose. After these interviews, the participants were provided with their interview transcripts, during the 4th week of December 2021 until the 2nd week of January 2022, to revise anything that they wanted to change within a timeframe of 2 weeks (see Appendix G).

Each of these interviews lasted roughly about 45 minutes, and the participants were able to share their ideas within this time frame. Unfortunately, similar to my previous online workshops, the one-to-one interviews which were conducted via Zoom also pushed me to endure the similar circumstances where the participant's camera was off, owing to internet connectivity problems.

Within the realm of action research, my data collection process reflected a participatory approach, allowing participants to actively contribute and direct the research with a autonomy. The participatory aspect is ingrained in the iterative nature of the process, where collaboration and shared decision-making plays a pivotal role. Participants are not mere subjects but active contributors to the research journey. Through continuous engagement in workshops, discussions, and reflective activities,

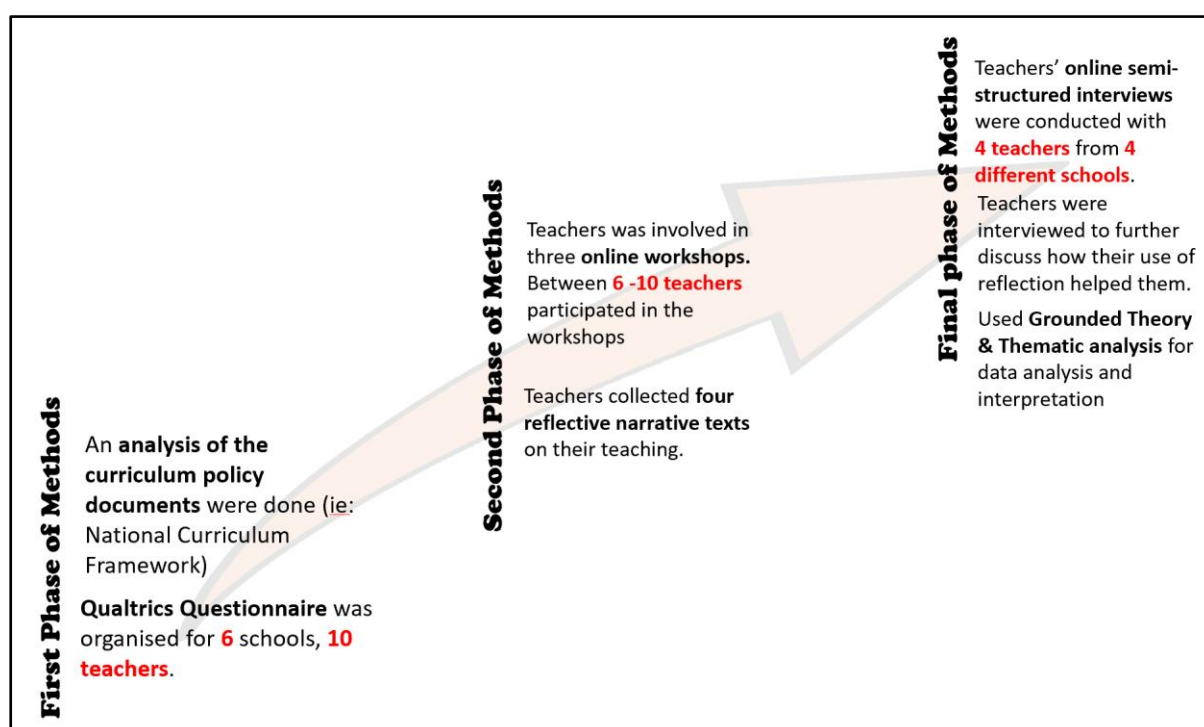
their experiences, insights, and challenges are not only acknowledged but became integral in steering the research direction. This participatory dynamic by the participants in my study influenced the research process, ensuring their perspectives and expertise within the social studied field were not only considered but actively contributed to the development of knowledge in the field of social studies pedagogy in the Maldives.

4.11 Data Analysis

To illustrate the research process and to provide a clear overview of how data was collected and analysed, Figure 4.5 presents the phases of my data collection process.

Figure 4.6

Three phases of my data collection process



The data collection was conducted in three phases. Phase 1 involved an exploratory analysis of the NCF and an online Qualtrics questionnaire administered to 10 teachers across six schools. Phase 2 included three online workshops, where 6-10 teachers

participated, and four consistent participants wrote reflective narrative texts about their teaching. Phase 3 consisted of online semi-structured interviews with four teachers from different schools to explore how reflection influenced their teaching.

In my study, I adopted a constructivist epistemological lens, which assumes knowledge is co-constructed through participants' experiences and interpretations. Within this framework, I employed thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as my primary methodological approach to systematically identify and interpret patterns in the data. One of the key strengths of thematic analysis is its adaptability across different epistemological positions (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing it to align with my constructivist stance and the nature of my study.

Thematic analysis (TA), as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to systematically identify patterns and themes within the qualitative data. Unlike deductive approaches that impose predetermined categories onto data, inductive thematic analysis allows themes to emerge organically from participants' narrative, ensuring the findings are reflective of their lived experiences. For my research, the flexibility of TA extended beyond its theoretical applicability (Clarke & Braun, 2013), it also influenced key research decisions, including defining research questions, determining sample size, and selecting data collection methods. Given the constraints of a small sample size, TA enabled me to work with qualitative data systematically, capturing both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying) themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of teachers' social studies education and pedagogy in the Maldives.

In addition to TA, I employed constructivist grounded theory (CGT), as a complementary analytical tool to refine my understanding of teachers' experiences. Grounded theory is widely recognised as a systematic approach within qualitative research and involves constant comparison, coding paradigms, and theory generation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is "a process of collecting qualitative data and undertaking data analysis to generate categories (a theory) to explain a phenomenon of interest" (Chong & Yeo, 2015, p. 258). Grounded theory is deemed to be an approach within qualitative data analysis, which involves aspects of the generation of ideas, coding paradigm (searching for keys from data), and constant comparison (Oktay, 2012;

Strauss, 1987). Similarly, Creswell (2012) described Grounded theory as a powerful tool when needed to explore a broad theory or explain a natural phenomenon. He further maintained that grounded theory is *rooted* in the data and will provide a better more sophisticated explanation in contrast to other theories derived from prior studies. Likewise, grounded theory can also be adopted during the data analysis stage of research where this approach allows you to “direct, manage, and streamline your data collection, and moreover, construct an original analysis of your data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 3).

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), a qualitative data analysis research design that can be implemented when current theories unsuccessfully provide an explanation of an interesting phenomenon. However, the use of Grounded theory in my research does not necessarily imply that the theories introduced regarding student learning, reflective practice, and professional learning were deemed unhelpful. Grounded theory is often employed when existing theories fall short of explaining a specific phenomenon adequately. In the context of my study, the application of Grounded theory signifies a methodological choice to develop an in-depth understanding of how Maldivian primary teachers conceptualise and engage in social studies pedagogy. It does not negate the value of existing theories but rather serves as a complementary approach to generate insights specific to the researched context. Furthermore, Grounded theory could also be viewed as a process to examine data to search for insights that are contained within (Bound, 2011). In my research, I have adopted Grounded theory as an approach within my data analysis stage of my study not only because Grounded theory is arguably the most common popular qualitative approach (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), but also because Grounded theory research has successfully used in numerous educational research studies (Laws & McLeod, 2004). In this study, Grounded theory was not used as a means to develop a formal theory, but rather as a systematic analytical tool to explore teachers’ conceptualisations and experiences.

Therefore, as my research was conducted in an educational setting where I studied teacher education and their conceptual understanding of social studies pedagogy, I realised that Grounded theory was the suitable complementary research data analysis approach. This was because, for instance, to produce high quality Grounded theory

analysis, my research design paradigm must be “parallel with the beliefs of the nature of the phenomenon of interest” (Chong & Yeo, 2015, p. 258; Mills et al., 2006). According to Creswell (2012), there are three major design paradigms that are under Grounded theory; which are the systematic design, emerging design, and constructivist design. The design paradigm that is parallel my research interest lies is the constructivist design paradigm.

Constructivist is a design developed by Kathy Charmaz (Chong & Yeo, 2015; Hallberg, 2006; Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022) and is a design that aims to describe the participant's meaning and interpretations towards a process in reality (Lincoln & Guba, 2016; Schwandt, 1994). A more recent definition shows that researchers who implement a constructivist design create interactions with their participants and this interaction further contributes towards the construction of data analysis (Hallberg, 2006). For instance, Charmaz (1994), implemented a constructivist design in her study and reported the participants' feelings, beliefs, and their perspectives by using codes; for example, awakening accommodating, and defining (as cited in Creswell, 2012). Thus, while some studies employ Grounded theory as a means to develop a formal theory, in my research, CGT was used as a complementary analytical approach with TA to systematically engage with and interpret the data, using constant comparison and iterative analysis to refine emerging insights.

I explored the participants' conceptual understandings, perspectives, beliefs and their opinions on social studies education and pedagogy in the Maldives which were grouped into codes and further into themes. I employed NVIVO version 20, a qualitative analysis software, to generate codes and organise them into themes. This iterative process involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing an analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data sources, including workshop and interview transcripts, reflective narrative texts, and Qualtrics questionnaire responses were imported into NVIVO. Grounded theory allowed simultaneous data collection and analysis, where emerging insights informed subsequent data collection (Grbich, 2012). For example, after analysing workshop data, I designed semi-structured interview questions to further explore participants' use of social studies concepts in teaching. Similarly, investigating their engagement with reflective narrative

texts provided deeper insights into both their teaching approaches and student learning. CGT facilitated the process of making meaning of the data, while inductive TA facilitated the extraction and identification themes from the data, thus allowing themes to naturally emerge without being imposed beforehand. The coding process involved key data segments, refining these codes iteratively, and identifying broader themes that directly align with the research questions. Themes were constantly compared for coherence and interconnections within the dataset. For instance, *teachers' perception of social studies* emerged as a sub-theme under Theme 1 of *Social Studies Teaching and Learning in Relation to the Maldives National Curriculum Framework*. This is just one of the many themes that I produced in my data analysis. The elaboration of my findings through themes will be further discussed, in Chapters 5 (figure 5.1) and 6 (figure 6.1).

4.12 Researcher's Positionality

My role as a researcher and a teacher educator conducting teacher research involves the intention and “systematic inquiry done by teachers with the goals of gaining insights into teaching and learning, becoming more reflective practitioners, effecting changes in the classroom or school, and improving the lives of children” (Henderson et al., 2012, p. 1). I was a participatory action researcher in my study, I uphold the same culture, language, namely Islamic tradition, and religion of the Maldives. Functioning as a teacher researcher, I identified a significant issue within the realm of social studies education, then formulated my research question. This involved collecting, analysing, and interpreting online data gleaned from participating teachers. My extensive teaching background, allowed me to develop my role as researcher in this study which was to comprehend the dynamics of social studies education in Maldivian primary schools, and to delve into the perspectives of the primary teachers shaping this educational landscape. Additionally, I acknowledge the need for reflexivity regarding my role as a social studies teacher educator and being mindful of perceived or actual power dynamics between myself and the teachers. While my insider positionality provided familiarity with the local education system, I made efforts to maintain objectivity by prioritising transparency and open dialogue, ensuring that I did not impose my perspective on participants. Throughout this dual role as a professional

developer and researcher, I maintained a delicate balance to ensure ethical and respectful engagement with the participants.

As a researcher, my connections and interactions with stakeholders and participants were significant to building effective research relationships. This involved developing communication skills necessary to reduce conflicts and strengthen relationships (Suter et al., 2009). Negotiations about workshop and interview timings, and deadlines of the participants' reflective practice narrative texts with my participants enabled me to overcome challenges in collecting online data remotely. This section highlights the strategies that I applied with my participants to pursue OPAR and describes the power relations between the participants and myself as the researcher in my study. I positioned myself not as an external or authoritative figure but as a participant researcher. This allowed me to collaborate actively with teachers, rather than merely observe or collect data. This collaborative approach fostered shared ownership of the research, ensuring that participants were contributors, not just subjects.

Bridging the gap between the participants and stakeholders of my research context with an eight-hour time difference was crucial but arduous. Nonetheless, increasing the number of initial anticipated number of participants for my study from eight teachers to thirteen was a strategy to improve the efficiency of gathering quality data of my study as a reduction of participants at the end of online data collection was anticipated due to the pandemic. The use of an OPAR approach was practicable as the schools in the Maldives were conducting online lessons underlining the possibility of bridging the gap between the participants and myself as the researcher. It is worth noting that successfully managing the dual role of a professional developer and researcher played a crucial role in navigating the complexities of coordinating with participants and stakeholders, especially with the added challenge of posed by the global pandemic.

Building rapport with the participants was significant (Hooley et al., 2012), yet it was another challenge within my research. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) highlight that building rapport online with the participants is different from establishing a relationship face-to-face. They further argued that technical snags can hinder rapport-building with the participants. This brings me to discuss the importance of bridging the gap between

the participants through the issues surrounding digital collaboration and communication environments. These issues in my research included difficulty in achieving seamless virtual communication, delayed responses, and feeling a sense of disconnection. These factors adversely contributed to building rapport between my participants virtually all the while they were experiencing a spreading pandemic. Nevertheless, being understanding, open, and friendly with the participants progressively bridged the virtual gap (Hooley et al., 2012). Thus, I planned weekly check-ups on the participants to observe how far they were on their reflective narrative texts, and if they needed more time, and if necessary, I provided them with as much time as they required. I understood their difficulties amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and valued their time and effort for voluntarily participating in the research in order to encourage their continued involvement. Additionally, I created a safe space for the participants to hold honest discussions where the participants felt more relaxed to share their thoughts and ideas on social studies. Recognising the potential for bias, I took steps to ensure reflexivity in my research. This included seeking participant feedback, maintaining transparency in data collection and analysis, and ensuring that my role as a researcher did not overshadow the voices of the teachers.

4.13 Ethical Issues

Regulating ethical consideration in any research undertaking is crucial. Ethics are guidelines and principles that provide good professional practice in conducting research (Wood & Bloor, 2006). This is owing to the “need to ensure that the process of educational research is genuinely based on ethical standards, principles, and guidelines” (Khan, 2015, p. 2). Despite selecting an appropriate methodological approach for the research is as important, considering the ethics around how the research is conducted is as significant. Before undertaking any research project, many universities require the approval of ethical processes for engaging in research with human subjects. In the case of my research, the approval of ethical considerations was sought and granted from the University of Waikato (see Appendix A). Nonetheless, one must bear in mind that taking an account ethical considerations is not just gaining the approval for conducting a research study.

Consequently, ethical considerations were another challenge within my research. It was essential to maintain the privacy and anonymity of the participants' data so that the respondents could reveal information that could be traced to them (Allen, 2017). I ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' data by keeping their information virtually in password-protected files and all the research data could only be accessed by myself. Moreover, the online reflective narrative texts were placed in a safe Google Drive folder dedicated to each respective participant which only the participant and I had access to. Furthermore, participants had the option to reach out through Viber and Email, with both platforms providing secure and confidential spaces for them to openly share their authentic perspectives and engage in discussions related to the study. Therefore, it was my responsibility to ensure that none of the participants would be at risk by participating in my study (Eynon et al., 2017). Macfarlane (2010) states that taking account of ethical considerations is not simply gaining ethics approval for conducting a research study; rather it involves what happens in the field of research and how the researcher manages whatever arises. According to Dahlquist (2006) two important aspects in this regard are research ethics and the researcher's ethics. Research ethics include rules and regulations that need to be followed when conducting research whereas, a researcher's ethics involves moral obligation of the researcher such as trustworthiness and equality when interpreting and presenting the findings. Besides, as ethical issues may vary from different research contexts, these ethical considerations may impact in unique ways depending on the nature of the study.

To put this into context to my research, research participants' rights in New Zealand are different from research participants in the research context in Maldives. Therefore, ethics are associated with the researcher's everyday actions and decisions that manage and uphold ethical standards (Wood & Bloor, 2006). The following subsections explain how these ethical considerations are related to obtaining access to participants, seeking informed consent from participants, confidentiality, and anonymity, and avoiding harm. Once these measures were negotiated successfully, I submitted a proposal for ethical approval of my research. It was approved without reservation.

4.13.1 Access to participants

According to Cohen et al. (2007) researchers must seek official permission prior to conducting research in an institution. My research access to participants was gained through the approval of and consent of the Ministry of Education and the school principals (Appendix C & D). Once I received the approval from the principals with the names and email addresses of potential interested teachers, I emailed each teacher with the information about my research and the consent forms.

4.13.2 Informed Consent

Halai (2006) states that all participants must have access to relevant information prior to consent which is usually obtained by written consent forms. Consent is a process whereby the researcher allows the potential participants to think freely and voluntarily decide to participate. Erlen (2010) noted several mandates for researchers which includes the researcher to observe participants' rights, such as privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, Banister et al. (2011) explained that participants need to be fully informed on details such as details about data collection methods, time, process, potential harm, and how their data will be used in the thesis. In my research informed consent was gained after gaining the approval from the principals of the schools to conduct research in their schools. After having received the interested teachers' names and email addresses, I sent each teacher who showed willingness to participate an email with an information sheet about my research and the duration of their involvement and requesting their consent to participate in my study during the first week of January 2020. Once I received their response, I explained about my studies and clarified their doubts. The participants' individual consent was achieved after I explained my research, and I invited the teachers to sign the consent forms (Appendix E & F).

4.13.3 Participants' right to decline to participate and right to withdraw/withdraw data

According to Creswell (2007) during the research process participants should be able to change their mind and withdraw from the research. Consequently, in this study participants had all the rights to participate and withdraw from the research at any point during the process. Participants had the right to request any information they shared in the study not be used. However, after 1st November 2020, individual contributions to group workshop evidence could not be withdrawn.

4.13.4 Arrangements for participants to receive information

Creswell and Poth (2016) stated that to gain support from the participants, the researcher must disclose all relevant information to potential participants, including the purpose and the nature of the research procedure of the study. This I did with interested teachers through their principal and via their email addresses. All informed participants had access to outcomes from the study upon completion through the University of Waikato Research Commons Database.

4.13.4 Language consideration

The Medium of instruction in the Maldivian schools is in English. The subject Social Studies in the Key stage 1 (Years 7-9, grade 1 to grade 3) to Key stage 2 (Years 10-12, grades 4 to grades 6) is taught in the English Language. Hence, throughout workshop and data collection procedures the communication was also conducted in English. If any participants wished to share anything in their own language due to the context or wanting a detailed approach; that spoken or written communication was translated and transcribed by the researcher to English before it were used in the research writing.

4.13.6 Anonymity

According to Halai (2006), to respect and protect research participant the research participants' anonymity must be maintained including the identity of the individuals and institutions involved. As this was an Online Participatory Action Research [OPAR] approach, there was a lot of sharing of social studies thinking and pedagogy throughout the research, as the teachers were already familiar with each other. Even though every effort was made to protect the anonymity of data gathered from the participants, this cannot be guaranteed as the issue of anonymity is impossible in OPAR. Therefore, in the writing process, I used pseudonyms for all my participants or if they preferred, they could choose to let me share their own names in my writing process.

4.13.7 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is strictly linked to protecting the rights of participants. Wiles et al. (2008b) stated that confidentiality includes keeping private the shared experiences and information between the researcher and the participant. Confidentiality of the participating schools and of the participating individuals was protected. However, given the small size of the school system of the education community in the Maldives, it may be possible for members of the community to guess the identity of the individuals and their schools by the information they had provided. This risk was informed and understood by the participants, but it was minimised wherever possible in data reporting. The records of this study were kept strictly confidential. This involved keeping the shared experiences such as reflective entries and the information between the researcher and the participants in confidence.

4.13.8 Avoiding Harm

Cohen et al. (2007) advised that researchers uphold an ethical and moral responsibility to protect participants from possible harm. Similarly, Halai (2006) states that all researchers are expected to provide the participants with an outline of the risks and benefits involved to the participants in the study. Therefore, protecting participants

from any form of harm is a moral and ethical obligation that was obliged to observe during the whole research process. To ensure participants' protection the information collected will not be exploited in any way outside the dictates of the study. However, I acknowledge that there was a power relationship in terms of my professional stance and responsibilities, as I had worked in the Maldives National University as a lecturer and a researcher. The participants may have been reluctant to share personal information with me. However, they were assured that no information would be shared in the present research without their permission, and they will remain anonymous. The participants also had no obligation to participate in this study and it was made clear that they could opt out any time before 1st November 2020. Apart from ethical considerations considered during the research process, I also maintained the trustworthiness and credibility of my research as explained in the following section.

4.14 Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative research study is important in order to promote the quality of the data and analysis (Gunawan, 2015). According to Shenton (2004) the trustworthiness of a qualitative study "is often questioned by positivists, perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed the same way in naturalistic work" (p.63). This is because qualitative researchers and quantitative researchers depend on different terms to ensure the trustworthiness of their study. However, several researchers notably Silverman (2001), Shenton (2004), and Pitts (1994), reveal how qualitative researchers can address the issues of validity and reliability of their own qualitative methods. Guba (1981) establishes four criteria he believes a qualitative researcher should consider when ensuring the trustworthiness of a study. These four criteria are:

(1) credibility (in preference to internal validity), (2) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalisability), (3) dependability (in preference to reliability) and, (4) confirmability (in preference to objectivity) (as cited in Shenton, 2004, p. 64).

Credibility is known to be one of the key criteria that essentially must be addressed by a qualitative researcher to promote trustworthiness of their study (Ahmed, 2024). According to Merriam (1998), when ensuring credibility, a qualitative researcher must deal with “How congruent are the findings with the reality?” (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). In Shenton’s (2004) article, there are fourteen provisions that a qualitative researcher must promote credibly in confidence to ensure trustworthiness in their research. To ensure the credibility of my study, I have prioritised congruence between findings and reality, aligning with Merriam’s guidance on trustworthiness. I have meticulously considered Shenton’s fourteen provisions to bolster credibility, demonstrating my commitment to the reliability of the study.

Transferability, according to Merriam (1998), is external validity that “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p.39). This essentially means that as the findings I have gathered are specific to a small number of individuals, the concern is that these findings may not be applicable to the wider population. With respect to transferability, I’ve acknowledged the unique context of each teacher, emphasising the need for careful consideration when applying findings to a broader population. My awareness of the specificity of individual cases and the importance of similar projects employing the same methods in different environments reflects my dedication to ensuring the transferability of my research. Therefore, transferability of the findings must mean “to assess the extent to which findings may be true of people in other settings, similar projects employing the same methods but in different environments could well be of great value” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70).

Dependability is when a qualitative researcher addresses the issue of reliability, by “employing techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). To address dependability more directly, a qualitative researcher’s work must be presented in detail for the readers to be able to understand coherently on the research design and implementation, the operational detail of the data gathering, and the reflective appraisal of the project (Shenton, 2004, pp. 71-72). Nonetheless, Fidel (1993) and Marshall and Rossman (1999) noted that changing the nature of the phenomena being investigated by the qualitative researcher “renders

such provisions problematic in their work” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). According to Florio-Ruane (1991), an investigator’s observation and findings are closely tied to the context of their research interest and the nature of the phenomenon. Addressing dependability, I have recognised the challenges posed by changes in the phenomena investigated. To enhance dependability, I have provided detailed information about the research design, data gathering, and reflective appraisal. This is accompanied by a coherent and transparent account of the study to ensure clarity and trustworthiness in the research process. This approach reinforces the dependability of my research, showcasing a commitment to reliability.

Lastly, confirmability is a qualitative researcher’s “comparable concern to objectivity” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). To ensure real objectivity with the use of instruments that are dependent on human skill and perception, such as questionnaires, that are designed by humans, is inevitable that a researcher’s biases to be somewhat intrusive (Amankwaa, 2016). Hence, as a qualitative researcher in my study, I made sure to take significant steps to ensure that my biases as a researcher were not likely to influence the participants’ perspectives and understandings. To accomplish this, I emphasised the role of triangulation where I conducted different varieties of data collection methods so that the participants had the opportunity to explain their own perspectives and beliefs. Shenton (2004) underscores the importance of triangulation in enhancing confirmability, specifically highlighting its role in minimising investigator bias. This deliberate methodological choice aims to bolster the credibility and reliability of a study’s findings by embracing a multiplicity of perspectives. Moreover, the underpinning decisions that were established to decide upon the methods and tools to be used in the research must be acknowledged as well as the favoured methodological approach adopted in the research must be well explained. This process is known as “reflective commentary”. This is significant because a “detailed methodology description enables the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Therefore, as a qualitative researcher in my research, I established a sound justification of the use of the methodology I adopted: Online Participatory Action Research. Furthermore, to ensure confirmability, I adopted five data collection methods in my research in order to minimise my biases that might influence on the participants’ decisions and thus affect the study’s findings.

4.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided details about the process of how my research was conducted. Firstly, the chapter described the selected methodological approach that was implemented in my study and the theorisation of action research as a methodology in my research. Following that, the chapter further explained my initial research design of PAR, the shift from PAR to OPAR. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the research methods and tools that I implemented in my study, along with the three data collection phases of my research process. In addition, the chapter described the data analysis steps and how the themes of the research findings were generated. The chapter also explained my role as a teacher researcher in this study and concluded by discussing the ethical and trustworthiness considerations within my study.

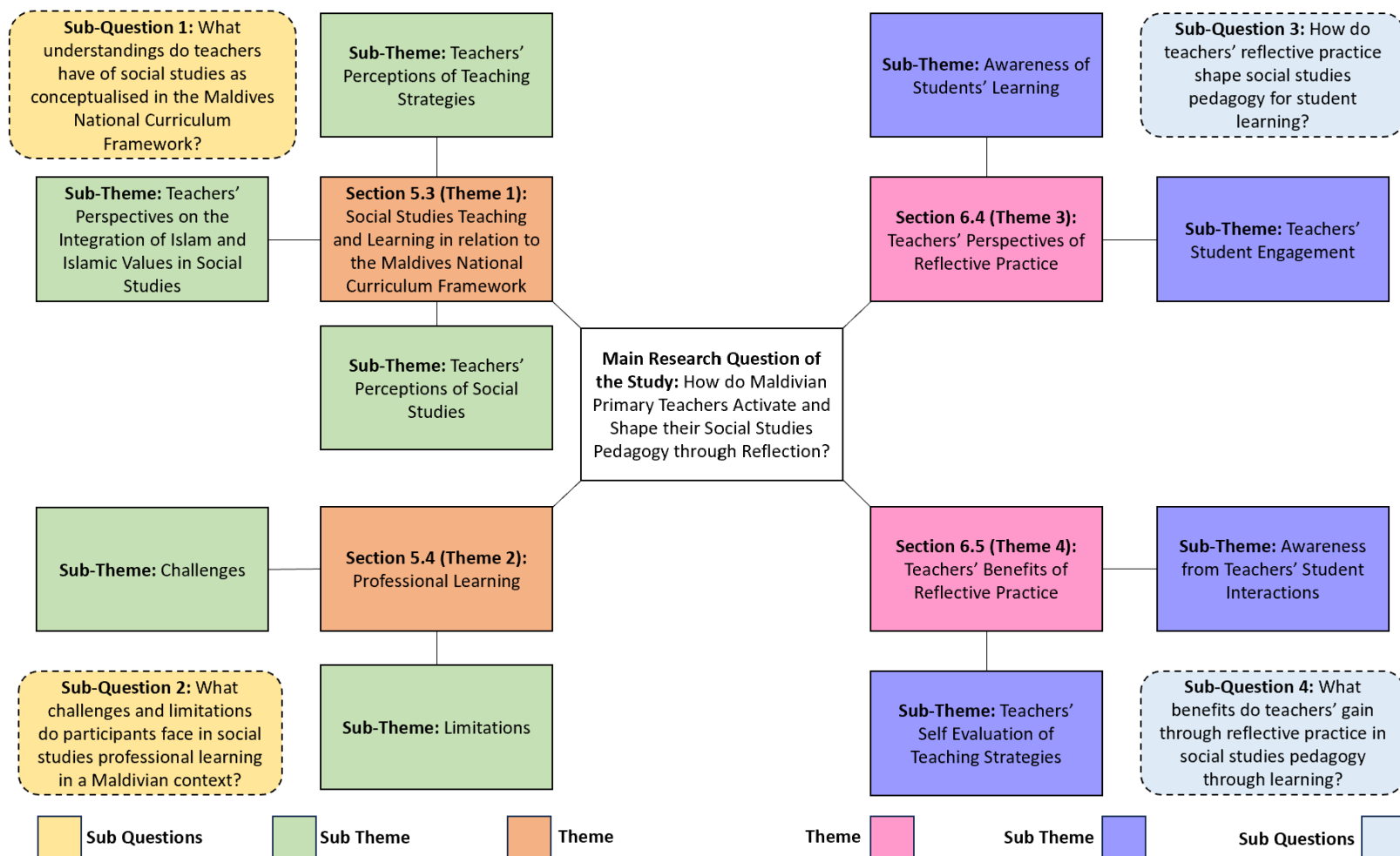
Chapter 5 Findings: Teachers' Understandings of Social Studies

5.1 Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter are mainly derived from the online Qualtrics questionnaire, the workshop data, and semi-structured online interviews. The evidence collected provides a means of exploring the fundamentals of social studies as stated in the Maldives NCF. In the exploration of the participants' viewpoints, the chapter addresses the first two sub-research questions of my study: 1) *What understandings do teachers have of social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives National Curriculum Framework*, and 2) *What challenges and limitations do teachers face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?* Navigating these findings highlight a picture of teachers' perspectives and the challenges they encounter in their social studies professional development within the context of Maldives education.

In my data analysis stage, I created a concept map to illustrate the thematic connections of data that are presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Using these connections, the findings are presented under four main themes: social studies teaching and learning in relation to the Maldives NCF; professional learning, teachers' perspectives of reflective practice, and teachers' benefits of reflective practice. There are sub-themes that have emerged from each main theme which are further elaborated on and provide more specific insights related to each main theme. Each of these themes is intricately linked to the respective four sub-questions that underpin this study, collectively working towards providing comprehensive answers. The visual representation in Figure 5.1 below illustrates this interconnection.

Figure 5.1:
Findings Concept Map



Note: Concept map of the main themes and sub-themes with the corresponding sub-questions of the study gathered in my data collection through NVIVO 20.

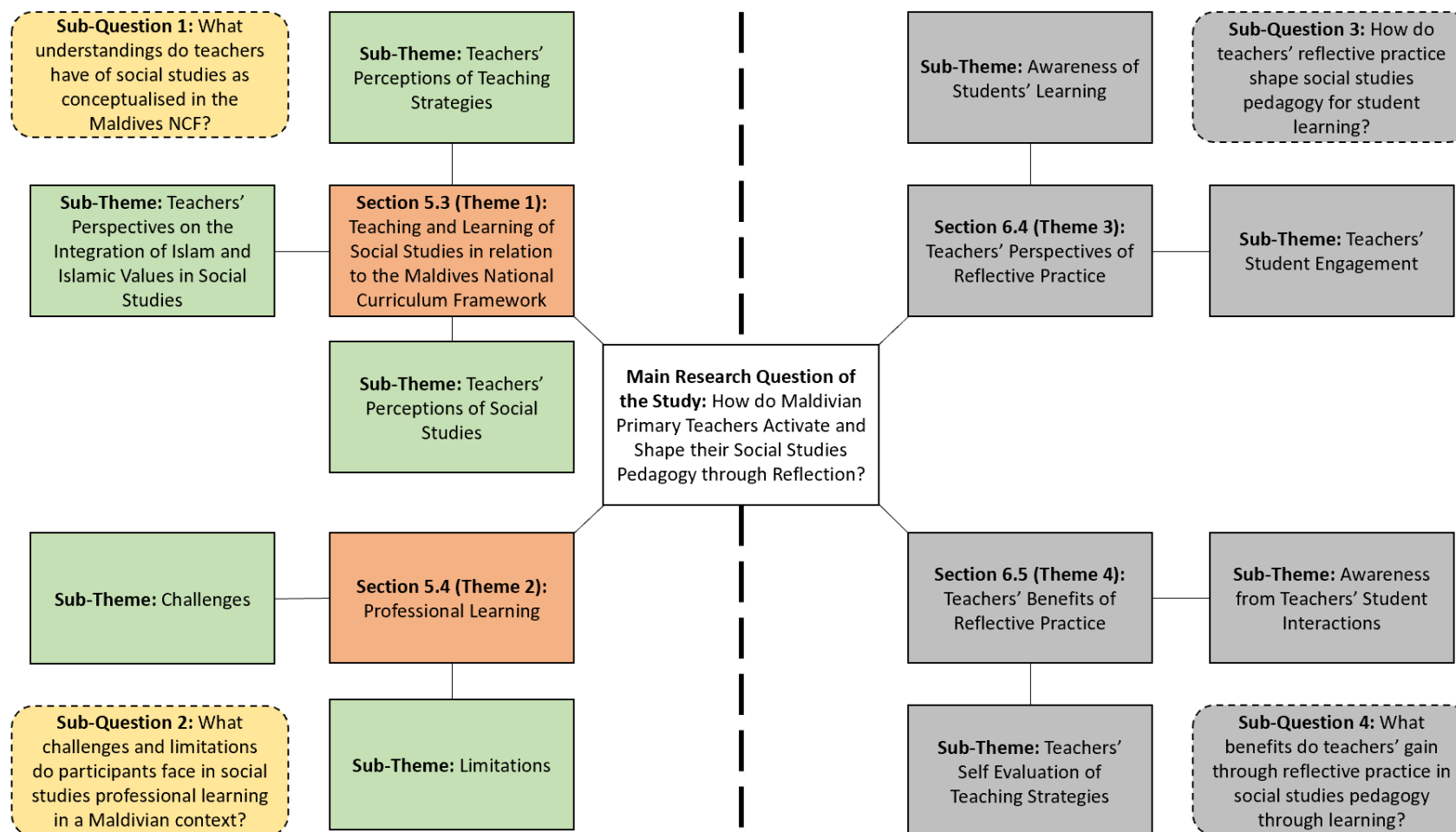
Figure 5.1 above encapsulates the core research question guiding my study, centrally positioned in the white box: *'How do Maldivian Primary Teachers activate and shape social studies pedagogy through reflection?'.* The lines stemming from this box illustrates the main themes derived from the research. Theme 1, housed in the orange box, explores social studies teaching and learning concerning the Maldives NCF, with sub-themes represented in green boxes examines teachers' perceptions of teaching social studies, teachers' perceptions of teaching strategies, and teachers' perspectives on integrating Islam and Islamic values in social studies. This theme aligns with the first sub-question in the yellow box at the top left corner, exploring teachers' understandings of social studies as conceptualised in the NCF. Theme 2, in the subsequent orange box, focuses on professional learning, with connected lines leading to sub-themes in green boxes related to challenges and limitations. This theme corresponds to the second sub-question in the yellow box at the bottom left, investigating the challenges and limitations participants encounter in social studies professional learning within a Maldivian context.

Theme 3, represented by the pink box, explores the teachers' perspectives of reflective practice, with linked sub-themes in purple boxes such as awareness of student learning with teachers' student engagement. This theme correlates with the third sub-question in the blue box at the top right, examining how teachers' reflective practice shapes social studies pedagogy for student learning. Finally, Theme 4, also in the pink box, explores teachers' benefits from reflective practice, with connected sub-themes in purple boxes, like self-evaluation of teaching strategies and teacher student interactions. This theme aligns with the fourth sub-question in the blue box at the bottom right, which investigates the benefits teachers gain through reflective practice in social studies pedagogy and learning.

This chapter addresses the first two sub-research questions (Theme 1 and Theme 2) of my study: 1) *What understandings do teachers have of social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives National Curriculum Framework?*, and 2) *What challenges and limitations do participants face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?* The primary objective from these findings based on qualitative data analysis is to explore the participants' understandings, perceptions, and experiences that address the main research question of this study.

Figure 5.2

Chapter 5 Findings Concept Map



Note: The following diagram above shows the main themes and sub-themes in colour which are presented in Chapter 5

5.2 Overview of the Data

5.2.1 Data from the Qualtrics online questionnaire

Responses from the Qualtrics online questionnaire (see Appendix H) were gathered from 10 primary social studies teachers. This online questionnaire was generated, and the information shared by the participants was consensually and anonymously collected as data for my research. I used this questionnaire evidence to cover a wide range of ideas, thoughts, and knowledge behind the teaching and learning of social studies in relation to the National Curriculum Framework [NCF] in the Maldives primary classrooms. The questionnaire focused on understanding how the teachers approach their social studies lessons and the different strategies they implement within their lessons. It is important to highlight that the teachers were asked about their ways of teaching social studies in order to understand their approaches to teaching and learning social studies both during the COVID-19 pandemic and under normal circumstances. It was my purpose to explore the perceptions of teachers with respect to their challenges and opportunities within the teaching and learning of social studies to enhance the student's remote learning.

5.2.2 Data from the online workshops

All of the workshop participants who completed the online questionnaire and were volunteers at each of the three workshops conducted within Zoom meetings. The number of participants varied between six to seven at each workshop. Four participants, Malak, Balqis, Nora, and Sarah attended all sessions.

The data gathered from the first workshop (see Appendix I) mainly focused on teachers' perspectives of what social studies meant to them as a subject in the NCF, the teaching and learning of social studies, how social studies develop student's thinking, and the importance of social studies in the Maldives National Curriculum. These data address the first sub-question which investigates the teachers' perception of teaching and learning of social studies (See Figure 5.1).

In the second workshop (see Appendix J), I gathered data on the participants' understanding of pedagogy, their social studies pedagogy in the classroom, and what reflection means to them when teaching social studies. The data that I gathered supports the second and third sub-questions of my research that explore how teachers' reflective practice shapes social studies pedagogy for student learning (See Figure 5.1).

Finally, the data collected in the third workshop (see Appendix K) centred on teachers' reflective practice while reflecting on their current social studies teaching and learning experience. While this data contributed to the second sub-question of my research, particularly through observations of participants' responses regarding their challenges and limitations of professional learning in social studies, the majority of the evidence comes from online interviews and reflections. A brief overview of the data from the online questionnaires and workshops are provided in Chapter 6.

5.3 Social Studies Teaching and Learning in Relation to the Maldives National Curriculum Policy

In this section, data are presented to indicate the range of perspectives among teachers regarding their understanding of social studies in the context of the Maldives National Curriculum. The significance of exploring these diverse views lies in their potential to shed light on the first research question, which aims to examine teachers' comprehension of the teaching and learning of social studies in relation to the Maldives National Curriculum Framework. The findings are organised in three headings based on the thematic analysis.

5.3.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Social Studies

The teachers' perceptions of social studies as a subject influence the students' learning of a social studies topic. Data show that participants held varied perceptions of understanding social studies as a subject in relation to the Maldives National

Curriculum Framework [NCF]. The findings in this section are drawn from the analysis of the online workshops and interview responses from the four participants who completed the whole project, while also drawing on the data analysed from the online questionnaire by all ten participants. To keep the anonymity of the participants, each respondent to the questionnaire was assigned a numerical value ranging from one to ten in reporting their data. This section is further organised into three subsections, each highlighting the participants' meanings, and their views of the purpose and value of social studies. These subsections collectively aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' views on social studies education.

5.3.1.1 The Meaning of Social Studies

When asked in the questionnaire about what social studies meant to them (Question 1), the participants demonstrated an understanding of what social studies entails and acknowledged the significance of the subject. Teacher 1 described social studies as “the history and functioning of the society”, while Teacher 2 defined it as “understanding the human society we live in”. Teacher 3 gave a similar response but expanded on the notion of society and specific subjects in relation to the Maldives social studies curriculum. They said, “It is part of a school curriculum concerned with the study of social relationships and the functioning of the society and usually made up of courses in history, government, economics, civics, sociology, geography, and anthropology” (Teacher 3). These perspectives indicate that the participants view social studies not merely as a subject with predefined content, but as a dynamic field that encourages critical thinking, social inquiry, and exploration of real-world issues. Teacher 1 suggested an awareness of the temporal and structural aspects of social studies indicating an understanding that goes beyond mere historical events to encompass broader social processes. Similarly, Teacher 2 indicated a recognition of the subject's relevance to everyday life and its significance in fostering societal awareness among students. Moreover, Teacher 3 acknowledges the range of disciplines that come under the umbrella of social studies that contribute to the study of human society. This indicates a more holistic understanding of social studies as not limited to one specific field but rather as an integration of various perspectives and methodologies. Hence, it can be inferred that these teachers' views of social studies

included aspects of the history, functioning, and dynamics of human society. By emphasising the study of social relationships and human society, these teachers recognised the relevance of, and value of, social studies in providing students with insights into their surroundings, culture, traditions, and the broader context of the world they live in.

Furthermore, the teachers' comments indicated their recognition of social studies as a multidisciplinary field within the Maldives NCF. This underscores their understanding that social studies encompass diverse perspectives and knowledge from various disciplines to offer a comprehensive understanding of human society. These teachers' ideas appear to align with the content outlined in the Maldives NCF, where social studies is described to be “drawn from related varied disciplines such as anthropology, economics, history, law, philosophy... it explores the past, present and the future of the Maldives and the interconnections of the wider world” (NIE, 2015a, p. 43). Hence, the participants' responses to what social studies meant to them in the questionnaire reflect the role the subject has within the curriculum in comprehending and exploring diverse disciplines and exploring human society in all its dimensions. This indicates the teachers' awareness of the subject's significance in providing students with a holistic view of society and enabling students to make connections to different aspects of human life.

The remaining seven teacher responses to the questionnaire echoed the sentiments expressed above; however, two other key ideas emerged. Four teachers expressed that social studies is about the environment, community, and moral values, while the other three indicated that social studies is about learning about social issues. For instance, Teacher 4 indicated that social studies is about “environment, surrounding, and people” while Teacher 9 suggested that social studies is “learning about the society and its organisation”.

It was clear from their individual interpretations and meanings associated with the subject, that these varied slightly from teacher to teacher. It is evident that teachers provided what could be considered surface-level answers, focusing on the definition and components of social studies as described in the NCF rather than expressing more deeply what the subject personally means to them. Nine out of 10 teachers

provided simple responses that focused on the basic definition and components of social studies, which seems to mirror what teachers may understand from the curriculum. While the responses indicated a solid foundational understanding of social studies, they appear to fall short in terms of depth and personal insight. To provide evidence of a deeper understanding and personal insight, teachers might have elaborated their own experiences with the subject and how it relates to their teaching practice and students' learning experiences. Rather than exclusively concentrating on the definition and components of social studies within the curriculum, teachers could have enriched their responses by sharing personal perspectives, experiences, or anecdotes that illustrate the significance of social studies in their students' learning journey. This approach would reflect a deeper engagement with their meanings of social studies as a subject and its importance within the educational context. This raised questions about the extent to which the teachers had internalised the deeper meaning of social studies in their own understanding and practice, and whether their teaching strategies would fully engage students in meaningful exploration and critical thinking about society and the wider world.

This observation prompts a critical inquiry into the extent to which teachers have internalised the profound meaning of social studies within their own pedagogical approaches. Brookhart (2011) underscores the importance of teachers understanding general principles about how students learn and possessing a deep understanding of the content areas they teach. As suggested by Brookhart, this knowledge is essential for effective assessment of students and for making sound decisions based on the results, emphasising the interplay between pedagogical understanding, content knowledge, and the ability to assess student learning effectively. In this study, four participants' names who were engaged during the whole research journey have been pseudonymously coded to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. For instance, 'Balqis' refers to one of the participants whose insights are highlighted in the interview. This coding approach allows for the discussion of participants' perspectives while protecting their privacy and identity. Participants indicated that their understanding of pedagogy is about "philosophies of teaching methods" (Balqis, Interviews) and this involves teachers "catering for the student needs" by "making social studies a meaningful subject" (Nora, first workshop). Balqis further underlined that teaching "social studies without meaning, leads to students finding the subject boring". Her

acknowledgment of making social studies a meaningful subject “by making the subject more interesting” (Balqis, first workshop) demonstrates a recognition of the importance of engaging students in the learning process and aligns with the literature highlighting the significance of pedagogical understanding in effective teaching strategies. Similarly, Deng (2018) suggests a crucial interrelation between Pedagogical Content Knowledge [PCK] Shulman (1986) and the conviction that possessing profound and sophisticated disciplinary content knowledge is integral to effective teaching. Nora suggested that “the most important thing is knowing the content (social studies) and using different teaching strategies” (Nora, Interview). The assertion underscores the interaction between PCK and effective teaching in social studies, emphasising that the effectiveness of social studies pedagogy hinges on the teachers’ ability to engage with the subjects’ meaning and purpose with their particular students.

In essence, this implies that teachers who aim for enhancing their instructional practices should not only master pedagogical techniques but also cultivate a deep understanding of the subject matter they teach. Together, these insights into teachers’ internalisation of the profound meaning and purpose of social studies underscores a fundamental connection between effective teaching and a comprehensive understanding of both pedagogical principles and disciplinary content. Therefore, it was crucial to examine whether the teachers in the study truly possess this comprehensive understanding of social studies pedagogy.

5.3.1.2 The Purpose of Social Studies

In the questionnaire at the start of the project, the teacher participants were asked, “What do you think is the purpose of teaching social studies to young students?” (Question 4). The responses were categorised into themes of social consciousness, citizenship, and cultural awareness.

In response to the question about what teachers thought about the purpose of social studies, some of the participants suggested developing a social consciousness in their response. Teacher 2 highlighted that teaching social studies plays a crucial role in helping students become aware of their surroundings, society, and the world at large.

The teacher indicated that the subject fosters a sense of social consciousness, equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to actively engage and navigate the society they live in. They commented:

Teaching social studies helps students to open their eyes to the real world when they step out of school. It makes the students aware of everything around them or the society they are living in. It teaches them how to be in a society. (Teacher 2)

This teacher believed that social studies not only develop students academically within the classroom but also extends its benefits to children's lives outside of school. The teacher emphasised the importance of students carrying the knowledge and skills acquired in social studies class into their everyday experiences, suggesting that this integration of learning supports their overall development beyond the confines of the academic setting. Likewise, Teacher 6 expanded upon the notion that the purpose of social studies "is to learn the community values and relationships", which further suggests through social studies students can gain knowledge about society, while also emphasising its role in fostering an understanding of values and relationships. Teacher 9 built on this idea by emphasising that social studies is where students "...will learn our culture, customs, and traditions. Then only students can apply that in real life. Then only students will respect their ancestors, and they will keep our tradition to the next generation". Hence, according to this participant, the purpose of social studies is centred around gaining knowledge and understanding of the cultures, traditions, and customs specific to the Maldives and its society. It encompasses everything that contributes to the identity and uniqueness of Maldivians.

Teacher 5 was one of four questionnaire respondents who described the purpose of social studies from a citizenship perspective. This teacher's viewpoint centres around the role of social studies in fostering good citizenship and preparing students to actively participate in a democratic society:

The main goal of teaching social studies is to teach students to become good citizens. We are living in a diverse society where one requires knowledge of social studies to succeed. With a social studies background, children, when they become adults, can participate civilly in our democratic society. (Teacher 5)

From this participant's response, the primary objective of teaching social studies is to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be active participants in a diverse and democratic society. They believe that social studies education plays a crucial role in preparing students for adulthood, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their communities and engaging in civil discourse. Hence, Teacher 5 highlights how teaching social studies goes beyond just learning facts - it's about making students aware of society and encouraging them to take part in it.

One of the questionnaire respondents gave a thorough explanation of their understanding behind the purpose of social studies and its impact to the students. Teacher 7 suggested that by studying social studies, students become more aware of the world around them, including their family, community, country and global issues: -

I believe teaching social studies helps the students to open their eyes into the real world once they step out of the school. This subject is all about the society and its different aspects and how a society works. By teaching this subject we help the students to be independent and confident people who are aware of the things that happens in different groups, starting from their family, island, country, and the world. So, in general teaching this subject will help the students to be good, confident, and independent citizens who can face and manage the things they face throughout their life. (Teacher 7)

This teacher believed that social studies could empower students to become independent, confident, and responsible citizens capable of navigating and addressing challenges in their lives. Similarly, Teacher 6 suggested that social studies teach students "to become good citizens and develop respect for themselves and others". From the questionnaire responses, it is evident that some teachers consider social

studies to be a crucial subject for fostering civic responsibility and respect among the students. Teacher 8 encapsulates the overarching aims of social studies education and asserts that “the main goal of teaching social studies is to teach students to become good citizens” (Teacher 8). The teacher iterates how the modern world today is living in a “diverse society that requires the knowledge of social studies to succeed. Hence, through social studies children can participate civilly in our democratic society” (Teacher 8). It was observed that four out of ten (4/10) respondents explicitly described social studies education from a citizenship education lens.

All ten of the participants emphasised that the purpose of teaching social studies to their students is to foster responsible citizenship and promote a comprehensive knowledge of their surroundings, cultures, traditions, and heritage. They believed that such knowledge is essential for future generations to apply in their lives effectively. Half of the participants (5/10) also indicated the importance of passing down historical events, cultures, traditions, and stories of their Maldivian ancestors to future generations through teaching social studies. Therefore, the insights gleaned from the participants’ perspectives on teaching social studies highlight the multifaceted nature of the subject, its significance in fostering responsible citizenship, understanding of society, and the preservation of cultural heritage for future generations.

According to the National Curriculum Framework, social studies aim to help “students to value their roots, explore their past and understand their contexts, appreciate the interrelationships between people across time, environments and cultures while developing civic efficacy” (NIE, 2015a, p. 43). Therefore, the participants’ perceptions regarding the purpose of social studies align closely with the goals outlined in the Maldives NCF. Building on the participants’ perceptions that align with the goals of the Maldives NCF (see Section 2.7), the next section investigates the ideas that emerged during the online workshops.

5.3.1.3 Teacher Beliefs about the Value of Social Studies

It was intriguing to observe that despite the participants’ reported solid understanding of social studies within their curriculum, two participants out of six in the first workshop,

felt uncertain about the subject, perceiving the subject as “useless” or “underrated” (first workshop observation). This expressed uncertainty became evident during the first workshop discussions, where initially all six of the participants had emphasised the importance of social studies.

Initially, one of the participants, Teacher 1, described social studies as “a very important subject like among other subjects” implying Mathematics and English, whereas another participant, Teacher 6 similarly suggested that “social studies is a very important subject because it is about studying and teaching history, the people, the society... and our students should know about it because it has much information about the Maldives”. The uncertainty expressed among the participants began when they put a heavy emphasis on the lack of resources and opportunities to pursue further study in social studies.

Two participants, Teacher 6 and Teacher 2, expressed their concerns respectively during the first workshop. Nora described that she was “not happy about the resources we are getting” and further suggested that “we should need more resources when we teach topics...for example, geography about the Maldives”. Teacher 2 indicated her personal interest in social studies and shared that it is her “favourite subject”; however, unfortunately, she was unable to pursue a teaching career specialising in the field of social studies as she suggested that “we do have any opportunity to study social studies as one subject right now because we do not have many students who want to study”. Teacher 2 also agreed with Teacher 6’s claim about resources and added that “I believe we do not have resources in the textbook or even in our curriculum”. However, she suggested that even though there are not enough resources in the textbook, “...right now, on the internet, we have resources, and we can integrate those resources to our studies... I believe we live in the best world; the internet is full of everything”. However, another participant, Teacher 5 held a discrepant view stating that “it is very difficult to actually get information about the Maldives on the internet..., especially for the Maldives because it is not available”. Teacher 1 supported this view by further providing examples of resources which are hard to find, “like the culture, history, and everything about the Maldives”.

Some of these difficulties were suggested by the participants in the first workshop, which led to one of the participants, Teacher 1, stating, “I think social studies is a very useless subject”. This led me to consider that despite outwardly acknowledging the importance of social studies, four of the participants ultimately did not perceive it as a subject of personal significance or relevance to their own teaching practices. This consideration is illustrated by the perceptions shared by Teacher 4, who expressed her observation that “...this is something that I have noticed when I joined my teaching career. When we are teaching for the previous curriculum also, I think the teachers are also not very much interested in teaching social studies”, suggesting that even before and after the making of the new curriculum formed in 2015, many teachers generally lacked interest in social studies. Teacher 4 further explained her statement by adding that, “The teachers themselves don’t like it either. The students as well don’t show that interest compared to Math, English...”, further suggesting that the subject is not given the same importance as Mathematics and English. However, Teacher 2 believed otherwise as she mentioned, “Maybe it is different. I think in my class, actually the students that I have been teaching to, they really show a lot of interest in social studies. I beg to differ”. However, among all the six participants, four took Malak’s deficit position, which raises implications for the teaching and learning of social studies.

The lack of interest in teaching social studies expressed early in this study by some of the participants not only undermines the subjects’ potential but also calls into question the extent to which students are adequately prepared for life beyond school. This contradiction directly conflicts with the vision outlined in the Maldives NCF, which emphasises that “Every child should be prepared for life” (NIE, 2015a, p. 8). Furthermore, if teachers are not genuinely interested in teaching social studies, it raises concerns about whether they are primarily preparing students for exams or assessments rather than equipping them with the necessary skills, values, knowledge, and understanding to navigate and contribute to society as active and informed citizens. This misalignment with the broader goals of the national curriculum, which emphasises holistic development and critical thinking, can limit the quality of learning experiences and hinder students’ ability to understand and engage with real-world issues. This highlighted the need for greater teacher engagement, more opportunities for social studies teachers’ professional learning, and instructional approaches that

foster genuine interest, critical thinking, and meaningful learning experiences in social studies.

Additionally, it is important to consider that, as teachers are given a heavy emphasis on assessments in other words, exam-driven education, students may question the value of social studies learning. This may lead to teachers facing challenges in effectively integrating interactive and experiential learning methods, which could additionally lead to students having a perception of the subject being less engaging and practical. Balqis underlined this perspective incorporated with the NCF vision stating that teachers “prepare children for tests, even though the vision of the curriculum says that we are preparing children for life” (Balqis, Interview). She further indicated that the main focus of social studies teachers is “covering the syllabus since we do not have much time” due to time constraints of “35 minutes of 3 period in a week”, further highlighting the significant limitation imposed on teachers by time pressure.

Examinations in Key Stage 1 (grades 1,2,3) and Key Stage 2 (grades 4,5,6) are when students engage in both formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment involves students taking an active role in their own learning. This approach emphasises continuous self-assessment, where students proactively identify areas for improvement (NIE, 2015b, 2015c, 2022b, 2022c). On the other hand, summative assessment, often done at the end of a topic or term, evaluates what students have learned. Hence, exams are held as significant importance, which could additionally contribute to an exam-oriented teaching approach. Sarah expressed her perspectives on social studies assessments stating that “teachers can't assess the students only by checking their student book work for them, we need to correct their behaviour because social studies is very much related to their behaviour” (Sarah, Interviews). Moreover, Malak pointed out that social studies teachers “focus on students to do better academically rather than learning and using their skills in real life”, suggesting that learning the content and grades are prioritised which illustrates that “social studies in the Maldives comprise more of concepts learned for tests rather than practically applicable skills” (Nora, Interviews). This emphasis on exams is influenced not only by the education environment but also by the broader context where excelling in exams is highly valued and prioritised (as suggested by Malak). As

a result of this prioritisation of exams, Teacher 2 indicated during the first workshop, a noticeable decline in student enthusiasm towards the learning of social studies. She stated:

...in 2018, I think we had social studies for grade nine. I was taking two grade nine classes at the time. When I went and tried to teach them (the students), what they said was- they used to complain about why they had to study social studies and would say that there is no future for it... social studies is not important (Teacher 2).

Based on this quote, it is apparent that the students' expressed complaints about the subject and their perception of social studies as lacking future relevance or importance indicates a disconnect between the teacher's understanding and the student's engagement. Hence, despite teachers acknowledging some importance of social studies for their students as highlighted in the curriculum, the heavy emphasis on exam-driven education may be leading to a prevailing student mindset of rote learning and a reluctance to engage in a more interactive and experiential social studies learning in the classroom. This sheds light on the participants' contradictory outlook toward social studies in relation to the Maldives NCF. A deeper insight with data analysis into how teachers get into a prevailing mindset of rote learning is explained in Section *Teachers' Obstacles in Implementing Teaching Strategies*

5.3.1.4 Section Summary

Therefore, from my data analysis of teachers' perceptions of social studies, it was apparent that teachers believed that social studies is a subject of significance, similar to Mathematics and English, for the students as this prepares every child for life. However, this thinking was somewhat tempered through the discussion within the first workshop where participants indicated their experiences during the teaching and learning of social studies, which led to participants suggesting a lack of enthusiasm toward teaching social studies.

This brought a new perspective to my understanding as I noticed that if teachers acknowledged the importance of teaching social studies, which exhibits their willingness to teach, but showed a lack of interest, it could be described as having a sense of obligation without genuine enthusiasm or passion for teaching the subject. Other factors that may contribute to inadequate teaching and learning in the classroom may include a lack of resources, time limitations, and limited opportunities for professional learning.

The teachers noted challenges in maintaining engagement when teaching social studies. While a lack of enthusiasm may not directly cause a disconnect between teachers' understanding and students' engagement, some participants suggested that an uninspiring classroom environment contributed to lower student interest. Furthermore, participants indicated that limited interest in the subject could impact their interpretation and implementation of the social studies curriculum, potentially restricting opportunities for meaningful, critical, and active learning in the classroom.

In the following section, I report on teachers' perceptions of teaching strategies within their social studies classrooms.

5.3.2 Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Strategies

This section examines the participants' perspectives on their teaching strategies as employed in the social studies classroom. Through data collection and analysis, I aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the resources, approaches, and methods utilised by teachers to foster student engagement and facilitate effective learning experiences in social studies. The data encompasses various aspects, such as the specific teaching resources employed, the instructional techniques employed, and the rationale behind the chosen strategies. By examining these factors, insights suggest how teachers effectively implement their preferred teaching strategies within the constraints of class time and how these strategies contribute to the teaching and learning of social studies. The findings in this section are based on the data gathered from the online questionnaires and workshops.

5.3.2.1 Types of Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies encompass diverse methods and approaches employed by teachers to facilitate effective teaching and learning environments in the classroom. Understanding these strategies serves as a valuable tool that educators utilise to provide guidance, support, and engagement throughout the teaching process. In the questionnaire, there were responses to how often participants used specific activities in their social studies classroom (Question 4ii). The participants were provided with a list of activities in which students might participate in the classroom along with a choice between often, sometimes, and never. The responses from the questionnaire were varied with the activity being most frequently conducted by the teachers being students working individually on a project and the lowest being students making presentations in the classroom. Table 5.1 below shows the list of responses from the participants.

Table 5.1

Various activities the participant teachers implement in the social studies pedagogy

#	Question	Often	Sometimes	Never
1	Students research and collect information on a problem.	4	5	1
2	Students make presentations to the class.	3	6	1
3	Students work in groups on a project.	6	4	0
4	Students work individually on a project.	7	3	0
5	Students read from a textbook and complete a worksheet based on their reading.	6	4	0
6	Students explore their values and those of others.	6	4	0
7	Students are encouraged to solve problems.	6	4	0
8	Students are encouraged to make decisions.	6	4	0

Based on the responses provided in Table 5.1, it is apparent that the majority of teachers tend to implement various activities in their social studies pedagogy, with a notable emphasis on individual student projects. Interestingly, there is a slightly lower emphasis on activities such as student research and class presentations.

Upon closer examination of the table, there is a slight tendency among teachers to have students work individually on projects, with 7 out of 10 teachers reporting that they often incorporate this practice, compared to 6 out of 10 who often assign group projects. The small difference suggests that both approaches are commonly used,

though individual tasks may be slightly more frequent. Meanwhile, activities such as student research and presentations to the class are implemented less often, with only 3 to 4 out of 10 teachers incorporating them regularly. These findings indicate that while individualised learning experiences are common, there may be opportunities to enhance collaborative discussions and research-based activities within the classroom.

The prevalence of individual projects may unintentionally lean towards prioritising task completion over the broader goals of holistic student development. This inclination towards individual projects might unintentionally also stem from the time constraints inherent in the academic schedule. Participants have described that teachers assign projects to students that mainly require them to copy and paste information directly from the internet, aligning with the provided questions (workshop 3 observations).

With each social studies period limited to 45 minutes, and only three such periods per week (NIE, 2015a, p. 55), there is a practical need to prioritise topics that align with the exam requirements. However, it is worth noting a discrepancy in the participants' responses, as they all indicated that there are only 35 minutes per period instead of the allotted 45 minutes. Despite this inconsistency, the limited time available for teaching social studies underscores the necessity for teachers to focus on topics that are directly relevant to exam content to adequately cover the curriculum within the constraints of the schedule. This time constraint could inadvertently shift the focus towards ensuring task completion within the given timeframe, possibly at the expense of fostering a more comprehensive approach to student development. Meanwhile, the nearly equal encouragement of research activities suggests recognition of their importance, yet the challenge lies in ensuring a harmonious integration of both individual and collaborative learning experiences. Striking this balance can better equip students with a diverse skills set, preparing them not only for academic success but also for the complexities of the real world.

5.3.2.2 Application of Teaching Strategies in the Classroom

In the questionnaire, participants were asked to describe how they encourage students to explore and learn about current social issues in the Maldivian context (Question 7).

One of the teachers responded that they actively promote students' awareness and engagement with current issues through news consumption (Teacher 1). Teacher 1 reported that she encourages students to choose age-appropriate information at home and then use this as a starting point to teach themselves how to critically analyse and interpret when watching the news. A second participant (Teacher 2) highlighted that they begin by addressing simple issues from the classroom and use them as a basis for discussion. The teacher then prompts students to reflect on the consequences of their actions and engages them in conversations that connect these actions to broader social issues in society. She said: -

I start from the classroom with the very simple issues that take place in the classroom and reflect on it. I asked the students about the consequences of the actions, discussed with them and related it to social issues (Teacher 2).

Based on these two responses, the different approaches taken by these two teachers in addressing social issues in the classroom demonstrate their varied teaching strategies. The teacher who encourages students to engage with news emphasises the importance of being informed about current events and their impact on society. On the other hand, the teacher who starts with simple classroom issues and connects them to social issues is promoting critical thinking and reflection within the immediate context of the students' lives. These teaching strategies allow students to gain an understanding of the social issues in the society. However, when considering these teaching strategies, Teacher 1 appeared to be focused on the passive intake of information, while Teacher 2 promoted critical thinking and reflection. While Teacher 1's strategy ensures exposure to external issues, there may be a concern about the depth of comprehension, as the information is being presented to the students at home, without necessarily active engagement or critical analysis. In contrast, unlike Teacher 1's strategy, Teacher 2's strategy not only encourages critical thinking but also promotes active participation, allowing students to connect abstract concepts to their everyday experiences. Viewing these teaching strategies holistically, both approaches contribute to students' understanding of social issues. However, the key distinction may lie in the level of engagement and critical thinking promoted.

Active participation in the classroom was a common element among seven out of ten responses. Most of these responses from the participants emphasised creating more discussions in the classroom to encourage student engagement. For example, Teacher 10 suggested that talking about the current issues in society in the classroom makes students become more interested in finding out about them more. Similarly, Teacher 5 indicated that creating discussions while “elevating students’ awareness” of the current issues in the society is very important as it would “stimulate students to explore and learn” (Teacher 5). These responses indicate participants believed in the importance of generating student engagement in the classroom to promote active learning, by incorporating discussions to stimulate their curiosity and increase awareness to further learn about the topics. Another participant, Teacher 8, shared a similar notion of creating awareness among the students “by attending to the simplest issues that happen inside the classroom” (Teacher 8). The participant further described that they were actively addressing and solving these issues with the students to ensure that they are aware of and know how to solve them. What is noteworthy is that this participant employs a specific phrase in the classroom to instil a strong belief in students, urging them to consistently reflect on and connect their learning to real-life situations:

...I often remind (the students) a phrase that I use a lot in my class.
‘Think before an action’. It’s my firm belief that reminding this would help them to think about every small thing they do wherever they are
(Teacher 8).

Based on the participants’ responses, these teaching strategies of creating discussion, relating back to real-life situations, or even “showing/telling real-life examples by role-playing in the class” (Teacher 6) demonstrate the active engagement and practical application of knowledge in the classroom. Each of these responses from the participants was unique and indicated from their own teaching experiences. These quotes highlight various approaches and strategies used by teachers to engage students in social studies and promote critical thinking. One teacher emphasised the importance of staying informed about current issues and guided students in selecting age-appropriate sources of information. Another teacher started with simple class incidents, encouraging students to reflect on the consequences of their actions and

relating them to broader social issues. The phrase “Think before an action” serves as a reminder for students to consider their choices in different contexts. Real-life examples and role-playing are employed to make the topics more relatable and interactive. Classroom discussions provide opportunities for students to express their thoughts and engage in collaborative learning. These diverse strategies aim to foster students’ awareness, critical thinking skills, and responsible decision-making within the context of exploring and learning about social issues within a Maldivian society.

From promoting critical thinking and reflection through discussions to practically applying their knowledge by reflecting back to real-life contexts fosters deeper student understanding of the social studies topics and opportunities to connect their learnings to the real world. What makes these responses from the questionnaire notable is that there are participants who actively promote the idea of reflection within their teaching and learning which suggests that these participants recognise the importance of critical and reflective thinking.

One of the common teaching strategies among the participants’ responses (5/10) was incorporating real-life stories or examples into their teaching and learning of social studies. This was a way for the teachers to enhance students’ engagement towards the subject by illustrating concepts with tangible examples from the real world to capture the attention of the students by making a meaningful connection between theory and practice. One of the responses in the questionnaire given by Teacher 5 for the question, “How do you place social studies into your classroom teaching?” (Question 3) indicated that they, “feel most of the students don’t like studying social studies, so to make them interested while teaching I use real stories with examples and a variety of strategies” (Teacher 5). The participant indicated that as students express their lack of enthusiasm over studying social studies, incorporating real-life examples through storytelling makes the subject more compelling for the students to engage with the topic, thus increasing their participation and learning. Similarly, Teacher 3’s response in the questionnaire highlights the participant’s efforts to make their lessons as ‘real’ as possible. This is reinforced by examples of how the participant utilises their teaching strategies in the classroom to promote active learning and participation from the students:

I tried to make the lessons as real as possible. I read a lot and try to gather knowledge on my own about the topics before I enter the classroom. I make videos, and PowerPoint to explain the topic. When I teach, one of my main targets is always to encourage them to apply what they have learned in the subject in their real-life situations. I conduct a lot of classroom discussions using different strategies. This is the one subject that students get maximum time to share their understanding and ideas about the topics. As a result, the lessons become more student-centred (Teacher 8).

In this quote, the teacher underscores a commitment to creating authentic and relevant lessons in social studies. By investing time in personal knowledge gathering and utilising multimedia resources like videos and PowerPoint presentations, the teacher aims to enhance understanding. The primary objective is to prompt students to apply what they learn in real-life scenarios, emphasising the practical aspect of social studies. Notably, the teacher adopts a student-centred approach, dedicating ample time for classroom discussion. This student-centric focus incurred active participation and engagement, aligning with contemporary teaching priorities. This approach is particularly crucial in fostering dynamic and meaningful learning experiences, further resonating with the objectives of the Maldives curriculum.

The Social Studies in the National Curriculum document states that “social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are active” (NIE, 2015c, p. 16). The document further underlines that active lessons go beyond mere physical engagement; they require students to actively process and think about the subject matter. The essence of active learning, as described, is not limited to being “hands-on” but extends to being “mind-on”, emphasising the cognitive engagement and critical thinking involved in the learning process. Therefore, student-centred teaching is one of the key focuses in contemporary social studies education today to promote “successful individuals who are motivated to explore and create knowledge” (NIE, 2015a, p. 8). Teacher 6 suggested in the questionnaire that “When I teach social studies I always used to relate the lesson to our real life, our community, our culture. I always take students to historical places in Male’ or sometimes to other islands too. (Teacher 6). In the Maldivian context, infusing real-life experiences, examples, and

narratives into social studies education, as demonstrated by the participants' approaches, carries profound significance. The participant's commitment to linking lessons with the community and culture underscores the importance of cultural relevance, anchoring social studies education in the vibrant tapestry of Maldivian life.

Actively engaging students in connecting theoretical concepts to tangible, real-world situations not only fosters a deeper understanding but also sustains interest. The participant's inclusion of field trips, enabling students to experience knowledge in its practicality, holds the promise of preparing them for real-world challenges. This approach encourages critical analysis and cultivates a sense of active citizenship. For example, while one teacher's strategy involves passive information intake through news reading, the other adopts a more active approach by initiating discussion on local issues. This contrast highlights the potential divergence in teaching strategies and raises questions about the optimal balance between passive exposure and active participation in social studies education in the Maldives.

5.3.2.3 Obstacles Faced by Teachers in Implementing Teaching Strategies

For teachers, with every teaching step, challenges often arise on the path to achieving their goals. All of the participants in my research process voiced their uncertainty or agreed with another participant's statement on the challenges and obstacles that they have encountered when utilising their teaching strategies within their teaching and learning of social studies. Malak, in her interview, described her personal experience and difficulties in implementing various teaching strategies in the classroom due to time constraints:

So, there are a lot of difficulties that teachers face. One thing is time limitations, where we only have 35 minutes for each two social studies periods, and when we enter the class and settle students to create an environment feasible to study, the first 5 minutes are gone (Malak)

Malak's comments express how time is of the essence. She shared her personal experience of struggling to fit her teaching strategies into one 35-minute class while

also incorporating her teaching to meet the social studies curriculum demands (see Section 2.7). This can also create extra pressure if teachers do not have access to proper teaching resources to guide their teaching and learning of social studies lessons which can further influence a teacher's instructional practices and decision-making. Malak had a similar concern in her interview, saying "In addition, there is a lack of resources, I mean, not enough resources to use as teaching aids". This obstacle leads to finding the subject too hard to teach as Nora states, "I noticed that social studies is not a very easy subject to teach right? It's not very easy as I said before, so the teaching resources are not available, that is the thing" (Nora, Interview).

Recognising that social studies is not an easy subject to teach, a lack of resources could act as an obstacle in the path of creating a successful teaching and learning social studies environment for the students. Limited resources pose a significant challenge for all of the participants in the research. Teacher 5 explained this in-depth during the first workshop:

...also not having enough resources becomes a challenge. Sometimes the guide also does not have enough information provided when we read or collect information from the internet, and due to this, we don't know how much we have to read or find. It is difficult because the internet already has a lot of information, so with limited time for every lesson, it is not easy to have or find the correct amounts of information for the lesson (Teacher 5).

In this quote, the participant recognises the struggles of finding resources but along with that, finding the right amount of information from these resources to conduct a time-efficient social studies lesson. The participant mentioned a guide which refers to the instructional teacher guide used for their lessons designed to support their teaching process in the classroom. They mention how the guide itself does not have enough information which further contributes to teachers facing difficulties of improvising and adapting their teaching strategies to compensate for the lack of resources, potentially impacting the quality and depth of teaching and learning of social studies education. Hence, insufficient access to up-to-date textbooks, and

reference materials can hinder the ability of teachers to provide a comprehensive and engaging instructional environment.

The same participant shared in the first workshop that, “The information in the social studies books, sometimes it’s not even true” (Teacher 5). She further explained her statement by indicating that they fact-checked the information themselves. As students raised questions, they realised that some of the information was incorrect, highlighting the lack of access to the up-to-date books for social studies. Moreover, the uncertainty of how much information is needed for one social studies lesson to cover the curriculum demands under the time constraints of 35 minutes per lesson (workshop one observations) can inadvertently encourage teachers to rely on rote learning methods as a means to meet the curriculum requirements. As noted by participants in the workshop observations, these rote learning methods emphasise memorisation and repetitive practice, ultimately resulting in students learning by rote – memorising information without a deeper understanding of its meaning (workshop 2 observation).

The participants’ accounts shed light on a pressing issue: the uncertainty surrounding the amount of information required to cover the social studies curriculum within the stringent time constraints of 35 minutes per lesson. This ambiguity inadvertently propels teachers towards a reliance on rote learning methods as a pragmatic approach to meet the curriculum demands. The participants articulated the need to cover extensive syllabus content for upcoming exams, reflecting a prevailing trend towards exam-oriented learning (workshop 2 observation). This emphasis on syllabus coverage may inadvertently shift the focus away from student-centred learning, highlighting a critical challenge in balancing curriculum requirements with a more holistic and student-centred education approach.

Similarly, teacher 1 shared the same perspective in the first workshop, noting that “the time limit is not enough compared to the syllabus that we have to cover” (Teacher 1). As the teachers feel the pressure of covering an amount of content within a limited time frame, they may feel compelled to prioritise content delivery and ensure all topics are addressed, potentially leaving little time for in-depth discussions, investigations, or inquiry learning approaches. Consequently, rote learning becomes a convenient approach in order to quickly cover the necessary content within a short period of time.

This is where the exam-driven education comes into play; teachers are led to teach students to prepare for exams rather than preparing them for life. Balqis confirms this idea by agreeing that students are more likely to be prepared for tests, and thus, to incorporate the curriculum in the teaching and learning of social studies in the right way, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed in the implementation process of teaching social studies:

What I have mentioned is exactly true because we prepare children for tests not for life, even though the vision of the curriculum says that we are preparing children for life, not preparing them for tests. If we actually incorporate the curriculum in its way, then we believe we will see lifelong learners or we see children prepared for life incorporating all of these key competencies, and shared values, which are very, very necessary and helpful, but we do not. I believe that there are a lot of issues and a lot of problems in the implementation process itself (Balqis).

Despite rote learning being an effective approach for exam performance in terms of quick recall and achieving high scores, this approach often fails to foster deep understanding, critical thinking skills, and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts to create meaningful learning experiences for the students. Balqis describes this in her interview, “I think teachers are more focused on achieving the outcomes and indicators and are trying to focus on covering the syllabus, that is actually the main focus of the teachers”. This focus on syllabus coverage and exam-oriented goals can inadvertently sideline the broader educational objectives, such as the “development of knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes” (NIE, 2015a, p. 14), which are intended to nurture deeper understanding and the ability to apply knowledge critically. In a real-world context, students are better prepared as life-long learners rather than exam learners.

In addition to the challenges highlighted by the participants above, it is also important to acknowledge the additional obstacles teachers may face when teaching social studies in English rather than Dhivehi. Responses gathered from the Qualtrics questionnaire indicated that 40% of the participants believed that social studies must

be taught in English, while the other 30% of the participants emphasised teaching social studies in Dhivehi, leaving 30% of the participants integrating both the languages in the lessons to enhance the teaching and learning of social studies education in the classroom. Those of the participants who emphasised supporting social studies to be taught in English indicated that “as English has become a need in today’s world, it is importance to teach social studies in English” (Teacher 1), this is because “all of the source of information is written in English” (Teacher 7). Moreover, teaching social studies in English could support the students to “better understand the concepts” (Teacher 4) and “easily involve within classroom discussions” (Teacher 3).

On the other hand, participants who emphasised teaching social studies in Dhivehi is “beneficial for students as social studies involves teaching the Maldivian culture, heritage and way of life” (Teacher 6). This notion is further emphasised by Teacher 9 who states that “it is easier to teach in Dhivehi rather than English, because most of the lessons are based on our Maldivian culture and beliefs” (Teacher 9). The participants who believed it necessary to integrate both the English and Dhivehi languages within the lessons shared similar sentiments stated above but further explained that “as the world is interconnected and we have to become aware of the people from other countries, English is need in today’s world. But I believe that in some areas of social studies such as the Maldivian culture, history, and nationality could be taught in Dhivehi” (Teacher 2). Likewise, Teacher 8 also explained how teaching social studies in English “will be easier for student to apply the content in their real life”, however, “Dhivehi language could be incorporated in some areas, i.e.: history and nationality, of the subject so that the students can gain a better understanding of these areas” (Teacher 8). Therefore, while some advocate for English instruction citing its global utility and accessibility to information, others emphasise the importance of preserving cultural heritage and facilitating a deeper understanding through instruction in Dhivehi. These differing views potentially suggests the need for careful consideration of language choice in enhancing teachers’ social studies pedagogy.

5.3.2.4 Section Summary

In navigating the complex landscape of social studies education, teachers grapple with diverse perceptions, challenges, and strategies aimed at fostering effective learning environments. Initially, teachers exhibited a range of perceptions regarding teaching strategies, emphasising the importance of understanding student needs and making social studies meaningful. Balqis highlighted the significance of engaging students by making the subject interesting, aligning with broader literature on the interplay between pedagogical understanding and effective teaching strategies.

When examining the types of teaching strategies employed in social studies classrooms, a variety of approaches emerge. From individual projects to group work and discussions, teachers employ diverse methods to enrich students' understanding of social studies concepts. While individual projects appear to be slightly favoured among teachers, there's also recognition of the value of collaborative activities and critical thinking exercises, as evidenced by the emphasis on problem-solving and decision-making.

In the application of teaching strategies within the classroom, teachers demonstrated a commitment to engaging students actively in exploring and learning about social issues. From encouraging news consumption to initiating discussions on local issues, teachers employed a range of approaches to promote critical thinking and reflection. Notably, the emphasis on real-life examples and active participation underscores the importance of contextualising learning and fostering practical application of knowledge.

However, teachers encounter obstacles in implementing teaching strategies effectively. Time constraints, limited resources, and uncertainty about curriculum coverage present significant challenges. These obstacles are compounded by pressures related to exam-driven education, leading to a focus on test preparation over deeper understanding and lifelong learning. Despite these challenges, teachers remain committed to creating meaningful experiences, highlighting the need for a shift towards student-centred approaches that prioritise critical thinking and engagement

with real-world issues. As Balqis aptly stated, “we prepare children for tests...not for life” emphasising the importance of aligning teaching strategies with broader educational goals to cultivate informed, engaged citizens capable of navigating the complex of the world.

5.3.3 Teachers’ Perspectives on the Integration of Islam and Islamic Values in Social Studies

The participants’ perspectives and contribution of integrating Islam and Islamic values in their social studies instruction significantly shapes the development of students’ learning in alignment with the vision of the Maldives NCF. The second dimension of the NCF, which is an integral part of the overall vision comprising three dimensions (as discussed in Chapter 2), focuses on cultivating confident and competent individuals who possess a strong belief in Islam, a strong sense of self and a deep connection to their national identity. It highlights two fundamental characteristics among many others: “adhere to teachings of Qur’an and Sunnah” and “take Islam as a complete way of life” (NIE, 2015a, p. 8).

This signifies that by emphasising the adherence to Islamic principles and the integration of Islam as a comprehensive way of life, social studies curriculum and instruction are designed to instil in students a deep understanding of their religious and cultural heritage. It underscores the significance of incorporating Islamic values, teachings, and traditions into social studies education, thereby fostering the development of students who are not only academically competent but also grounded in their religious identity and values. Hence, Islam is not just a faith but a way of life encompassing habits, practices, and customs that characterize how individuals can organise themselves in their daily lives. The Islamic values that come with the faith are the principles and Islamic teachings that Muslims follow. These values are taught to guide how Muslims can overcome adversity, live in harmony, and exhibit humility, understanding that genuine success can only be found in serving others with a humble spirit. The importance of teaching the Islamic values is further evidenced by the fact that Islam is the first among the eight NCF Principles and Key Competencies for the

basis of curriculum delivery and development, recognising that the “NCF is underpinned by Islamic values, principles, and practices” (NIE, 2015a, p. 9).

Through social studies, students have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of Islam and its principles. By exploring different cultures, societies, and historic events, students can gain insight into the diverse manifestations of Islam around the world. They learn about the values, beliefs, and practices associated with Islam, as well as its historical and contemporary significance. This integration of Islam within the study of social studies, ensures that social studies education in the Maldives is meaningful and relevant to students’ lives, helping them become active, responsible, and engaged citizens who contribute positively to their society while staying connected to their Islamic roots.

The findings in the following sections are drawn from the analysis of the online semi-structured interviews with the four participants. Each of these subsections aims to provide an analysis of the teachers’ understanding of the integration of Islam and Islamic values within social studies education.

5.3.3.1 The Influence of Islam on Teaching Social Studies

Each one of the participants in their online interview were asked the following question, “How do you see Islam’s influence on the teachings of social studies?”. Initially, the participants demonstrated insights into their perspectives and how they perceived the influence between these two subjects. This question aimed to explore the participants’ understanding of how Islamic principles, values and teaching can shape and inform the content, approaches, and methodologies used in teaching social studies.

One of the participants, Sarah, indicated in her interview that Islam has an influence on how social studies is taught. She described this by saying, “I think I have to say, since they are studying values in Islam, we are actually studying the same thing in social studies, the values, so it is influencing”. This statement by Sarah demonstrates her belief that Islam influences the teaching of social studies. She highlights the

connection between the values studied in Islam and those addressed in social studies.

Similarly, in Nora's interview, she also suggested that the values incorporated in Islam influences the instruction of social studies. She stated that, "...as I said, the values, good morals like values. So, if we learn those values very well then they can use it in their real life. So that influences them". This statement by Nora indicates that the values, for instance, 'good morals', embedded in Islam have an impact on the teaching and learning in social studies. She specifically mentions 'good morals' as values in Islam because she believes that teaching these values effectively can allow students to apply them in their everyday lives. She emphasised the practical relevance of these values and how they can positively influence students' behaviour and decision-making outside of the classroom. Nora's statement reflects her perspective on the importance of instilling moral values derived from Islam within the social studies curriculum, highlighting the potential impact on students' character development and their ability to navigate real-life situations with integrity and ethical awareness.

In contrast, another participant offers an alternative perspective on the influence of Islam on social studies. Balqis examines the realm of Islamic values and concepts, shedding light on the fundamental aspects such as the term "Islam" itself, as well as discussions surrounding Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the concept of Hijra. Additionally, she emphasised that the teachings of Islam have a notable impact on topics related to the caliphates and the companions of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) when integrated into social studies topics. However, she also acknowledged that the influence of Islam may not extend to all topics within the realm of social studies, as she said: -

Islam in the sense, like, as I have told you that there are concepts, which are specifically about the Islam, like, from the beginning, from the term, the Islam itself to the part where we talk about the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Hijra. And he's, like, the title of the caliphates, those people, the companions, all of these, so I think, there is a huge influence on those kinds of topics (social studies topics), but not on all the topics I would say. (Balqis)

Balqis' statement indicates her belief that Islam influences social studies by providing specific concepts and topics that are integrated into the Islamic curriculum. The concepts and topics as she mentioned in her statement, play a significant role in shaping the content and teaching methods of social studies. They provide a framework for understanding values, history and societal structures from an Islamic perspective. This perspective is then integrated into the topics of social studies which aligns with the NCF key competencies and principle of practising Islam (See Section 2.7, p. 26). However, she also notes that while Islam has a substantial influence on certain topics, such as Me and My World, Power Authority and Governance, and My Environment (workshop 1 activity) within social studies, it may not directly impact all areas of the subject. Therefore, this demonstrates that among four of the participants, three of the teachers observed how Islam influences the instruction of social studies, while one suggested otherwise. This difference in perspective highlights the varying viewpoints among the participants regarding the relationship between Islam and social studies.

While these three participants namely, Balqis, Nora, and Sarah, all indicated that Islam has an influence on the teachings of social studies education, Malak expressed an alternative perspective. When asked how Islam influences social studies, Malak indicated her perspective by stating, "I don't think there is any influence like that" (Malak, Interview). This suggests that she holds the belief that Islam does not have a direct impact on how social studies education is taught in the classroom.

Based on the findings surrounding Islam and its influence on social studies, as well as the perspectives shared by the participants, it can be concluded that there is a recognition of the connection between Islam and social studies education. While all of the participants emphasised the impact of Islam and its values on social studies education, one held differing views or did not perceive a direct influence. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement of this connection highlights the potential for exploring and further understanding the relationship between these two subjects. The next section explores deeper into this connection, examining the ways in which Islam intersects with and contributes to the field of social studies education.

5.3.3.2 The Connection between Social Studies and Islam

When the participants were asked about their views on the connections between Islam and Social studies education, a range of perspectives emerged. Nora described in her interview how Islamic values, for instance, are integrated within the social studies curriculum:

...there are some values that we have in Islam, we have to practise respecting others, we have to practise freedom of thoughts, their respect to risk taking responsibilities, we have to love our country. So, these things are included in the social studies curriculum, and also there are some key competencies like practising Islam. So, in every lesson we have to relate it to Islam, and that is how it is connected. (Nora)

Nora's statement indicates that by relating the integrated Islamic values within social studies education, students develop and practise important principles and values. She further expressed how these values align with the social studies curriculum and the key competency of practising Islam. According to Nora, connecting the teachings of Islam to social studies lessons allows for a meaningful integration of Islamic values into students' learning experiences. This highlights the potential for social studies to serve as a platform for students to not only gain knowledge about diverse cultures and perspectives but also to internalise and apply values and principles associated with Islam. Likewise, Malak highlighted a similar notion in her interview regarding the common ground of values between Islam and social studies. She shared her belief that there are shared values between the two subjects and she recognised certain values promoted in Islam align with the topics covered in the social studies curriculum:

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...a lot of values we teach our students through readings of social studies, beliefs that align with our religion, for example, honesty, patience, being more caring than selfish as well as resolving conflict through peace. These are all morals and values that have a connection with Islam, I think. (Malak)

Malak's statement suggests that she saw a strong alignment between the values promoted in Islam and the topics covered in the social studies curriculum. She highlights that many of the values taught in social studies are also principles emphasised in Islam. Her viewpoint highlights that social studies education not only imparts knowledge but also instils important values and principles that align with the teaching of Islam.

Sarah discussed a shared notion in her interview where she indicated that "...when they (students) study Islam, they study about good values, they also study about the history of our prophet's time. I think there is a connection". Sarah recognised that there are shared values between the two subjects, hence demonstrating the connection between Islam and social studies. However, to further develop her perspective, she suggested how students can also "study about the history of our prophet's time", through these "good values" of Islam integrated within the teachings of social studies. This suggests that studying the history of the prophets' time through the lens of good values in Islam integrated within social studies education can foster historical understanding, promote moral values by following Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) as an example, cultivate empathy and insight and, finally encourage students to think critically and analytically. Students would gain knowledge of the historical context of Islam, its significant events and influential figures, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of the religion's origins and impact. By gaining this knowledge, students can learn and reflect upon the moral teachings and principles upheld in Islam. Learning to reflect allows the students to make connections between historical events and the moral values upheld in Islam, deepening their understanding of the significance of these values in shaping individuals, societies, and historical outcomes. This integration between Islam and social studies becomes evident when Balqis highlighted how social studies provides opportunities for students to learn about Islam through various concepts and topics explored within the social studies curriculum.

Balqis highlighted the connection between social studies and Islam by stating, "...there are concepts where we specifically talk about Islam and I believe that each and every concept of social studies can be incorporated with the practice of Islam, the key competency of the Maldives Curriculum as well". Balqis's statement underscores the integration of Islam into the teachings of social studies topics, revealing a clear and

significant connection between the two subjects. Moreover, she indicated that this integration aligns with the key competency of practising Islam as outlined in the Maldives NCF. She further supported this notion by pointing out specific topics that provide students with the opportunity to learn about Islamic history and understand the role of Islam within the context of the Maldives.

We talk about the Islamic civilization where we give the children the opportunity to learn about the leaders of the Islam, the people who have conquered the world and have spread Islam to different parts of the Maldives. If we were to talk about the Maldivian context, how Islam has come to Maldives, so all these have been there. (Balqis)

Balqis' perspective indicates that she recognised the value of teaching Islamic history within the broader context of social studies, allowing students to explore the interconnectedness of cultures, religions and historical events. Her understanding reflects the recognition that Islamic teachings and values have relevance and application in various aspects of life, including social studies education. Balqis further elaborated on how Islam is incorporated into social studies teaching by focusing on Islamic views on certain topics such as democracy. She suggested, "...like when we talk about governance if we talk about democracy, all these kinds of systems, how is it? How is it in our religion? How is it in other countries or how is it in other religions?". This indicates that when discussing these topics, it is important to explore how Islam perceives them and compare it to other countries or religions. By doing so, students can gain a deeper understanding of the Islamic perspective and how it relates to different societal systems. Balqis indicated her understanding by explaining that "when children are given this kind of opportunity, they are more clear about their religion". Furthermore, the students gain clarity which further helps them to become more "connected to our religion". Hence, Balqis's insights highlight the significance of providing children with opportunities to explore social studies topics through an Islamic lens, as it enhances their understanding of their religion and strengthens their connection to it.

Therefore, based on the perspectives and evidence shared by the participants, it is evident that they firmly believe in the connection between Islam and social studies

education. Through their statements, participants have highlighted how Islamic values and concepts can be integrated into social studies topics, providing students with deeper understanding of both subjects. The participants' recognition of this connection underscores the potential for enriching social studies education by incorporating Islamic perspectives. By bridging the two subjects, participants shared that students can develop a comprehensive understanding of diverse cultures, historical events, and moral values upheld in Islam. As teachers continue to explore innovative ways to integrate Islamic principles into social studies curricula, they contribute to fostering a more inclusive and culturally diverse learning environment for all students, aligning with the ethos of the Maldives National Curriculum Framework.

5.3.3.3 Section Summary

The perspectives shared by teachers regarding the integration of Islam and Islamic values in social studies demonstrates the influence of Islam on teaching social studies. Additionally, the correlation between Islam and social studies education indicates various perspectives of beliefs and insights among the participants.

All of the participants responses highlight the alignment between Islamic principles and the content of social studies education. They highlighted how teaching Islamic values alongside social studies topics allows students to develop a deeper understanding of both subjects, fostering respect, critical thinking, and cultural appreciation. For instance, Nora's statement, "so every lesson we have to relate it to Islam, so that is how it is connected" underscores the beliefs in the meaningful integration of Islamic values into students' learning experiences. Moreover, participants like Sarah and Balqis emphasised the impact of Islam on social studies education, illustrating how Islamic values shape content and methodologies of social studies instruction. They provide students with opportunities to explore diverse perspectives and historical events through an Islamic lens. Balqis' statement, "there are concepts where we specifically talk about Islam", highlights the integration of Islamic history and teachings into social studies topics, thus enriching students' understanding of both subjects. Ultimately, participants unanimously emphasised how integrating Islamic perspectives enhances students' understanding of diverse cultures,

historical events, and moral values. They stressed the importance of providing students with opportunities to engage with social studies from a culturally diverse perspective, contributing to a more inclusive learning environment aligned with the ethos of the Maldives National Curriculum Framework.

5.4 Challenges and Limitations in Social Studies Professional Learning in the Maldives

In this section, data are presented to showcase the range of perspectives among teachers regarding their challenges and limitations in social studies and professional learning in the Maldives. The significance of exploring these diverse views lies in their potential to shed light on the second research question, which investigates the challenges and limitations teachers' face in social studies professional learning in the Maldivian context. The majority of the insights regarding professional learning were gleaned from the online semi-structured interviews by the four participants who engaged with the whole study. Nonetheless, the questionnaire and workshop data also shed light on the challenges and limitations encountered by all ten participants. The findings are organised under two headings based on the thematic analysis of the gathered data.

5.4.1 Challenges Faced by teachers in Social Studies Professional Learning

The journey of social studies professional learning in the Maldivian context presents a myriad of challenges that teachers must navigate. This section explores the unique obstacles that participants encountered during their pursuit of enhanced pedagogical practices and reflective teaching methods. The participants' experiences and responses illuminated several prominent challenges that warrant close examination. These challenges spanned various aspects of their professional learning journey, revealing the intricate nature of social studies education. The following sections illuminate the key challenges of restricted access to resources and technology, as well as the persistent pressure of time limitations and heavy workloads.

5.4.1.1 Teachers' Access to Resources and Technology

One prominent challenge identified by the participants was the constraint posed by their limited access to resources and technology. This challenge encompassed several facets, including outdated educational materials, inadequate availability of online resources, and sporadic internet connectivity. These challenges collectively hindered the participants' endeavours to create a vibrant and enriched learning environment for their students as well as significantly impacted teachers' professional learning in several ways.

Inadequate access to up-to-date educational materials and technology restricted teachers' opportunities to engage in continuous professional learning. Effective professional learning involves staying abreast of the latest pedagogical approaches, content updates, and innovative teaching strategies. However, when teachers lack access to current resources, their ability to explore and incorporate new strategies into their teaching practices is hindered. Participants frequently indicated the impact of outdated textbooks and learning materials. For instance, Malak expressed in her interview the need for a more extensive and detailed teacher's guide for social studies, including links to additional information, videos, and pictures, especially for topics related to the Maldives. Malak explained: -

In the Maldives, teachers normally focus on teaching what is given in the textbooks. It would be easier if all teachers can get access to a good guide which has the detailed information of social studies that we have to teach for example information about Maldives. (Malak)

She further highlighted several challenges in teaching social studies; for example, how teachers often rely on limited resources, primarily the information provided in textbooks and teacher's guides, which lacks depth, guidance, or "not enough information relating the social studies topic area" (Malak, Interview). Moreover, Malak suggested a lesson as an example of this challenge stating: -

For example, if we are teaching about heritages, it would be better if teachers can get the videos or pictures of monuments because it is neither easy to find or available on the internet. Getting a link added to the teacher's guide about the information, videos and pictures can help teachers be prepared for the lesson. (Malak)

Similarly, Nora indicated in her interview the challenges of obtaining the correct "information and content that is up-to-date and relevant to Maldives culture and history". Although she agreed that the internet is a possible source of information for social studies, Nora expressed that it is challenging to search and gather the relevant information in the Maldivian context. Instead, she proposed that her method of obtaining information is by "discussing whether the information is relevant to social studies and strategies of teaching with fellow teachers". Nora strongly emphasised that the social studies teachers do it in their own time and stated that "there are no professional learning workshops in her school" specifically aimed at social studies education.

Hence, it is evident that the challenge of limited resources may lead to undermining the quality of the learning environment and create a sense of isolation among teachers. Professional learning often thrives in collaborative environments where educators can share ideas, experiences, and best teaching practices or strategies. When teachers lack access to update resources and technology, they may potentially miss out on opportunities to engage in collaborative learning networks, attend online workshops, or participate in virtual communities of practice. This isolation can potentially hinder their ability to connect with their peers, exchange insights, and collectively enhance their teaching skills.

The scarcity of technological resources limits teachers' exposure to modern teaching instructional strategies and platforms. Especially during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, technology played a pivotal role in education, so becoming familiar with digital tools and various online platforms was crucial for effective teaching. This state of affairs continues to be so. Teachers who have limited access to such resources may find it challenging to enhance their digital literacy skills and develop proficiency in utilising technology for teaching and learning. For instance, in the questionnaire

responses, all ten participants expressed challenges related to the feasibility of conducting online learning (Question 10). Nine out of the ten participants emphasised that remote learning led to reduced interaction with their students, as online classrooms didn't provide ample opportunities for engaging in various activities, as pointed out by Teacher 3. The following quote by Teacher 3 is an example of this point:

Actually COVID-19 has impacted our teaching a lot. The thing is, we are now taking online classes, so we are not interacting each other. Therefore, it would be difficult to deliver our lessons the way we want and also it won't be easy for the students to understand their lessons too. (Teacher 3)

Furthermore, six out of the ten participants encountered challenges in facilitating classroom discussions online. The primary tools employed for online instruction were Google Classrooms and PowerPoint presentations, yet this approach often resulted in "reduced student engagement and increased distractions, leading to difficulties in maintaining focus" (Teacher 4). While Teacher 1 acknowledged that online learning provided an opportunity for students to develop effective internet usage skills, the rest of the respondents expressed concerns about the challenges arising from limited technological proficiency.

This lack of familiarity with technological tools for teachers and students posed significant obstacles in the effective teaching and learning of social studies. The limited understanding of or access to technology in social studies education impedes the delivery of dynamic and engaging lessons, restricts access to information, and creates challenges in both classroom teaching and professional learning. Emphasising technology integration in professional learning is essential to equipping teachers with the skills needed to navigate the digital landscape and providing a more enriching educational experience for their students. Therefore, addressing this challenge is vital for fostering a conducive environment that supports teachers' ongoing professional learning and empowers them to provide high-quality education to their students.

5.4.1.2 Time Constraints versus Workload

Balancing the demands of teaching, conforming to the Maldives curriculum policies, and addressing personal obligations emerged as a persistent challenge. The participants' responses unveiled the uphill battle of managing time for reflective practice amid their demanding schedules. Particularly, the curriculum policy mandates that teachers cover an extensive social studies syllabus, leaving them striving to comprehensively deliver the content before examinations. Consequently, the time constraints of 35 minutes per subject for three days in a week often compels social studies teachers to lean towards an exam-oriented approach compared to diverse pedagogical and interactive strategies that encourage innovative thinking and creative exploration.

The NCF outlines that for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, there should be three social studies periods per week, each lasting 45 minutes (NIE, 2015a, p. 55). However, insights gathered from observing participants in the workshops, gathering their reflections, and holding interviews indicate a consistent discrepancy. Teachers uniformly expressed that they are allocated only 35 minutes for each social studies lesson. Hence, the constrained time frame of 35 minutes allocated for social studies periods, as reported by the participants, raises concerns about the potential adverse effects on teachers' professional practice.

From analysing insights from the participants, the pressure to cover the material within the condensed timeframe may inadvertently prioritise content delivery over pedagogical innovation, diminishing opportunities for exploring varied teaching methodologies and approaches. Balqis highlighted in her interview that time constraints often lead to "teachers focusing on achieving the outcomes and indicators, focusing on covering the syllabus"; however, she emphasised that greater attention should be placed upon "relating it (social studies teachings) to life, making it meaningful rather than achieving outcomes [required by the NCF]". Similarly, Sarah indicated that in her experience of teaching, that she does not "get enough time to do tasks given on students' workbooks", due to valuable time being lost in classroom management and settling students (Sarah, Interview). Malak, on the other hand,

focused on the reflective practice aspect and suggested that due to the lack of time, teachers do not get the opportunity or “enough time to reflect on everything that we do” in the classroom (Malak, Interview). This demonstrates that time constraints and heavy workloads impact teachers’ professional learning by reducing the amount of dedicated time they can allocate to engage in reflective practices and continuous improvement.

Teachers find themselves grappling with the pressure to cover extensive curriculum requirements within limited class periods, leaving them with little time for in-depth exploration of innovative teaching approaches or meaningful self-assessment. Malak stated that she “normally does not get a minute to get close to a student to check their work” due to the time-consuming process of explaining topics, addressing student queries, and assigning tasks, and these leave little room for individual student attention or assessment (Malak, Interview). This is because “there are a lot of difficulties that teachers face, and one significant obstacle is time limitations for each period where we only have 35 minutes” (Malak, Interview). Likewise, Nora emphasised how most teachers “do not have time because they are busy in schools” causing them to face challenges and difficulties to get ample time “for preparing for teaching every day” (Nora, Interview). Moreover, Nora suggested that practising reflection could be done “once a week or once a month, but I do not think we can because of how busy we are” illustrating that practising reflection as a social studies teacher presented another hurdle for her (Nora, Interview). Despite this challenge, Nora vocalised her intention by suggesting that “anyways, we have to try and get some time to improve our teaching” (Nora, Interview). Hence, it is evident that the limited timeframe for social studies teaching with a substantial amount of content to cover becomes a significant factor impacting the professional learning and development for teachers. As a result, due to the limited window for teaching, the urgency to prepare students for exams and meet curriculum targets often takes precedence over investing time in redefining pedagogical skills through reflective activities.

Therefore, this limitation underscores the need for a more balanced and supportive approach to workload management that recognises the value of continuous professional growth. Currently, the overall quality of professional learning experiences may be compromised, hindering teachers’ ability to develop and implement effective

teaching strategies, incorporate student-centred activities, or explore new education technologies. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering an environment conducive to meaningful professional learning, reflective teaching practices, and effective social studies education.

5.4.2 Limitations Faced by teachers in Social Studies Professional Learning

In addition to the challenges discussed above, the participants also faced certain limitations to their pursuits of effective pedagogy. These limitations encompassed various aspects, ranging from institutional support, curriculum policy alignment, and limited professional learning opportunities.

5.4.2.1 Professional Learning Constraints

One prominent limitation was the reported restricted institutional backing for comprehensive professional learning programs for social studies. The lack of robust support was claimed to hinder teachers' ability to engage in sustained and impactful professional growth. All ten of the participants highlighted a similar opinion about the lack of importance given to proper professional learning from each individual's school management. They explained the challenges of not being able to improve their social studies teaching pedagogy as they implied that the subject is not given significance. One of the teachers, Sarah, described in her interview the current professional learning practice that teachers experience in their school:

I mean, they don't have professional learning sessions for social studies. It's for the whole school and I don't think they conduct it specifically for social studies teachers but sometimes they conduct about the strategies and the things which all teachers could use are taught in some PD sessions. (Sarah)

From Sarah's comment, it is evident that the school conducts sessions that cover strategies and techniques applicable to all teachers, which suggests a broader professional learning approach rather than subject-specific training. This is also clear

through the statistical response demonstrated in the questionnaire, where all ten participants were asked about their attendance in various professional learning sessions in the last 12 months. These sessions might have included professional learning workshops for social studies, face-to-face workshops within the school context, face-to-face workshops outside of the school related to teaching and online workshops related to teaching. The responses are as shown below in Table 5.2:

Table 5.2

Statistical response of professional learning activities attended by participants.

#	Professional Learning Activity	Number of Participants
1	Professional learning workshop for social studies	1
2	Face-to-face workshop in school related to teaching	6
3	Face to face workshop outside school related to teaching	1
4	Online workshop related to teaching	7
	Total	15

The higher frequency of face-to-face workshops within the school context suggests that teachers in this study have access to professional learning opportunities that directly connected to their immediate environment. This may also indicate that teachers value the familiarity and relevance of learning within their school community, which can support personalised and contextually appropriate growth in their teaching practices. However, given the small sample size, these findings should be interpreted cautiously and not generalised beyond the participants of the study. Additionally, while face-to-face workshops appear prevalent, it is unclear from the data whether this preference is due to institutional support, personal preference, or external factors such as COVID-19 restrictions. Furthermore, a general professional learning approach within schools may not fully address the unique needs and challenges faced by social studies teachers, suggesting a need for more targeted subject-specific professional learning.

This is backed up by Balqis' statement; she described, "there should be special professional development programs, special training, and special practicums for teachers who are specialised in social studies" (Balqis, Interviews). She further expressed that back in her earlier days of getting her diploma, "there was a subject specialising of social studies, where students (pre-service teachers) go on practicums and talk about the lack of professional learning opportunities" (Balqis, Interview). This eventually led to "seeing majority of students fail in social studies". Hence, she believed that "they do not have the proper kind of knowledge or the concepts that need for them to be teaching social studies" despite social studies being a "very, very important subject" (Balqis, Interview).

Moreover, Malak described the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the various components of social studies. Specifically, she emphasised the need for teachers to "learn about the components of social studies" and become "familiar with all the topics (social studies) and gather information on the Maldivian history, culture and atolls" (Malak, Interview). The key idea for her was to be familiar with and knowledgeable about the diverse topics within the field of social studies. However, since the professional learning sessions are not subject-specific, social studies teachers might miss out on targeted strategies, resources, and discussions relevant to their subject area. This could potentially further limit their ability to enhance their social studies pedagogy and may result in less effective integration of subject-specific content and teaching strategies. In essence, a generalised approach might not provide the specialised support that social studies teachers require to excel in their subject, potentially impacting the quality of social studies education provided to students.

Across all interviews, the four participants expressed that professional learning sessions are not conducted consistently. Nora highlighted that:

We discuss social studies topics among us (teachers), and we discuss how we are going to teach the topic and if the information is good enough or if it is correct. But we don't have a professional learning session for the social studies teachers in a workshop or in the schools (Nora).

This statement highlights that her school lacks consistent and structured professional learning sessions specifically tailored for social studies teachers. Instead, the participants rely on information discussion among themselves to address teaching strategies, content accuracy, and other related matters. The absence of formal subject-specific workshops or sessions for social studies teachers, as expressed by Nora, indicates a potential gap in the professional learning approach. This gap could hinder the collective growth, knowledge sharing, and subject-skill enhancement among social studies teachers, impacting the overall quality of social studies education delivered to the students.

Sarah also noted a significant gap in social studies professional learning sessions at her school, compelling teachers to independently prepare for their classes (Sarah, Interviews). She suggested that it is important for schools to “conduct more sessions (professional learning)” either by “conducting professional learning sessions specialised for social studies teachers” or “include social studies within the professional learning session conducted for the whole school” (Sarah, Interview). Sarah emphasised this notion because “teachers have to prepare on their own” or “share strategies with fellow teachers or leading teachers” because “school do not conduct professional learning sessions” (Sarah, Interview). Additionally, Sarah recommended conducting “professional learning session with other schools so that we will know if other teachers are also having the same issues” (Sarah, Interview). Similarly, Balqis suggested that schools should have subject-wise professional development days “where all of the social studies subject teachers across Key Stage 1,2,3 could come together in one platform and discuss issues” (Balqis, Interview). She further emphasised the need for a more organised approach, suggesting that teachers could benefit from discussing effective lessons and engaging in peer observations. The first workshop observations I made, and interviews consistently underscore the limited avenues through which teachers can communicate their perspectives, experiences, and valuable insights back to those responsible for curriculum development.

Balqis’, in the interview, stated that “teachers blame the curriculum developers, and the curriculum developers blame the teachers” (Balqis, Interviews) for the shortcomings in education. Her perspective is that there is a “disconnect between the

curriculum's vision" where she believed that "there are a lot of issues in the implementation process which will impact later onwards", highlighting the need for collaborative efforts among teachers and curriculum developer (Balqis, Interview). She further suggested that "teachers and curriculum developers should work together to improve education" (Balqis, Interview). Moreover, data gathered from the first workshop indicated that all participants expressed agreement that despite facing limited resources or challenges, they are unable to engage with curriculum developers or authority figures to address these issues. This includes the need for more "updated textbooks" and "providing more teacher guides" to enable teachers to teach social studies effectively. This deficiency in communication channels poses significant challenges, hindering the collaborative and iterative process necessary for a responsive and evolving curriculum. The data illustrate the need for a more structured and effective feedback mechanism that empowers teachers to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing refinement of the curriculum. These insights highlight the reliance on informal information sharing among teachers to address teaching strategies, content accuracy, and related matters.

Furthermore, Balqis explained that there is a lack of significance given to professional learning for social studies compared to Mathematics or English, as she says, "I have seen Maths and English being specialised professional learning workshops, but not for social studies" (Balqis, Interview). This indicates that social studies teachers may not get the same opportunities to develop as Mathematics or English teachers which represents a lack for professional learning that may result in the participants feeling less equipped to effectively employ innovative and impactful pedagogical approaches in the teaching of social studies.

Therefore, this dearth of professional learning opportunities was believed to hinder the participants' capacity to refine their teaching strategies and adapt to the evolving educational dynamics. Moreover, the scarcity of dedicated professional learning opportunities in the form of workshops, seminars, and courses specifically tailored to social studies education posed a significant hurdle. This limited availability of such avenues restricted the participants' avenues for continuous growth, understanding and knowledge enhancement in their field of teaching social studies. Moreover, while there exists a comprehensive framework in the form of the National Curriculum Framework

(NCF), the challenge lies in the limited utilisation of reflective and subject-specific professional learning activities by teachers (Workshop 3 observations). The NCF provides a structured framework for assessment, yet the efficacy of its implementation is hindered by the lack of consistent reflection and subject-focused professional development opportunities, making it challenging for participants to accurately gauge the success or impact of their teaching practices. In simpler terms, the participants could not fully determine how beneficial their efforts were in enhancing their teaching skills and practices because there was no proper mechanism available for teachers to evaluate the results of their learning activities.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 findings reflect, an exploration into the teaching and learning landscape of social studies within the framework of the Maldives National Curriculum Framework. The chapter communicated findings of the teachers' perspectives, and examined views on the meaning, purpose, and intrinsic value of social studies and professional learning opportunities. Several key insights have been gained through participants' online questionnaires, workshops, and interviews. These insights show a notable absence of meaningful channels for teachers to provide feedback to curriculum developers. This dearth of communication poses a risk of rendering the curriculum unresponsive to evolving educational needs and broader societal changes because, in part, teachers' invaluable perspectives remain unincorporated into the curriculum development process. Furthermore, the identified lack of effective communication and collaboration between curriculum developers and teachers introduces the potential for a misalignment between the intended and implemented curriculum. These key findings shed light on the overarching theme of Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in the Relation to the Maldives NCF, emphasising the need to address these challenges for a more effective and responsive social studies education system.

Data analysis, showed that teachers conveyed a recognition of social studies' significance akin to Mathematics and English, framing it as vital for students' life preparation. However, an enthusiasm gap surfaced during workshops, revealing teachers' mixed sentiments toward teaching social studies. While acknowledging its

importance, some teachers exhibited a lack of genuine interest, possibly stemming from factors like limited resources, time constraints, and insufficient professional learning opportunities. This perspective suggested a scenario where teachers, while recognizing the subject's importance, may lack the passion needed for effective teaching. This lack of enthusiasm, although not directly causing a disconnection between teachers' understanding and students' engagement, has the potential to create a disengaged learning environment. Furthermore, it may hinder teachers' interpretation and implementation of the curriculum, and limit their capacity to deliver meaningful, critical, and active learning experiences.

The data in relation to the teaching and learning of social studies highlights the potential for effective implementation, continuous knowledge expansion and personal growth in students. The emphasis on critical thinking and practical application positions students to excel academically and develop into well-rounded individuals, all which are key learning outcomes in social studies education. However, teachers, including Balqis, expressed concern over a perceived decline in learning quality due to an exam-centric focus prevalent since 2009. This sentiment is echoed by other teachers, pointing to a broader issue of exam-oriented learning. The chapter emphasizes the crucial tension between exam-centric approaches and holistic educational goals, advocating for a balanced strategy that not only prepares students for exams but also cultivates lifelong learning skills essential for success beyond standardized assessments.

Furthermore, the chapter investigated the challenges and limitations confronting social studies teachers in their professional learning within the Maldivian context. Key findings underscore the desire of teachers for enhanced, subject-specific professional learning opportunities to elevate social studies pedagogy among the Maldivian primary social studies teachers. Moreover, the lack of such opportunities and limited resources indicates a need for a more robust and tailored approach. Additionally, the limited opportunities affect teachers' abilities to improve pedagogy and deliver engaging social studies lessons, impacting students' understanding and critical thinking skills in social studies. These significant findings bring to the fore a central theme, the imperative of addressing and overcoming the challenges and limitations that social

studies teachers face in their professional learning journey within the Maldivian context.

In summary, this chapter offers an understanding of the intricate interplay between pedagogical practices, challenges, and the pursuit of effective social studies education in the Maldives. These key findings are expanded upon in the discussion chapter, exploring their implications and potential applications for advancing social studies education in the Maldivian context.

Chapter 6 Findings: Reflections on Social Studies Teaching

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings derived mainly from the online reflections and semi-structured interviews, addressing the last two sub-research questions of my study: 3) *How does teacher reflective practice shape social studies pedagogy for student learning?* and 4) *What benefits do teachers gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy?* The main objective of this qualitative data analysis was to explore the experiences of the four participants who engaged in the complete study of using reflective practice as a form of evaluating and understanding their teaching practice and experiences. The evidence gathered from the investigation of the third and fourth sub-research questions serve as key pieces of the puzzle that collectively address the overarching main research question of the study, “*How do Maldivian Primary teachers’ activate and shape their social studies pedagogy through reflection?*”.

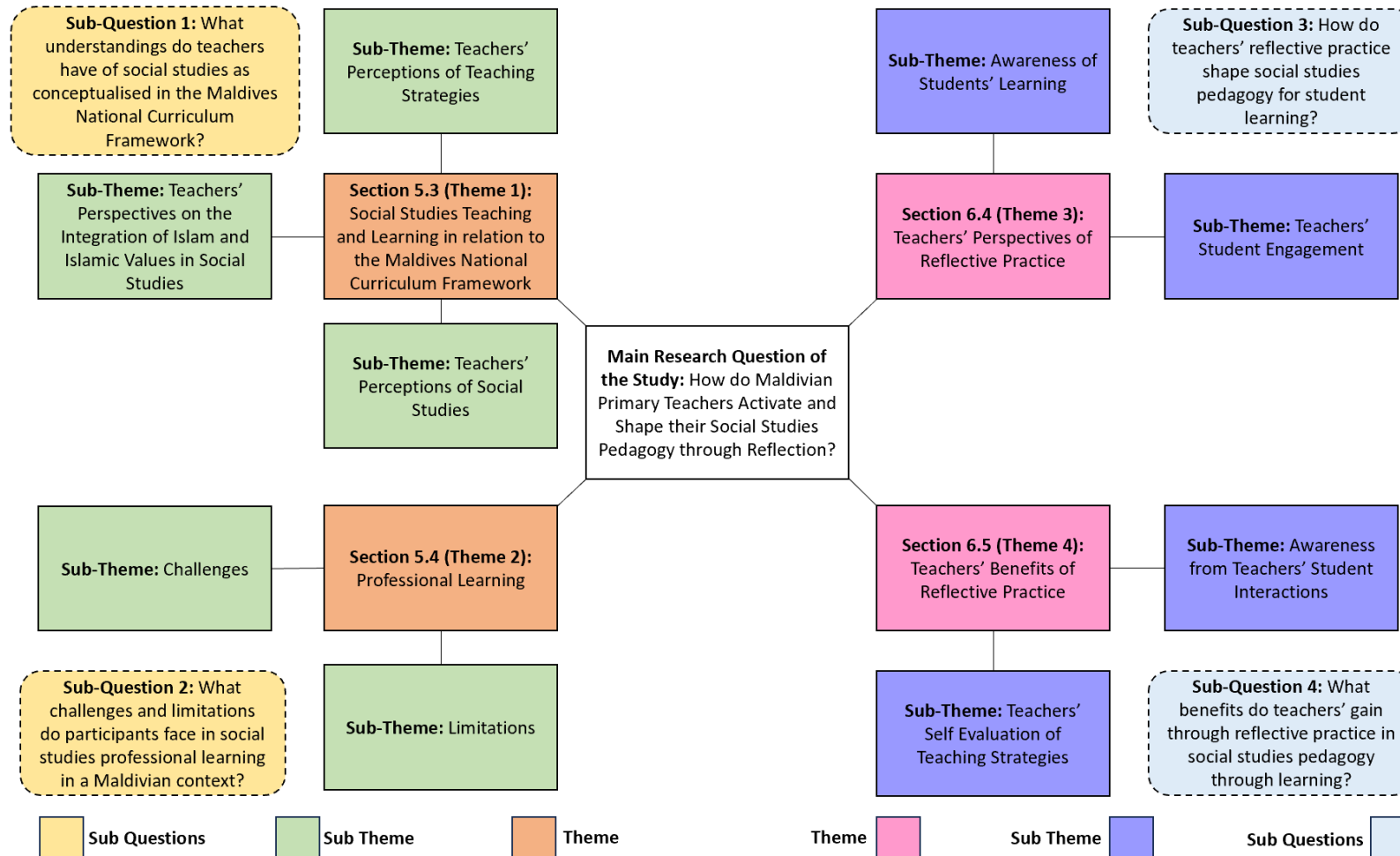
This chapter highlights the learning from each of the four participants experiences, changing the emphasis from potential benefits to a deeper understanding of what they learned via implementation of reflective practice, also the challenges they grappled with. Ultimately, the chapter contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of social studies education in the Maldives.

As previously highlighted in Chapter 5, the findings are structured around four key themes: teaching and learning of social studies, reflection, benefits of reflective practice, and professional learning. These themes, derived from an analysis of data collection sources including questionnaires, workshops, interviews, and reflective narrative texts, closely align with the study’s sub-questions, collectively forming a cohesive framework. As visualised in Figure 6.1, this interconnectedness is evident.

As highlighted in Figure 6.2, this chapter addresses the last two sub-research questions of my study.

Figure 6.1

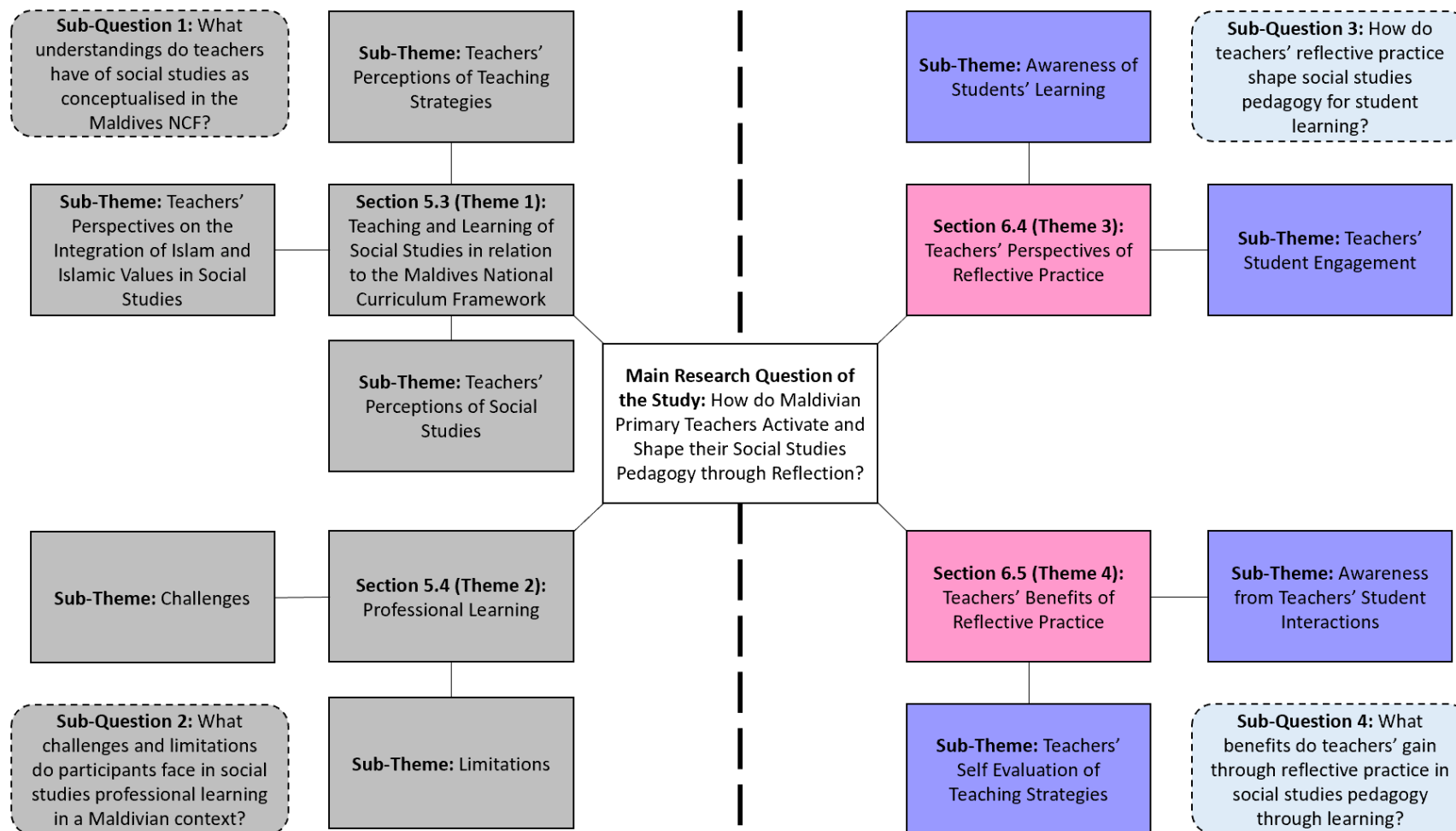
Findings Concept Map



Note: This concept map shows all of the main themes and sub-themes gathered in my research through NVIVO 20.

Figure 6.2

Chapter 6 Findings Concept Map



Note: This map demonstrates the themes and sub-themes that will be investigated in Chapter 6.

6.2 Overview of the data

6.2.1 Data from the online reflections

The online reflections explored the teachers' perceptions of their classroom teaching experiences. Data were gathered from the four teachers who consistently participated in all data activities to complete four individual reflections: Balqis, Malak, Sarah, and Nora. The data collected were analysed through coding and theme generation which further addressed the sub-questions related to the teachers' perception of social studies, the benefits of reflective practice, the teaching and learning of social studies in Maldivian classrooms, and the challenges and limitations they encountered. The reflections provided insights and were systematically examined to identify common themes that could provide answers to the research sub-questions. For example, some of the themes under Theme 4, such as teacher's benefits of reflective practice include awareness of students' learning and teacher-student engagement.

Each of the four reflection tasks focused on one aspect of teaching social studies. The first reflection piece focused on the process of teaching social studies to their students. The second reflection focused on each participant's feelings as a social studies teacher, their interests and possibilities, and the challenges that they faced teaching social studies in the classroom. The third reflection considered how social studies teaching and learning practices changed during the COVID-19 pandemic over 2020-2021. Finally, the fourth reflection mainly focused on participants' interests, challenges, and limitations that they faced when teaching social studies under normal circumstances, assuming a non-COVID-19-infected world. In each of the reflections, the teachers were provided with the focus of each individual reflection. This was backed up by writing prompts to support their written reflection in order to gain a deeper understanding of their impressions on their experiences of teaching social studies in a classroom.

6.2.2 Data from online semi-structured interviews

Data were also collected from the four teachers who participated in all activities in an individual semi-structured interview. These four teachers consistently participated throughout the data collection process amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. They were full-time employed primary teachers who had at least 2 years of experience in teaching social studies and were readily available to the researcher. The data collected from these interviews allowed for a more in-depth exploration of teachers' personal perceptions and experiences as social studies teachers. By providing an opportunity for the teachers to express their thoughts and experiences, the interviews offered a deeper understanding of their perceptions. Moreover, the data gathered from the interviews complemented the data collected from the online questionnaires, workshops, and reflections, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the teachers' experiences.

6.3 Personal Profiles of Participants

The following personal profiles of the four teachers who were engaged in the reflections and interviews highlights their background and contextual information that relates to their personal experiences and perceptions of teaching social studies. Each participant was given a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. Among these profiles, it was observed that these four teachers did not possess specialised training in teaching social studies. However, each teacher offered unique perspectives of how they approached and taught social studies, despite the challenges they faced.

6.3.1 *Malak*

Malak is a Muslim female who identified as being in the 50–59-year age group. She was in her 27th year of being a primary teacher who has taught social studies and had taught in curriculum Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3, from grades 1 to 5 in a government school in Male' city. Her role as a primary teacher position meant she taught Maths,

English, Science, Practical Art, and Health and was not a specialised social studies teacher who underwent specific training to become a social studies teacher.

6.3.2 *Balqis*

Balqis is a Muslim female who is identified as being in the 30–39-year age group. At the time of the interview, it had been twelve years since she began teaching social studies to Key 1 to Key Stage 2, from grades 4 to 6 at a government school in Male' city. She has a Bachelor's degree in primary education and a Masters qualification in education. Balqis is a middle school teacher who is a social studies coordinator and teaches social studies, maths, and science. However, by her profession, she was not a social studies teacher, as she had majored in science and mathematics.

6.3.3 *Nora*

Nora is a Muslim female who identified as being in the 30–39-year age group. She was in her eighth year of teaching as a primary school teacher and had taught social studies for grades 4 to 5 working at a government school in Male' city. Teaching was her childhood dream as she wanted to contribute to the Maldives society. She began teaching social studies for two years at an island school but moved to the city, where she is now a primary school teaching Maths, English, Science, Practical Art, and Health, and also social studies. Nora is also a social studies coordinator in her school. She loves teaching social studies, as it teaches students different aspects about our country. She believed in the importance of understanding Maldivian traditions, the nation's environmental challenges, and how the government functions. Nora describes herself as an unspecialised social studies teacher.

6.3.4 *Sarah*

Sarah is a Muslim female who identified herself as being in the 20–29-year age group. At the time of the interview, she had been a primary teacher for over nine years and had taught social studies to students of Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, grades 1 and 2

at a government school in Male' city. As a class teacher she taught social studies along with the other five subjects: Maths, English, Science, Practical Art, and Health. She also described herself as being an unspecialized social studies teacher as she is required to teach many subjects. Sarah described social studies as an "interesting" subject when she began to teach her students, and a great opportunity for the teachers to involve students in lessons.

6.4 Teacher Perspectives on Reflective Practice and Shaping Social Studies Pedagogy

In this section, the data presents a range of perspectives across each participant's online reflective texts regarding their understanding of social studies in the context of the Maldives NCF, their social studies pedagogy and their rapport with students in the classroom. The significance of exploring these diverse views lies in their potential to shed light on the third research sub question, which is to investigate how practising reflection can shape teachers' social studies pedagogy for student learning.

6.4.1 Teachers' Feedback on Classroom Strategies for Engaging Students

This section draws on the participants' responses on their first online reflection piece, which focused on their social studies teaching and learning in action. The data collected from the participants' first reflections are presented as mini-case studies, offering an overview of each teacher's practice. Following these individual sections, an exploratory cross-case analysis concludes this section, to identify common patterns and differences across all cases, offering a comprehensive perspective of the participants' shared challenges, pedagogical adaptation, and reflections. As part of the action research spiral, the participants' reflections on past lessons not only served as a means of examining their teaching practices but also acted as a stimulus for planning for future actions. Reflection is not the end point but a catalyst for informed action of how they refine instructional strategies, address student learning needs, and enhance their pedagogy. In the subsequent phase of the action research spiral, these reflections inform adjustments in teaching strategies, which are then revisited and

analysed in future reflection, thus creating a continuous loop of reflection and action aimed at improving their social studies pedagogy. The spiral was engaged through ongoing modifications in their pedagogical approaches based on insights gained from reflections, as stated in their interviews.

Given the sample size and data collection limitations, particularly constraints related to time and disruptions caused by COVID-19, I was able to complete one full cycle of the action reflection spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflection with the teachers. However, as action research is an ongoing and evolving process, these reflections serve as a foundation for participants to continue in reflective practice, to potentially shape their future teaching approaches and professional learning. Each participant was given a series of prompts to guide them through their reflective writing pieces which were designed to explore various aspects of their teaching practice (See Appendix L). These prompts covered the selection of teaching content and alignment with the NCF, the rationale behind their choice of context, planning decisions, and the effectiveness of their teaching strategies. The participants then reflected on evidence of students' learning and engagement, and considered any potential adjustments they might make when teaching the same content in the future.

6.4.1.1 *Malak*

In the reflective writing, each participant selected a unique lesson to examine. For instance, Malak's chosen topic for reflection was *Migration*, which she had implemented with her grade 2 class as part of their social studies curriculum. She provided an overview of the purpose, concepts, and the resources used in the lesson as well as the activities that she incorporated into the lesson, as shown in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2

Malak's overview of her chosen topic, Migration (Malak reflection 1).

Purpose	To know why people, migrate and how their life is improved after moving to a new place. To know what types of difficulties they have to face due to migration. To identify advantages and disadvantages of moving to a new place.
Concepts	Identify what is migration; To understand the pull and push factors
Resources	Videos, Name cards and Charts

Analysis of Malak's reflection explored how the lesson aligned with her expectations and objectives. Malak's teaching strategy for the lesson activity involved engaging students by asking thought-provoking questions and fostering meaningful discussion (Malak reflection 1). Her goal was to facilitate students' exploration of their forefathers' lives and encourage them to draw connections with their own experiences, thereby, enriching their understanding of social studies concepts. Additionally, Malak emphasised the importance of students' learning about various topics such as the "environment, other countries, trading, economy, presidency, and many other things" through social studies lessons (Malak reflection 1). By fostering critical thinking and active participation through teacher-student interactions, as highlighted in her reflection, Malak aimed to deepen students' comprehension of social studies topics. This approach aligns with her overarching objective of providing a comprehensive and engaging learning experience for her students.

Malak's reflection demonstrates that she achieved this goal, as she further explains, "The lesson was very effective because they understood why people migrate and what are push and pull factors. Students were able to answer questions given to them"

(Malak reflection 1). Malak appeared satisfied with the lesson's outcomes as she observed that not only the "students were very interested in learning" but also the "whole class discussion was effective" (Malak reflection 1). She reported being able to examine what the students were able to learn within the social studies lesson, which suggests that her reflection allowed her to identify the points where students demonstrated their understanding of the lesson. When asked about students' learning engagement that she observed in the lesson, Malak pointed out that students were "clarifying their doubts, which is evident that they were engaged in the lesson attentively, and completing the assigned tasks independently showed that they have engaged with the lesson fully" (Malak reflection 1). Therefore, Malak's reflection indicated that she observed positive signs of student learning engagement during the lesson.

That students were clarifying their doubts suggests that they were actively participating and paying attention to the content being taught. Additionally, the students' ability to complete the assigned tasks independently further demonstrated their full engagement with the lesson. Overall, Malak's reflection shows that, in her opinion, students were actively involved and responsive during the learning process, which reflects the effectiveness of her teaching strategies and the level of engagement in the classroom. However, in her reflections, Malak evaluated her teaching strategies and acknowledged that there were areas for improvement in her lesson. She suggested that if she were to teach this lesson again, she would use different teaching strategies to further enhance student engagement. Malak elaborated, stating, "I would implement a different pedagogy, planning the lesson to encourage increased student involvement through diversified class activities, including group work, oral questioning, individual tasks, and research-based activities" (Malak reflection 1). This demonstrates her thoughtful consideration of, and willingness to, critically assess her teaching practice upon reflection, making necessary adjustments to create a more engaging and effective learning experience for her students in the future.

6.4.1.2 Sarah

Sarah's first online reflection focused on the social studies topic of *different dialects in the Maldives*. Throughout her reflection, she discussed how this topic related to the curriculum and its alignment with the key competencies. Sarah reported the purpose of teaching her social studies topic of choice, concepts and resources used, as well as the activities she incorporated to engage her grade 4 students. Table 6.3 below demonstrates Sarah's overview of her chosen topic.

Table 6.3

Sarah's overview of her chosen topic different dialects in the Maldives (Sarah's reflection 1).

Purpose	I have taken this topic because this is among one of the very interesting topics in social studies Also, I have done many activities related to this topic for the ceremony which was held in the year 2015 in the implementation for the current national curriculum The activities got liked by many people who visited our stall
According to the NCF	Describe cultural practices in their community and in different islands. That is through dialects, ways of addressing people (e.g.: names used for grandparents) Compare different dialects spoken in class and in the community
Key competency	Relating to people Using technology and Media
Resources	Video and Flash cards

Sarah's reflection highlighted her innovative approach to the lesson on "different dialects in Maldives". She began the lesson by captivating her students with a video song, followed by encouraging thought-provoking questions to further engage her students. During the lesson, Sarah facilitated a group task among her students, providing them with an engaging activity to explore the different dialects in the Maldives collaboratively. This group work activity encouraged peer-to-peer interaction and enabled the students to exchange ideas and perspectives, and allowed the students to share their insights. By incorporating both individual and group-based participation and collective learning in the classroom, Sarah fostered a supportive and inclusive learning environment that enhanced student engagement and understanding. Furthermore, her deliberate incorporation of key competencies in her teaching strategies, involving the use of technology and media, as well as fostering meaningful classroom discussions, illustrates a comprehensive approach to student learning and engagement. Sarah utilised interactive teaching strategies with her students to create a dynamic learning environment that fostered active participation and deepened students' understanding of the topic.

Sarah explained that this was just an introductory lesson to *different dialects in the Maldives*, and she believed that the lesson went "really well" according to her observation of how engaged the students were in the lesson (Sarah reflection 1). She further suggested that the lesson may have been better if an individual task was assigned to the students as well (Sarah reflection 1). Moreover, she indicated in her reflection that if she were to teach this lesson again, "I would ask the students to get the help of their parents to know about any one dialect spoken in the Maldives. This will be assigned prior to the lesson" (Sarah reflection 1) or perhaps inviting a guest speaker into the class to learn more about the past. These observations made by Sarah show that through reflective practice and evaluation of the student engagement in the classroom, she gained insights into her teaching strategies and identified areas for improvement. By recognising the need to involve parents or guest speakers in the learning process and create meaningful connections to real-life experiences, she demonstrated a commitment to enhancing student engagement and understanding. Sarah's reflective approach enabled her to discern the necessary steps for future

lessons, illustrating the value of continuous improvement and positive impact of reflective teaching practices.

6.4.1.3 Nora

Nora's first online reflection was based on the social studies topic, *My Maldivian Tale*. This topic focuses on the "...features of Maldives and National identities, how people lived (lifestyle)" in the past and how they have changed their lives" (Nora reflection 1). Nora described the purpose, principles and connections to the NCF. Table 6.4 below shows Nora's brief overview of her chosen topic for her grade 3 students for her reflection.

Table 6.4

Nora's overview on the topic My Maldivian Tale (Nora reflection 1).

Purpose	To identify unique features of the Maldives and the National Identity To know how the people in the past changed the lives of others.
Principles	Identity and Culture
NCF	The NCF encourages the provision of a deep understanding of the unique Maldivian culture, and the appreciation of its heritage. It promotes National Identity with the tradition among the Maldivians along with its history, present and its future.
Resources	Video and Information sheets

Nora evaluated her teaching strategies and approach she incorporated in her reflection. She began the lesson by engaging the students with the strategy of storytelling, the story about Santhi Mariyam, an old Maldivian folklore. She created

classroom discussions by asking thought-provoking questions in order to get the students to better understand the Maldivian culture and its traditions from the past. After a brief discussion, to further reinforce their understanding of the cultural heritage, the students were then shown a video of another Maldivian folklore (Rannamaari Story) played out by a group of students. Moreover, the students were given a group activity where they had to write and present their own story about the Maldivians in the past demonstrating the elements of the lifestyle, food and clothing of the people in earlier days.

Through Nora's reflective evaluation, she recognised the significance of storytelling and interactive discussions in fostering students' engagement and promoting a deeper appreciation for the Maldivian culture and traditions. Her thoughtful consideration of the teaching strategies used in the lesson indicated her commitment to creating meaningful learning experiences for her students. She further described that the lessons proved highly effective as it facilitated students' comprehension of the distinctive characteristics of the Maldives and its national identity, along with illustrating how individuals from the past influenced the lives of others. (Nora reflection 1). Nora's strategy of incorporating storytelling of Maldivian folklore suggests that students can grasp how the people of the past influenced the cultures and traditions that have been upheld until present day. The students demonstrated their ability to grasp this understanding as Nora explained:

Students participated very well, and they watched the drama (Ranamaari story) very carefully and they enjoyed watching it. They participated in discussion and also completed the task given... I noticed that students were willing to share their story to the class. (Nora reflection 1)

Nora's strategy of incorporating storytelling of Maldivian folklore proved to be effective in helping students grasp the influence of past generations on the present culture and traditions. As she observed, the students actively participated in the lesson, attentively watching the drama of the Ranamaari story and engaging in discussion. Their willingness to share their own stories with the class demonstrated their understanding

and connection to the cultural narratives being explored. This reflects a positive success of Nora's approach in fostering student engagement in the classroom.

Nonetheless, Nora also gave her thoughtful consideration to using different teaching strategies in the classroom to ensure meaningful learning experiences for every student in the classroom. Nora explained in her reflection that the challenge that she faced when she taught her lesson was "having differently able learners in a normal classroom and as a result students could not complete their work in the given time" (Nora reflection 1). This indicated that Nora was mindful of the diverse needs of her students and recognised the importance of adapting her teaching strategies to accommodate differently abled learners. Despite the challenge, she remained committed to creating a meaningful learning environment for all students in the classroom. This demonstrates Nora's dedication to refining her instructional approaches and fostering a positive learning environment in the classroom.

6.4.1.4 Balqis

Balqis' first reflection was based on the social studies topic "*Sustainability of International Organisation*". The topic for her grade 5 class was focused on identifying factors that worked for the sustaining of some of the international organisations that existed from the past to the present day (Balqis reflection 1). Compared to the three other participants, Balqis does not talk about the purpose or relate the lesson back to the NCF, however, she described what resources she used for her lesson; namely, the social studies textbook, PowerPoint presentation and the whiteboard.

Balqis reported that she first began her lesson by recalling, listing and explaining the significance of some of the globally renowned organisations such as United Nations [UN] and Commonwealth. Her reflective practice further involved posing thought provoking questions to her students during the lesson. She observed that some of the students struggled to answer a specific question, prompting her to realise the importance of narrowing down and clarifying questions to better support student comprehension and engagement in future lessons. However, Balqis's observation

suggested that a significant majority of the students were unable to provide answers when posed with these questions. She expressed her concern, stating:

I was sad to see that only a very few students were able to come up with the answers. This implies that students' thinking capacity is limited and they do not try to think out of the box. I feel a lot of effort needs to be put into developing the skill of critical thinking in these students which is one of the important 21st century skills needed in the future (Balqis, reflection 1)

The quote from Balqis' reflection provides insight into teacher-student engagement. This suggested that during the lesson, Balqis observed the students' responses to her questions and noticed that the majority of them struggled to provide answers. This observation is an essential aspect of teacher-student engagement because it shows how actively the students are participating in the learning process and how well they are comprehending the material being taught. Based on her reflection, Balqis engaged in critical analysis, suggesting that some students might have limited thinking capacity and may not be actively exploring creative solutions or "thinking out of the box". Her concern points to the significance of fostering effective teacher-student engagement and creating a learning environment that promotes the development of critical thinking among her students.

Nonetheless, despite the initial challenge of students struggling to answer the questions, Balqis persisted in her efforts to promote critical thinking in the classroom. She adopted a proactive approach by breaking down the complex question into smaller steps. First, she asked about the failures of the League of Nations, encouraging students to recall and retell historical events. Then, she connected these mistakes to the establishment and success of the United Nations today. By doing so, she aimed to make the learning process engaging and relevant for her students.

Balqis's determination paid off, as several students were able to come up with answers when she repeated the question. This success in student participation and engagement left her happy and satisfied because as she states, "I made children think

and answer and not just by reading the book” (Balqis reflection 1). The participant’s approach of prompting students to think and respond rather than merely relying on textbook knowledge exemplifies the dedication to teacher-student engagement and promoting critical thinking in the classroom. Balqis further expressed her intention to maintain the same teaching approach if she were to teach the lesson again (Balqis reflection 1). Her primary focus was to encourage students not to rely solely on the textbook but to actively engage in discussion and apply critical thinking. By prompting students to answer based on their own thought processes and classroom discussion, Balqis aimed to foster independent thinking and deeper understanding of the social studies topic. This insight from Balqis’s reflection highlights her dedication to refining her teaching approach and ensuring that her students have a positive and meaningful learning experience.

6.4.1.5 Summary: Cross-Case Analysis of Classroom Teaching Strategies

A wide range of teaching approaches are apparent when examining the educational methods used by participant teachers Malak, Sarah, Nora, and Balqis in social studies. Each participant brings unique talents, observations, and insights to the education environment as they navigate the complexities of their chosen topics. This exploratory cross-case analysis aimed to illuminate common underpinnings and subtle differences in their teaching approaches, with a keen focus on how reflective practices actively shape their social studies pedagogy.

In all four cases, teaching strategies played a central role, and Malak, Sarah, Nora, and Balqis all used a variety of engaging techniques. Each teacher not only demonstrated a dedication to actively involving students in the learning process but also showcased how their reflective insights directly influenced their pedagogical choices – using probing questions, group activities, storytelling, and multimedia integration. Student engagement emerged as a unifying theme, reflecting the impact of reflective practices on fostering dynamic connections in the classroom.

Reflection on Lesson Outcomes indicated unanimous satisfaction with encouraging signs of student comprehension, involvement, and participation. Even in the face of

challenges, such as those addressed by Balqis, participants showcased adaptability and a commitment to continuous improvement – a direct result of their reflective processes. While each participant shared a commitment to effective teaching, their reflection varied in focus yet consistently highlighted the tangible impact of reflective practices on refining and shaping their pedagogical approaches.

To briefly highlight, Malak provided a comprehensive overview, detailing the purpose, concepts, and resources used in her lesson. Sarah concentrated on innovative teaching and its impact on student engagement. Nora emphasised the effectiveness of storytelling and group activities in enhancing cultural understanding. Balqis, though not explicitly discussing the NCF, highlighted the importance of her teaching strategies and outcomes. Moreover, Balqis showcased adaptability in addressing challenges and modifying her approach, underlining the value of continuous improvement.

Recognising the crucial significance of teacher-student engagement was a common thread across all four of the cases, underscoring the transformative role of reflective practices in understanding and responding to student dynamics. The cross-case analysis illuminates not just the varied teaching strategies employed but emphasises how reflective practices actively shaped the pedagogical choices made by Malak, Sarah, Nora and Balqis. The incorporation of multimedia resources and group activities emerged as a common way of fostering dynamic and student-centred learning environments, directly influenced by reflective insights.

Multimedia use emerged as a consistent pattern, with all participants incorporating videos and presentations in their lessons, showcasing a shared effort to leverage technology for enhanced engagement. Similarly, group activities were another recurrent pattern, where Sarah, Nora, and Balqis included collaborative tasks to encourage peer-to-peer engagement and collective learning. Moreover, the adaptability and commitment to continuous improvement were evident, particularly in Balqis's case. She proactively addressed the challenges, emphasising the need for ongoing improvement. The development of critical thinking skills became a shared goal among all teachers, who recognised its importance in educating students for the twenty-first century. These cases were connected by the overarching theme of

student-centred teaching strategies, with each participant emphasising engagement, understanding, and active participation as core principles of their teaching practice. In conclusion, the cross-case analysis of Malak, Sarah, Nora, Balqis's reflective practices of their social studies teaching indicated diverse yet interconnected approaches, with a heightened focus on the direct influence of reflection on their pedagogy. Despite differing topics and emphases in their reflections, all participants demonstrated a dedication to engaging teaching and learning of social studies, with reflective practices emerging as the guiding force shaping their pedagogical decisions. Together, these insights not only illuminate teaching strategies in social studies but also emphasise the importance of adaptability, use of multimedia, and student-centric approaches for a more meaningful and impactful student learning experience.

6.4.2 Teachers' Reflection on their Teaching Practice

This section centres on the participants' responses in their second online reflection piece. The second reflection focused on the participants' role as a social studies teacher and investigated the participants' self-perceptions and understandings of their teaching practice as social studies teachers. The data collected from the participants' second reflections are presented as mini-case studies to outline a consistent overview of each teacher in action. Following these individual sections, an exploratory cross-case analysis summary concludes this section, offering a perspective across all cases. Through their second reflections, the participants shared their feelings, interests, and possibilities in relation to teaching social studies concepts and activities. Additionally, they discussed the challenges and limitations they faced in their role as social studies teachers and they provided insights into their opinions on how social issues in the Maldivian society are considered and reflected in the social studies curriculum and pedagogy. Furthermore, the participants reflected on potential changes they would make to the social studies curriculum, indicating areas they would like to improve or modify to enhance their teaching practices. Through this process of self-reflection, the participants demonstrated their engagement with their role as social studies teachers.

6.4.2.1 *Malak*

Malak believed that her role as a social studies teacher involves creating a learning environment that encourages student engagement and critical thinking. She suggested that “each student is unique. They have to improve their skills as well as try to improve their critical thinking skills, so that they can get ready for their social life” (Malak reflection 2). Her statement emphasises her belief in the importance of fostering a positive learning environment that promotes student engagement and critical thinking. As a social studies teacher, she recognized the individuality of each student and acknowledged the need for them to develop their skills, both academically and in terms of critical thinking. Malak showed a sense of responsibility by further describing how “it is also my responsibility to help them develop their logical thinking and focus on learning new things. I can help them through lessons, to become better people who will contribute to society” (Malak reflection 2). Her rationale indicates that she aims to prepare her students for their future social lives and enable them to make informed decisions, engage with complex issues, and contribute meaningfully to the society. This participant’s commitment towards their goal as a social studies teacher can be observed through their reflection and strategy of reaching towards this objective by helping the students develop a better understanding of social studies. This indicates that Malak is committed to ensuring her students receive a meaningful and enriching education in social studies.

Malak ’s interests and possibilities as a social studies teacher as indicated in her reflection highlights her passion for the subject and genuine concern for the students’ learning experience. Through her commitment to seek opportunities for professional development, she demonstrated a growth mindset and a desire to continuously improve as an educator by assisting coworkers and to work on developing her personal development” (Malak reflection 2). As a social studies teacher, Malak’s primary goal was to “guide the students to love the subject and present their opinion to the class without making any student feel threatened for holding a different view” (Malak reflection 2). Her emphasis on creating a safe space for diverse viewpoints reflects her commitment to nurturing well-rounded individuals who can engage in constructive discussions about various social studies. Malak ’s approach not only

focuses on academic learning but also on nurturing empathy, understanding, and tolerance, which are essential skills for active and responsible citizenship. While doing so, Malak also strived for “planning fun, knowledgeable activities to help them enjoy learning” (Malak reflection 2), and this indicates her desire to make social studies not only relevant and meaningful to her students’ lives but to also foster curiosity and love for learning.

Nonetheless, there are challenges that Malak faces as a social studies teacher. She indicated her concern about the lack of resources and information provided in the social studies teacher’s guide, which became a hurdle in creating engaging and comprehensive lessons for her students. She suggested that “teachers are being made accountable for more than they should ” (Malak reflection 2), which indicates that there are increasing pressures and responsibilities placed on teachers in the education system. This consideration reflects the broad challenges faced by teachers in balancing their roles as facilitators of learning and meeting various administrative and societal expectations. Balancing these different aspects can be challenging and may impact the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Teachers are required to teach their students 35 minutes per lesson on their social studies topic which becomes an obstacle as “35 minutes is not enough to teach social studies’ (Malak reflection 2), as Malak suggests. Moreover, despite Malak’s many efforts of fostering a fun learning environment for her students, she indicated that students cannot understand the significance of studying social studies which leads them to become uninterested towards learning the subject. This situation was disheartening and frustrating for Malak, as she puts in considerable effort into teaching social studies, but the students’ lack of interest and understanding hindered their motivation to participate actively. However, it also prompted her to reflect on her teaching strategies and explore new approaches to make the subject more engaging and relevant to the students.

Some of the approaches that Malak suggested on the ways that social issues in the Maldives are reflected in the curriculum and pedagogy is the lack of practical work. She indicated that some changes in the social studies curriculum that she considers

would be important are providing more resources or providing vocational training in social studies (i.e.: carpentry work, cooking, washing, ironing, building, sewing or gardening). Malak's explanation was that "vocational training in the school can provide students who are academically weak an opportunity to do something in the society" (Malak, Interview). To provide more clarity, Malak believed that students in primary levels should also be encouraged to do vocational training in social studies education. Malak justified her logic by giving an example from students abroad stating:-

I went to Japan in 2019, and some schools in low grades such as grade 3 or grade 5 students start to do things like t-shirt painting, make plates, bake small biscuits, sell these items and earn some money. These sorts of things start to make students prepare them for life, isn't it?" (Malak, reflection 2)

By incorporating more hands-on, practical experiences like vocational training, schools could better prepare young students for the challenges they will face in the real world. Malak highlighted that due to the lack of vocational training for academically weak students, "students get into some social issues, I mean when they finish school, they do not know how to go and work in a place", and this further leads to "not getting a job and some will involve with gangs and become gangsters and these people will then become unaccepted in the society" (Malak, Interview). She further gave a comparison between academically strong and weak students by illustrating: -

Students who can perform well in academics will have a chance to get better jobs and they become good in the society. Meanwhile, weak students will be left without a job, and if they are not earning money or do not get what they want, they can potentially create problems in the society (Malak, reflection 2)

Therefore, Malak's ideas suggest that she believes social studies education should be more practical and hands-on, providing students with the opportunity to engage in real-life experiences and experiences that are relevant to Maldivian society. Malak's advocacy for vocational training underscores a crucial aspect of my research into

social studies education. By integrating practical experiences into the social studies curriculum, educators can better address the diverse needs of young learners and prepare them for active participation in society. This aligns closely with the broader objectives of social studies education, which include fostering critical thinking skills, social awareness, and citizenship values. In a rapidly changing world where academic success alone may not suffice, young students must be equipped with practical skills and real-world experiences from an early age. Moreover, Malak's observation about the potential consequences of neglected vocational training for academically weak students highlights a critical social issue. In the context of social studies, addressing such issues is paramount as the discipline aims to cultivate informed and responsible citizens who contribute positively to society. The risk of academically disadvantaged students facing challenges such as unemployment, involvement in gangs, and social alienation underscores the urgency of integrating practical skills training into social studies education. An inquiry-based approach within social studies would allow students to investigate these societal issues critically, encouraging them to ask questions, gather evidence, and explore possible solutions to challenges like unemployment and social inequality. By doing so, teachers can actively work towards creating a more equity and inclusiveness, attributes aligned with the overarching goals of social studies as a means to foster active citizenship and social responsibility.

While Malak's suggestion of incorporating vocational training into the curriculum has merit in terms of providing practical skills for students to be prepared for life, it may not align entirely with the traditional scope of social studies. Social studies typically focuses on topics related to human society, history, geography, civics, and economic, aiming to foster an understanding of societal structures, relationships, and dynamics. While practical skills like vocational training are not exactly within the purview of social studies education, the consideration of social issues is. Hence, despite my study focusing on young students in Key stage 1 and 2, who may not directly engage in vocational training, instilling values and life skills at a young age through learning topics in social issues could be more effective. By incorporating social inquiry into discussions on these issues, students can engage in deeper learning by analysing causes, effects, and potential solutions, thus fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This approach could better prepare them to navigate societal challenges

as they grow older. By integrating such practical elements into the curriculum, Malak envisions a more meaningful and impactful learning experience for her students, where they can apply their knowledge to real-world situations and better understand the social issues affecting their communities. Hence, incorporating elements of inquiry-based learning or social inquiry into these discussions could further enhance students' critical thinking skills and deepen their engagement with social studies content.

Therefore, through her reflection, Malak 's dedication to her role as a social studies teacher indicates her commitment to creating a engaging and relevant social studies learning environment that empowers her students. She demonstrates a commitment to equipping them with practical skills and knowledge, nurturing their comprehension of social issues, and preparing them for meaningful engagement in society, despite the obstacles she encounters.

6.4.2.2 Sarah

Sarah's role as a social studies teacher is deeply rooted in her passion for the subject, as she has been teaching social studies ever since she started her teaching career. She believes that as a social studies teacher, she can envision how social studies "can make a huge difference in building a good citizen as this is the subject that prepares the students for real life and makes them aware about everything around them" (Sarah reflection 2). This implies that she views social studies as a subject that encourages students to thinking critically about the world and their role in it. Her passion towards social studies began through her upbringing and exposure to Maldivian cultural activities which sparked her curiosity and pride in her culture. This early fascination led her to engage in reading articles and books related to her culture, fostering a deep love for social studies and desire to learn more about her country's history. At the time of the study, Sarah was grateful for her role as a social studies teacher as this gave her the "opportunity to teach the students what I loved the most" (Sarah reflection 2). This statement reflects Sarah's strong engagement and alignment with her interests and values as a social studies teacher.

In the social studies classroom, Sarah incorporated topics related to social issues in the curriculum to instil in her students the importance of expanding their perspectives on roles and responsibilities in response to the changing world around them. For instance, Sarah indicated that: -

It is not only the role of the women in the house to do the house chores.
Both men and women equally should take part in house chores.
Likewise, when it comes to earning bread for the family, both men and women are equal. (Sarah reflection 2)

Sarah's belief in breaking stereotypical mindsets is evident as she emphasises the importance of gender equality for both men and women. By teaching these concepts, Sarah aimed to challenge traditional gender roles and foster a more inclusive and progressive perspective among her students. She described further, "teaching these things would help the students to face and overcome the challenges they face in the society" (Sarah reflection 2). By incorporating these topics into her curriculum, Sarah encourages students to critically examine the societal norms and think critically about issues such as gender equality. Her goal is clear in that she wants to prepare the students to face the challenges of the real world and become more aware and responsible citizens.

In order to achieve this goal, Sarah indicated that maximum effort was required to find reliable and valid information for the lessons. However, due to a lack of resources as well as teacher guidance, this poses a hindrance to the effective teaching and learning of social studies. While Sarah enjoyed teaching the history and culture of the Maldives, teaching resources like videos and pictures were relatively straightforward. However, obtaining reliable and updated information poses a greater challenge (Sarah reflection 2). Furthermore, Sarah expressed her concern about the limited time allocated for social studies lessons compared to the extensive content that needs to be covered and the activities that should be conducted (Sarah reflection 2). This suggests that despite Sarah's passion for her role as a social studies teacher as well as the subject social studies, there are challenges that act as barriers to achieving effective teaching and learning of social studies. Nonetheless, her reflection indicates her thoughtful thinking

process of how these challenges affect her teaching of social studies which demonstrates an increased engagement to her role as a social studies teacher.

Despite these challenges, Sarah reflected on and suggested some changes that could be considered for the social studies curriculum. Firstly, she indicated removing repeated topics from different grades within the same key stage and allocating more time for each topic. Secondly, by doing so, teachers would have sufficient time to conduct engaging activities and focus on instilling values related to each topic. This reflects her belief that spending more time on each topic would increase students' interest and engagement, suggesting that she values depth over breadth in teaching social studies. This suggestion may encourage critical thinking as students can explore deeper into topics and engage in more in-depth analysis and discussion.

In conclusion, Sarah's thoughtful reflections highlight her passion for teaching social studies, her emphasis on promoting critical thinking, and her desire to create an inclusive and engaging learning environment for her students. There were elements of critical thinking in her reflection which underscore her ability to analyse, evaluate and propose solutions to challenges within the social studies curriculum. Through her dedication and continuous efforts to improve the curriculum and teaching strategies, Sarah aims to instil a sense of cultural appreciation and awareness in her students, empowering them to become informed and active members of the society.

6.4.2.3 Nora

Nora described that her "role as a social studies teacher makes her feel happy" (Nora reflection 2). Her passion for the subject, driven by its connection to her Maldivian cultural heritage and traditions, motivates her to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences for her students. She suggested that "as teachers, we can help our students learn more about the Maldives. We can also teach them in very interesting ways because students want to know more about our culture and customs" (Nora reflection 2). Nora's perspective indicates her commitment to creating a dynamic and enriching learning environment that fosters a deeper connection to the Maldivian culture among her students. Her belief in the importance of fostering an interest in

students' own culture is significant, as it can lead to a deeper understanding of the Maldives' history, values, culture and tradition. By recognising the potential impact of social studies on her students' cultural identity, Nora underscores the power of social studies education in shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and their community.

Nora's perspective on how social issues in the Maldives society are reflected in the curriculum and pedagogy, highlights the potential of social studies education as a learning area. She emphasised that "As a learning area, social studies allow students to value their roots, explore their pasts and understand their contexts, appreciate the interrelationships between people across time, environments and cultures while developing civic efficacy" (Nora reflection 2). According to Nora, social studies plays a vital role in enabling students to understand how societies function and developing the necessary knowledge and skills for making informed and thoughtful decisions as responsible citizens in a democratic society. Moreover, Nora believed that students will be able to "appreciate diversity and develop respect for oneself and others and will learn to be compassionate and tolerant" (Nora reflection 2). This valuable insight from Nora's reflection demonstrates her level of understanding of social studies and its potential to shape well-rounded individuals who are equipped to contribute positively to their society. Nora's deep connection and passion for the subject shows the high level of engagement she has towards her role as a social studies teacher.

There are also some challenges that Nora has faced during her teaching career. She states her reasons that the lack of adequate resources and outdated books and information on social studies topics has contributed certain limitations to her teachings (Nora reflection 2). The scarcity of relevant materials has made it challenging to keep the content engaging, which, in turn, affects the overall effectiveness of her teaching strategies. Thus, Nora suggested that a change she would bring into the social studies curriculum would be to only include Maldivian culture and customs as she believes that "there are some topics which are not necessary" (Nora reflection 2). She does not expand on these topics and what led her to believe that these topics are unnecessary, but it is certain that Nora believed that focusing solely on Maldivian culture and customs would better serve the needs and interests of her students. By narrowing the

curriculum to topics related to the Maldives, Nora aimed to create a more meaningful and relevant learning experience that resonated with her students' lives and experiences. However, further insights into the specific topics she considers unnecessary and her reasoning behind this perspective would be beneficial to fully understanding her approach to curriculum development.

6.4.2.4 Balqis

Balqis demonstrated in her reflection her sense of pride in her role as a social studies teacher which stems from her genuine passion for the subject. She indicated that, "social studies has evolved me into a very knowledgeable person who has the potential to have own opinions and criticise in a meaningful way in a given situation" (Balqis reflection 2). She further elaborated on how being a social studies teacher has made her feel approachable and accessible to her students. She attributed this positive dynamic to the subject itself, suggesting how social studies has a unique ability to engage students in meaningful ways. Moreover, Balqis passionately referred to herself as a "defender of social studies" (Balqis reflection 2), signifying her deep commitment and engagement with every topic and concept within the subject. In her role as a social studies teacher, she has "trained and developed social studies teachers", which was due to the school "not having any social studies teachers" (Balqis, reflection 2). She further presented an example where she mentioned training a "teacher from a maths and science background" and "with her effort and my knowledge and guidance, she became a professional social studies teacher" (Balqis, reflection 2). Despite these challenges, Balqis made a conscious effort to "make social studies lessons into meaningful lessons" for her students. For instance, by organising "field trips (for example, museums and the Maldives Majilis) to help students a lot in learning the lesson in a meaningful way" (Balqis reflection 2). She further expressed that these trips enhance their engagement as it "drives the students' interest" (Balqis, reflection 2).

Similarly to the other participants, Balqis also encountered challenges in her role as a social studies teacher. She highlighted the difficulty of finding valid and up-to-date

information for the topics she teaches, which poses a significant hurdle for her in delivering accurate and relevant content to her students. She explained:-

[The] Only challenge I have gone through is finding information relating to Maldivian history. The Internet has information, but we are not sure of the authenticity of the information. So, to find validated information regarding this topic is a big challenge. (Balqis reflection 2)

Balqis further explained that while teacher guides and textbooks serve as available resources for teaching content, they may not provide the level of depth and understanding required for teachers who aim to deliver comprehensive lessons to their students. As a dedicated educator, she sought to offer her students a more profound understanding of the subject matter, which necessitated additional effort and research beyond the provided materials. Balqis's statement below exemplifies her addressing this challenge: -

Textbooks and teacher guides have information but those teachers who want a very detailed understanding of the area, find it really challenging to find this information. We are not aware of whom to contact, where to find resources regarding Maldivian history. (Balqis reflection 2)

However, Balqis indicated that she managed to find a proactive approach to addressing this challenge where she often asked Dhivehi teachers to find any books that are related to Maldivian history. She also suggested that to make lessons more engaging for the students, she invited "field experts, historians and arranged guest lecture lessons" (Balqis reflection 2). By incorporating real-world perspectives and expertise into her teaching, Balqis enhances her students' understanding and appreciation towards social studies making the content more meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Moving forward, Balqis outlined several changes she envisions for the social studies teaching syllabus, curriculum and teaching strategies. The teaching syllabus provides specific guidance for social studies while the curriculum encompasses the entire educational program and reflects the broader goals and values of the education

system. Firstly, she began by addressing some of the social issues in the syllabus; for instance, bullying and littering are some of the issues faced in the society. Balqis indicated that when it comes to teaching these social issues in the classroom, she feels that “social issues should be addressed along with ways of solving it” (Balqis reflection 2). She further suggested that this could be achieved through “interactive and role play activities” (Balqis reflection 2) that can actively engage students and increase their awareness of the issues, thus encouraging them to think critically about potential solutions. However, Balqis emphasised her concern by further suggesting that “...social studies taught in the Maldives comprises more of concepts learnt for tests rather than practically applicable skills” (Balqis reflection 2). This indicates that the current teaching approach and strategies may not fully equip students with the necessary skills to address real-world social issues and situations effectively. The apparent lack of engagement with social inquiry skills processes among teachers underscores the need for a shift towards more hands-on, inquiry-based teaching methods that foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in students.

Taking this into consideration, when a social studies teacher expresses this sentiment, it means that they believe the focus of social studies education in the Maldives is primarily on memorising theoretical concepts and information for the purpose of passing tests, rather than emphasising practical skills and real-world application. Moreover, a test-centred approach may result in students feeling disengaged from the subject, as it becomes more about memorising information rather than exploring meaningful and relevant topics. This could lead to a lack of interest in social studies and reduced motivation to learn, as indicated in Malak 's reflection. Therefore, this sentiment reflects a call for educators and curriculum developers to reconsider the way social studies is taught and to prioritise both theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

Balqis also addressed the significance and emphasis that is given for social studies in the curriculum. She indicated that while the curriculum suggests the significance of social studies in the National Curriculum Framework [NCF], in practice, this emphasis appears to be lacking (Balqis reflection 2). Balqis further described a mismatch between the NCF and the implementation stage of social studies which leads her to

indicate that “the significance of the subject diminishes in the implementation process” (Balqis reflection 2). She highlighted that despite social studies being considered a compulsory subject from key stage 1 to key stage 4, according to her observation, it is not taught in key stage 4. This situation is primarily attributed to a shortage of trained social studies teachers. However, Balqis firmly believed that with proper training and support, teachers can be equipped to effectively implement the subject across all key stages. Addressing this issue could lead to a more comprehensive and impactful social studies education for students.

Finally, in her reflection, Balqis identified that social studies contains numerous outcomes and indicators, leading to a need for streamlining and limiting the number of indicators to ensure effective coverage. Additionally, Balqis observed instances of content repetition across the curriculum, suggesting a potential area for improvement in terms of curriculum design and organisation. For instance, Balqis explained:

For example, talking about Myself (social studies topic) it might talk about interest and abilities throughout the grade 1, 2 and 3. But rather I suggest having distinguishing indicators covered in each grade in detail. In grade 1 students learn about themselves. Their name, date of birth, father, mother and house name etc. In grade two their likes and dislikes. Likes and dislikes of their friends. In grade three, interest and abilities of themselves and friends. And learn to respect others interests etc. With this adjustment and change repetition can be avoided. (Balqis reflection 2)

Balqis’s suggestion for improving the curriculum demonstrates her thoughtful approach to teaching social studies. By proposing a more detailed and structured progression of topics across grades, she aims to avoid unnecessary repetition and enhance learning experience for students. Her thinking reflects a commitment to optimising the curriculum’s effectiveness by ensuring that each grade introduces distinct and relevant content. This demonstrates her reflective nature as a teacher, as she critically evaluates the content curriculum and actively seeks ways to enhance its impact on students' learning. Through her insights and recommendations, Balqis shows her dedication to fostering meaningful and engaging social studies experiences

for her students. These findings gathered from the participants' reflections serve as evidence, shedding light on the complexities faced by social studies teachers in navigating the social studies curriculum and advocating for potential refinements to enhance the overall learning experiences.

6.4.2.5 Summary: Cross-Case Analysis of Teachers' Reflections on their Teaching Practice

From the reflections of Malak, Sarah, Nora, and Balqis, a pattern of insights towards social studies emerges. Each teacher's account indicates an underlying belief in the ability of social studies teaching and learning to transform students into informed, responsible Maldives citizens. Malak's emphasis on fostering critical thinking aligns with the essence of social studies, which seeks to cultivate informed, analytical citizens capable of understanding and addressing complex societal issues. Sarah's dedication to challenging gender stereotypes through social studies highlights the subject's role in promoting social awareness and empowering students to critically examine prevailing norms and values. Nora's focus on deepening students' understanding of their cultural heritage underscores social studies' capacity to foster a sense of identity and belonging, essential for active civic participation. Balqis' unwavering advocacy for social studies reflects its significance in equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the intricacies of contemporary society, think critically, and make informed decisions. Together, these perspectives illustrate how social studies serves as a vehicle for promoting critical thinking, social awareness, cultural appreciation, and civic engagement among students, thereby preparing them to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the world at large.

Despite their shared enthusiasm, these participants face common challenges. The scarcity of resources and outdated information surfaced as recurring obstacles, impacting the efficiency of teaching strategies. This challenge is particularly evident in Balqis's struggle to find validated information on Maldivian history, leading her to seek support from Dhivehi teachers and incorporate real-world perspectives through guest lectures. All four teachers echo their need for a more thorough, relevant, and engaging curriculum. The participants share their struggle with the conflict between the

theoretical focus of current teaching approaches and the need for practical skills. Balqis, in particular, critiqued the prevailing emphasis on memorization for tests, advocating for a shift towards more practical, applicable skills to address real-world social issues.

A notable point of comparison is the mutual commitment to improving the social studies curriculum. Changes were suggested by all four teachers, suggesting a more detailed and structured progression of topics across grades. Balqis specifically calls for streamlining outcomes and limiting indicators to avoid repetition, emphasising a need for a more organised and effective curriculum. Another prevalent point is the lack of qualified social studies teachers, with Balqis firmly believing that proper training can enable effective implementation across all key stages. This is evident as each participant teacher in their personal profiles (See Section 6.3, p. 224-225) has described themselves to be unspecialised social studies teachers or those who have undergone specific training to become professional social studies teachers.

While there are commonalities, differences in the participants proposed changes and their emphasis on certain aspects in their reflections stands out. Sarah, for example, placed a strong focus on challenging gender stereotypes, while Balqis advocated for interactive activities and practical skills. Malak, on the other hand, emphasised more practical work and vocational training, highlighting the importance of hands-on experience for students.

In conclusion, the exploratory cross-case analysis of teachers' reflection on their teaching practices indicates a shared passion among the participants for emphasising the importance of shaping well-rounded individuals. Common challenges in resources, outdated information, and the emphasis for a curriculum refinement emerged across all four reflections. Within the broader framework of social studies education in the Maldives, the subtle distinctions in recommended adjustments and emphases highlights the individual participants' goals and viewpoints. Their reflections serve as a collective voice, aiming to better equip students for active citizenship and engagement with real-world issues.

6.4.3 Awareness of Students' Learning

Teachers' awareness of students' learning refers to their ability to recognise and understand how their students are engaging with and comprehending the material being taught. There were two reflections the participants undertook during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflection 3 was based on the ways in which the teachers' social studies teaching and learning practices adapted to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic in 2020-2021. On the other hand, reflection 4 examined the interests, challenges, and limitations that the teachers encountered while teaching social studies in the Maldives under normal circumstances, imagining a non-COVID-19 infected world.

Reflection 3 provided valuable insights into how the teachers' awareness of their students' learning changed during the pandemic, considering the shift to remote and hybrid learning methods and the challenges they faced in maintaining student engagement and progress during this period. The next section explores the impact of this shift for the teachers.

6.4.3.1 Adapting to Online Social Studies Teaching

As these reflections were undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic period, the participants were compelled to shift to remote online teaching due to the circumstances. This transition posed new challenges, opportunities and experiences for the participants to adapt and reflect on their teaching strategies and engage with their students in a virtual environment. When it came to adapting to the sudden shift to online teaching and learning of social studies from traditional classroom teaching, all of the participants found managing teaching social studies online to be both challenging and rewarding. Nora explained this clearly by stating that, "...during this pandemic, we managed teaching online classes. As with most teaching methods, online learning also has its own set of positives and negatives" (Nora reflection 3). Similarly, Sarah reported that teaching social studies online has also brought its own "cons and pros" (Sarah reflection 3), while Balqis acknowledged that the pandemic brought the teachers to "enter a new era of teaching and learning which we have not imagined at all" (Balqis reflection 3). These initial expressions of the participants

highlight that they recognise that online teaching has both advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, it has required them to adapt to challenges and search for innovative solutions in a virtual learning environment, as suggested in Malak 's reflection 3. The participants approached this new teaching strategy with an open mind, acknowledging that it required them to rethink their teaching strategies and find ways to effectively engage students in a virtual setting. Their reflection demonstrates that they approached online teaching of social studies with a positive attitude and willingness to explore new teaching methods to provide meaningful learning experiences for their students.

As the method of teaching shifted to online platforms, their schools' expectations of the teachers also underwent significant changes. They were required to navigate and embrace the challenges posed by the virtual teaching environment and to fulfil their roles as educators in innovative ways. Malak highlighted that her school expected them to "establish a positive learning environment and monitor student progress and potential" (Malak reflection 3). All of the participants used Google Classrooms as the virtual classroom for their lessons and conducted activities through Google slides and Google docs. To accommodate students who missed lessons, the lessons were recorded which proved to be advantageous in facilitating catch-up and review of the content (Balqis reflection 3). However, the participants expressed the difficulties they faced in their reflections. Sarah described the following, "although our school expects us to make the lessons more student centred and give more activities online, it was difficult as all of the students do not have the access to a proper internet connection" (Sarah reflection 3). Without the proper internet connection, conducting efficient classroom management and delivery content became a challenge as the participants did not have the accessibility to a whiteboard, as they would in traditional classroom settings. However, Nora suggested that one of the resources she incorporated in the virtual classroom was using the whiteboard (Nora reflection 3). She stated that as the "school expects us to make lessons more student centred... and keep the students motivated and engaged", Nora conducted online debates among the students and incorporated quizzes to engage the students. Nonetheless, as Sarah suggested earlier, it was difficult for Nora as well to ensure a seamless facilitation of the classroom as the students often did not have proper internet connection. Thus, despite the

challenges posed by limited internet connectivity, the participants felt they were able to manage to create a positive learning environment through the difficult pandemic period, further demonstrating the teachers' commitment to facilitating meaningful learning experiences for their students.

Two of the participants (Nora and Sarah) shared that to facilitate an efficient learning environment, parent involvement in teaching and learning online was supportive. Meanwhile the other two teachers (Malak and Balqis) express in their reflections that none of the parents were involved at all. However, Balqis suggested that despite the fact that "no parents were involved during the teaching process" when it came to "internet problems, parents were involved and their support was appreciated" (Balqis, reflection 2)

Meanwhile, Sarah and Nora expressed that while parents helped with internet connection issues, they also further supported their students "to join online classes, submit their work and also complete students' work on time" (Sarah reflection 3). Sarah noticed that students who did not complete their work in the classroom physically were submitting their work on time with the help of their parents. Likewise, Nora stated "...they (parents) have helped the students to do their work, and also students who were not able to perform well in the physical classes were submitting excellently completed work" (Nora reflection 3). From their observations, on one hand, the parents' involvement clearly supported the teachers to facilitate a smooth learning process for their students. On the other hand, both the teachers had also noticed that excessive parental involvement may inadvertently hinder students' sense of responsibility and self-reliance in their studies. The teachers' awareness of this dual impact of parental involvement showcased their thoughtful reflection on the teaching and learning process. While they appreciated and valued the support parents provided in creating a conducive learning environment, the teachers also recognised the importance of encouraging students to take ownership of their learning journey.

The participants' reflections on their experiences as social studies teachers during the pandemic circumstances highlight their dedication, adaptability and commitment to providing quality education. Their thoughtful insights into managing online teaching

challenges and navigating the impact of parental involvement demonstrates a strong focus on student engagement and holistic learning. The next subsection discusses the participants' reflection on their strategies incorporated within their lessons to improve their teaching practice and provide a meaningful educational experience for their students.

6.4.3.2 Reflections on Students' Learning in the Virtual Classroom

In this section, I explore the participants' reflections on their students' online learning experiences during the challenging pandemic period. The primary objective is to examine how students engage with the online teaching and learning of social studies, and to consider their progress and understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, this section also explores the strategies and teaching resources employed by the participants to effectively facilitate online teaching and create a conducive learning environment.

Adjustments of the content delivery was one of the points in the participants' reflections during the transition to online teaching. Balqis recognised the importance of modifying the content delivery to suit the virtual setting. She indicated that "the normal social studies curriculum was condensed to teach online as we do not get much time. Most crucial outcomes and indicators are found in the condensed curriculum from each unit" (Balqis reflection 3). Balqis' observation about condensing the social studies curriculum to fit with the limited time period reflects the challenges faced by educators during online teaching. While Balqis was the only participant who explicitly mentioned this aspect, it is likely that the other three participants also faced similar time constraints when conducting their social studies lessons online. This common experience highlights the widespread impact of the pandemic on teachers' ability to deliver the full curriculum within the confines of virtual learning.

While adapting to the constraints of online teaching, the participants demonstrated their commitment to providing meaningful and engaging social studies lessons for their students. Through their reflection, it becomes evident that the teachers took on the responsibility of delivering the content and skills to students by incorporating a range

of resources in the virtual classroom. For instance, Malak expressed incorporating resources such as “PowerPoint presentation, videos, stories and pictures” (Malak reflection 3) to create engaging lessons for the students. In her observation it was evident that the students were engaged in the lesson through virtual classroom discussions and teacher student interactions which led to “more students turning in their work and asking questions to clarify their doubts” (Malak reflection 3). This demonstrated to Malak that the students developed a “keen interest in learning social studies” (Malak reflection 3). Through the opportunity to use the Google apps, Malak described that students and teachers were able to interact better in the virtual classroom compared to physical classrooms. Thus, for this reason, she loved online teaching as she got more opportunities to be flexible with her work as well as create better student-teacher interactions.

Likewise, Nora shared that she assessed students in various methods such as, “giving quizzes, online classroom discussions, and through the tasks in Google Classroom” (Nora reflection 3). On the other hand, Balqis shared that she incorporated “PowerPoint to deliver the lesson content... and used quizzes and group work” (Balqis reflection 3) where students collaborated and often discussed in Google Classroom to “provide more opportunities for students to engage and interact with each other” (Balqis reflection 3). Among the participants, there was a noticeable commonality in the diverse range of resources and strategies employed to engage students in the online learning environment. The use of technology allowed the participants to assess students’ progress and encourage active participation, leading to an enriched learning experience for their students.

Among the participants, Balqis was one of those who explicitly stated in her reflection that she integrated both summative and formative assessment methods into her lessons, aligning with the curriculum’s recommendations. She employed interactive activities with the help of digital resources that allowed her to effectively evaluate her students’ progress. Similarly, both Sarah and Nora implemented similar assessment approaches during online teaching, emphasising the importance of providing feedback to students on their work and giving them opportunities for revisions to enhance their understanding. Additionally, they both made sure to attach relevant materials to the

students' work to facilitate further comprehension. Their shared emphasis on comprehensive assessment methods highlights their approach to ensuring effective learning outcomes in the virtual classroom. However, ensuring the authenticity of assessments posed a challenge for all the participants, as it required placing a trust in both students and parents. Balqis expressed her concern as, "the most effective part was assessment. It was easy to manage and handle and monitor. But making sure of the authenticity was difficult" (Balqis reflection 3). Despite her recognition of the challenge, Balqis further expressed the effectiveness of assessment in the online teaching process but indicated that "students have performed well in the assessed outcomes which I believe is a factor that shows online teaching went well" (Balqis reflection 3). Therefore, despite the challenges faced during the online teaching, all participants felt they achieved effective instructional practices.

However, in their reflections, they also shared some potential changes they would consider if they were to teach online again in the future. These reflections highlight their willingness to adapt and improve their teaching strategies in response to the unique demands of online education. These insights provide a glimpse into their thought processes as social studies teachers, showcasing how they critically evaluated their strategies and made improvements to enhance the teaching and learning experience for their students in the virtual environment. Malak recommended in her reflection for continuing online teaching as this mode of teaching allows her to access various resources for her lessons. Meanwhile, Nora highlighted the importance of time management and the need for adjustments in the online teaching for social studies. She stated the following in her reflection:

I believe that if we have continued to teach social studies on an online platform, we have to bring some changes. Should extend the time. So that we can conduct more activities. Teachers and students should be more aware of technology, provide interactive activities. (Nora reflection 3)

Nora further suggested "extending the lesson time to conduct more activities" (Nora reflection 3) to foster a deeper understanding of the subject. Additionally, she emphasised the importance of both teachers and students becoming more adept at

using technology to facilitate interactive learning experiences in the virtual classroom. Likewise, Sarah shared the same perspective of how “every lesson was not enough as the students had a lot to share in every lesson”, thus wanting to increase the time allocated for the subject to ensure a more engaging learning environment for the students. Balqis considered bringing changes in her online teaching by using “updated interactive tools I have learnt from different platforms” to further experiment and bring changes to her social studies pedagogy. These considerations from the teachers show their forward-thinking approach to enhancing the online teaching and learning process for social studies.

Therefore, to conclude, the reflections provided by the four participants shed light on their experiences and challenges during the transition to online teaching and learning of social studies amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite facing various challenges, the teachers reported adaptability and dedication to providing meaningful and engaging lessons for their students. Their experiences highlight the importance of teacher-student interactions, teacher-parent collaboration, technological proficiency, and curriculum adaptation in ensuring effective virtual learning. Their reflections on their teaching suggested their awareness of students’ learning and by acknowledging the challenges they faced and proposing potential changes, the participants showed a willingness to adapt and grow as teachers, continually seeking ways to enhance students’ learning experiences.

6.4.4 Section summary

Overall, the reflections offer insights into the evolving landscape of teaching and learning of social studies education, particularly in the context of the pandemic induced shift to online learning. The participants’ experiences serve for both social studies teachers and curriculum developers, emphasising the importance of continuous professional development and support in social studies education.

6.5 Teachers' Benefits of Reflective Practice in Social Studies Pedagogy

In this section, data are presented to showcase the range of perspectives across each participant's online semi-structured interview regarding how the process of active reflection benefitted them during teaching their classes. The significance of exploring these diverse views lies in their potential to shed light on the fourth research sub-question, which aimed to explore the benefits that teachers may potentially gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy. The findings are organised under two headings based on the thematic analysis of my data collection.

6.5.1 Teacher-Student Interactions

Teacher-student interaction refers to the dynamic communication and engagement that takes place between teachers and students within a classroom setting. It encompasses various forms of communication, such as verbal exchanges, discussions, feedback, and nonverbal cues, that contribute to the learning experience and overall classroom environment. Effective teacher-student interaction involves fostering active participation, understanding, and forming positive relationships, ultimately enhancing the teaching and learning process. This section explores how reflective practice has positively influenced these interactions through the participants' experiences. Through online interviews and participant reflections, several key benefits of reflective practice were shared. These include a deep understanding of students' individual needs, tailoring instructions to suit each student, better classroom management and stronger teacher-student relationships. This examination underscores the pivotal role of reflective practice in enhancing the teaching experience and fostering a conducive learning environment in Maldivian social studies classrooms.

Enhanced understanding of students' needs is a pivotal benefit derived from reflective practice in the context of social studies education. Through thoughtful self-evaluation and introspection, teachers gained insights into the diverse learning requirements for their students. For instance, Nora explained that writing reflections helps her to

“improve my teaching...if perhaps students are not understanding then I can use another way to teach” (Nora Interview). This heightened awareness allows the teachers to tailor their instructional approaches to accommodate individual strengths, challenges, and learning styles. As a result, teachers became more attuned to identifying students who may require additional support or alternative teaching strategies. This is clearly demonstrated by Malak, as she described that “through reflection, I could better address students’ varying learning needs and enhance their understanding of the lesson” (Malak Interview). This awareness led her to make changes in her teaching approach, focusing on more interactive and engaging techniques that actively involved students in the learning process. By grasping the unique needs of each student, teachers can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment that nurtures academic growth and fosters a sense of belonging. Balqis reinforced this by stating that reflection allows her to “identify her strength, weakness and things to improve further on. This will help to develop the best meaningful lesson for children” (Balqis Interview). This aspect of teacher-student interaction exemplifies the transformative power of reflective practice, as it empowers teachers to better serve the diverse needs of their students in the social studies classroom.

Similarly, personalised instruction stands as a significant outcome of reflective practice within the teacher-student interaction dynamic. This goes beyond understanding the students’ needs, by actively customising the learning experience for each student, and maximising their engagement and comprehension. Through reflective processes, participants acquired a deeper understanding of their students’ individual strengths, weaknesses, and learning preferences. This newfound insight enabled teachers to design tailored instructional strategies that cater to each students’ learning. Balqis indicated that writing reflections had given her insight into online teaching for example, “knowing how to conduct best Google classrooms so that I can make the students create better discussions through an online group activity” (Balqis Interview). Moreover, she further suggested that reflection had allowed her to: -

Understand the best effective way for online teaching to students, engaging students, how to make them discuss their topics, how to conduct group activities

and also incorporate reflection in my lessons to make the students reflect back on what has been learnt. (Balqis Interview)

By recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach may not effectively engage all learners, teachers can adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles. Malak reported this understanding in her interview as she described how reflecting has made her “feel good” and that “reflection has improved me” (Malak, Interviews). She further stated that “I believe improvement can only come with reflection, when we write reflections, we can understand the mistakes we made and then only we will know how to correct it” (Malak, Interview). Her perception on practicing reflection demonstrates that reflection has indeed made an impact on her social studies teaching. This is shown from her reflection as she further expressed “I am able to think in different ways” and “I am improving my teaching methods and identify the mistakes I have made”, which shows how reflection guided her teaching in the classroom (Malak, Interview).

Likewise, Nora highlighted that writing reflections had “helped her a lot” and allowed her to understand “what are the things I have to change my teaching style? What are the ways I can improve my student learning? What are the different ways I can help because there are different students in my class?” (Nora, Interviews). Through this process, Nora engaged in introspection, identifying areas for improvement and devising strategies by “changing teaching materials to cater different levels of students” when “the students are not understanding the lesson” to better support the diverse needs of her students (Nora, Interview). Nora stated that the importance of changing teaching materials to cater to different levels of students is because “the child has to learn something when they go back home when their parents are expecting that they have learned something at school” (Nora, Interview). Hence, Nora emphasised the importance of reflection and recommends that “reflection improves teaching, and it helps to perform better in the future” and expressed that even towards the end of the study she is still continuing to practice reflection on her social studies teaching (Nora, Interview). Thus, practicing reflection from Nora’s perspective illustrates that she was able to reflect on her teaching practices, identify areas for improvement, and tailor her approaches to meet the needs of her students.

Malak advocated that emphasising the role of reflection had led her to realise that it holds the key to enhancing student learning, particularly among diverse learners. Malak indicated that reflection is “the only way we can improve to understand our students. There are different abilities of students in our classroom, and different learners are there, so some will learn through visual aids while other just listen to learn” (Malak, Interview). Moreover, she emphasised that once teachers “focus on reflection, I believe that we can bring some changes in our teaching method and approaches” (Malak, Interview). This realisation underscored the importance of continuous reflection and its potential to drive necessary adjustment in teaching methods. This personalised approach fosters a more meaningful and impactful educational experience, allowing students to grasp complex social studies concepts with greater clarity. The ability to customise instruction based on individual needs exemplifies the positive impact of reflective practice on teacher-student interactions, ultimately contributing to more effective and student-centred pedagogy.

An additional benefit highlighted by the participants was enhanced classroom management which emerged as a notable consequence practised within the realm of teacher-student interaction. Through reflective practice, the participants gained insights into the dynamics that govern their classrooms. This reflective exploration allowed teachers to refine their strategies for fostering a conducive learning environment effectively. However, as the reflections were written during the online teaching period, the management of virtual classes differed from traditional classroom settings. Sarah described her online teaching experience where she stated that it was “difficult to say whether the students really understood the topic or not, we don’t know whether the works were submitted by the students on their own or the parents...” (Sarah, Interview). Moreover, time became a big factor even in virtual classrooms as Sarah further reported that “we don’t get enough time to conduct the lesson the way we want. So, even though we plan, sometimes it is difficult to conduct the lesson smoothly” (Sarah Interview). By identifying the challenges and limitations that hinder the students’ learning, teachers are better equipped to proactively implement preventive measures and targeted interventions.

Balqis provided additional insight by highlighting the constraint of limited time of “35 minutes per period”, which poses challenges in both classroom management and comprehensive syllabus coverage (Balqis Interview). While immediate improvement might not have been evident despite reflective practice, the habit of engaging in reflective writing had empowered her to adopt diverse teaching approaches that effectively address learning indicators and achieve lesson outcomes within the given timeframe. Similarly, Sarah discussed the challenge of time constraints and how she strategically managed it by prioritising learning indicators over task completion (Sarah Interview). She incorporated activities that ensure students’ understanding of the topic within the limited 35 minutes time frame, fostering a conducive classroom environment that enhanced engagement and comprehension during social studies instruction. The integration of improved classroom management into the teacher-students interaction space exemplifies the positive influence of reflective practice on pedagogical outcomes, ultimately contributing to more successful and rewarding teaching experiences.

Fostering stronger teacher relationships constitutes a significant dimension within the landscape of reflective practice’s impact on teacher-student interaction. This fits into the interpersonal connections that underpin effective teaching and learning experiences. By engaging in thoughtful reflection, the participants gained fresh perspectives on their interaction with students, paving the way for enhanced rapport and mutual understanding. Sarah described in her interview that reflection “helps to improve our social studies teaching... it helps the teachers to identify what went well and what went wrong in their lesson” (Sarah Interview). Likewise, Nora suggested that practising reflection on her teaching strategies had increased her awareness of students’ learning, saying for example, “if students are not understanding then I can use another way to teach” (Nora Interview). Moreover, Malak highlighted that the practice of reflection becomes imperative in accommodating the diverse learning styles present in her classroom, prompting her to adapt and modify her teaching strategies to effectively address the varied needs of her students (Malak Interview). This heightened awareness enables teachers to tailor their communication styles, instructional approaches, and support mechanisms to align with individual students responding with increased enthusiasm and receptiveness. Balqis, in her interview,

made thought-provoking observations, expressing her belief that students should be encouraged to think beyond conventional boundaries. She stated the following:

Nowadays, we only see the basic Bloom's Taxonomy level, like not the high level of taxonomy, not the critical or synthesising that level, that is why I think students are not able to do so from the very early age onwards, we should make them think beyond the text. (Balqis Interview)

Therefore, Balqis suggested that incorporating more interactive elements and thought-provoking questions into lessons is crucial. She emphasised the importance of using diverse questioning techniques, including those that challenge students to engage with higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. With the help of reflection, she further recommended including such questions in worksheets to stimulate independent thinking and to discourage the common practice of providing answers alongside questions. Hence, the resulting atmosphere of trust and collaboration not only nurtures a more positive classroom ambience but also amplifies the efficacy of social studies pedagogy. The elevation of teacher-student relationships through reflective practice manifests as a testament to its potency in shaping meaningful educational interactions, thus enriching the teaching and learning landscape.

6.5.2 Self-evaluation of Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies are the approaches or broader techniques that teachers use to help students achieve learning outcomes. Implementing these approaches appropriately in the classroom is important in order to determine the activities of the teachers and students. Data from this study illustrate that participants believed that reflective practice has allowed them to self-evaluate and observe their own teaching methods and approaches implemented within their classroom. The findings in this section are based on the data gathered from the interviews and four reflections that each participant answered.

Identifying effective teaching strategies stands as a pivotal advantage derived from the process of self-evaluation within the reflective practice. This dimension explores

the dynamic interplay between pedagogical choices and their impact on student engagement and comprehension. When teachers engage in reflective practice, they gain a sharper lens through which to assess the efficacy of their teaching methods. Balqis articulated her engagement with reflective practice and the subsequent influence on her approach to teaching social studies, further advocating for the incorporation of reflection among other teachers. She stated that: -

I believe that this is an important process or important thing that we should ensure because this gives us the chance to reflect back on what we have done, and to judge ourselves. Judge in the sense of evaluating ourselves. It gives the idea to identify our strengths, our self, the things that we need to improve, and to identify what's the best strategy that we can incorporate in our lesson so that we can develop the best lesson out of it. (Balqis Interview)

From Balqis observation, it is evident that she considers the process of reflection to be crucial as it offers an opportunity to review one's actions and self-assess. This self-assessment involves evaluating personal performance, recognising strengths and areas for improvement, and determining the most effective strategies to enhance the quality of teaching and lessons. This introspective exploration illuminates the strategies that resonate most with students' ones that maximise their comprehension, motivation, and overall learning experience. Through this methodical review, the teachers unearthed the teaching techniques that fostered optimal understanding and retention among their students. Similarly, Malak stated that writing these reflections had supported her to understand her "teaching methodology" which further helped her to improve her social studies teaching pedagogy (Malak reflection 4). This heightened discernment empowered the participant to refine her institutional approaches, aligning them more closely with students' cognitive processes and learning preferences. Furthermore, Sarah indicated that reflection is significant as it also helps teachers by "noting down and writing how the lessons went" (Sarah Interview). As a result, the toolbox of teaching strategies broadens, enriched by practical insights gathered from reflective practice. This deliberate adjustment of teaching strategies through self-assessment not only boosts how well teachers teach but also strengthens the core of

social studies teaching, enabling a more powerful and customised learning experience for students.

The process of self-evaluation inherent in reflective practice brings forth the advantage of adapting to evolving learning trends. Teachers engaging in reflective practice find themselves attuned to the shifting dynamics of education. This involves not only aligning teaching methods with the ever-changing needs of students but also harnessing emerging educational technologies to enhance engagement and comprehension. During the pandemic, the participants were engaging in social studies through reflective practice which in return brought them to evaluate and understand their social studies teaching strategies effectively. Two participants described their respective online teaching experiences in their interviews. Firstly, Sarah described that her experience of writing reflections “began when was involved in this study” and during the transition to online teaching provided her the opportunity to “pick points on the areas that students are doing well or not well in a topic. Then I check if I have to reteach it again, what I need to focus, so I take anecdotal notes now” (Sarah Interview). This self-assessment process allowed her to develop more impactful teaching methods and create a more effective learning environment for her students.

Balqis highlighted that engaging in reflective practice had provided her with valuable insights into effectively integrating online teaching methods. This included “strategies for fostering student engagement, facilitating meaningful discussions, and orchestrating group activities” (Balqis reflection 4), all within the context of online learning. Through reflection, she gained a better understanding of how to optimise the online platform to create an interactive and engaging virtual classroom environment. Hence, through regular introspection and critical analysis, the participants were able to identify the teaching techniques that resonate most effectively with their students. This adaptive approach allowed them to embrace innovative virtual social studies teaching that bridges the gap between traditional instruction and model learning preferences. The ability to flexibly respond to these trends equips teachers to deliver lessons that are not just relevant but also captivating. This, in turn, fosters a more conducive environment for students to grasp complex concepts and engage meaningfully with the subject matter. Ultimately, the process of reflective practice

empowers educators to be proactive in navigating the teaching and learning of social studies education, ensuring that their teaching methods remain in sync with the ever-evolving world of learning.

Within the realm of reflective practice, the concept of continuous professional growth emerged as a key theme. This facet is emblematic of teachers' commitment refining their craft and keeping pace with the evolving educational landscape. Engaging in self-evaluation of teaching methods instils a sense of proactive responsibility for their professional development. Balqis argued that “along with reflection, teachers should find anybody (other social studies teachers) who is delivering an effective lesson, and discuss on having peer observation” (Balqis, Interviews). She further stated that “putting this into coordination will allow teacher to learn from each other. That is an important thing” (Balqis, Interviews). This approach would contribute significantly to their professional development and growth. Each of the participants described the lack of professional learning opportunities for social studies teachers, and each has emphasised the significance of placing importance on reflective practice and professional learning for these teachers (as indicated in Chapter 5, section *Challenges and Limitations in Social Studies Professional Learning in the Maldives*).

Through this ongoing reflective practice, participants were not only attuned to their strengths and areas of improvement but also poised to seek out opportunities for growth. By critically examining their teaching strategies, they identified gaps in their knowledge and areas that demand enhancement. These gaps may have included the deficiencies in understanding specific social studies contexts, concepts, social inquiry skills processes, or values necessary to advance their teaching practice. This realisation catalyses a thirst for learning, propelling them to engage in targeted professional development activities. Sarah emphasised the significance of conducting professional learning sessions when she stated that teachers will learn how to manage and improve their teaching strategies (Sarah Interview). Likewise, Malak expressed that with her experience of teaching social studies with reflective practice, it is imperative that “teachers know how to prepare students to learn social studies through professional learning” (Malak Interview). Furthermore, Balqis described her firm belief that professional learning opportunities should be given to social studies teachers

through” professional development programs, special training, and special practicums” (Balqis Interview). She further indicated that “there should be professional teachers teaching social studies, not teachers who are teaching other subjects or content” (Balqis Interview). Whether it involves attending workshops, seminars, or pursuing advanced certifications, the drive for continuous improvement becomes an inherent trait. This growth mindset permeates their teaching approach, as they infuse newly acquired insights into their lessons, bolstering the quality of education they provide.

The participants demonstrated a growth mindset towards their professional learning and the enhancement of their roles as social studies teachers, this demonstrated their drive to improve their social studies teaching pedagogy through the active process of reflection. However, the potential for their development is hindered by the absence of sufficient reflective practice opportunities provided for them. In spite of this, through reflective practice, the participants not only uplifted their own teaching efficacy in their social studies pedagogy but also championed the ideals of intellectual curiosity and growth within the classroom, fostering a positive impact that extends beyond the confines of traditional pedagogy.

The teachers believed that reflective practice offered them the opportunity to align their teaching approaches with the evolving needs of students and the teaching of and learning about social studies education in the classroom. . Embracing new strategies not only invigorated the teaching experience for the participants but also created an engaging and stimulating learning environment for students. This practice nurtured adaptability and flexibility, critical skills in an ever-changing world. Through reflection, teachers were emboldened to foster an environment of exploration that prompts students to think innovatively by encouraging hands-on learning experiences. This spiral of innovation and experimentation propels continuous growth - teachers refine their methods based on reflections, leading to enhanced teaching strategies such as incorporating collaborative projects, real-world applications, and inquiry-based learning activities.

6.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the aspects of reflective practice among the four social studies teachers who engaged throughout the study, focusing on teacher-student interactions, self-evaluation of teaching strategies, and the overall impact on pedagogical outcomes. Through interviews, and participant reflections, several key themes emerged, that shed light on the impactful role of reflective practice in enhancing social studies teaching and learning experiences. Firstly, the chapter explored the dynamics of teacher-student interactions within the context of reflective practice. It highlighted how reflective practice fosters deeper understanding of students' individual needs, which leads to tailored instructions, improved classroom management, and stronger teacher-student relationships. Participants emphasised the importance of adapting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles and leveraging technology to enhance engagement in both traditional and online classroom settings. In addition, the chapter explored the self-evaluation of teaching strategies activated by reflective practice. It illustrated how teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional approaches and adapt to evolving learning trends. Through continuous self-evaluation, the teachers refined their strategies, embraced innovating methods, and pursued professional growth opportunities to enhance their teaching efficacy. Overall, the findings in Chapter 6 report the impact of reflective practice in social studies teachers' pedagogy. The data demonstrates that reflective practice empowers teachers to tailor instruction to individual student needs, adapt to changing educational landscapes and foster continuous professional learning growth. By engaging in reflective practice, teachers are better able to create stimulating and inclusive learning environments that promote student success and prepare them for the challenges of the modern world. Chapter 7, further analyses and discusses the implications of the findings. This will include investigating the broader implications for teachers' social studies pedagogy through reflection in the Maldives, discussing potential strategies for integrating reflective practice into teacher professional learning programs, and identifying areas for future research.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore *how Maldivian teachers activate and shape their social studies pedagogy through reflection*. Employing online participatory action research [OPAR], this study explored Maldivian primary teachers' engagement with reflective practice to enhance their social studies pedagogy. Opting for PAR was a research approach, aligning with the aim of collaboratively understanding and addressing the issues surrounding primary teachers' responses to and conceptualisations of, social studies in the Maldives NCF (NIE, 2015a). PAR's emphasis on collaboration and cyclic learning processes, including observation, reflection, action, evaluation, and modification, suited the social studies context of my research. However, the shift to OPAR became imperative due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, thus ensuring continued collaborative learning, and adaptation among teachers in a virtual environment. This chapter elucidates the answers to the sub-questions guiding this study and the findings which were presented in Chapters 5 to 6 are discussed. Section 7.2 begins with the discussion of findings relevant to teachers' social studies pedagogy and professional learning to help answer the sub-research questions 1 and 2, namely:

1. *What understandings do teachers have of social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives National Curriculum Framework?*
2. *What challenges and limitations do teachers face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?*

Section 7.3 discusses the impact of reflective practice on teachers' self-evaluation on their social studies pedagogy, and their observations on student learning to help answer the sub-research questions 3 and 4, namely:

3. *How does teacher reflective practice shape social studies pedagogy for student learning?*
4. *What benefits do teachers gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy?*

This chapter draws to a close by synthesising the study's conclusions and recognising its inherent limitations. Finally, the chapter highlights the implications of these findings and offers insights for future research directions.

7.2 Navigating Teachers' Social Studies Pedagogy: Insights and Challenges

In this section, the focus narrows to the first and second sub-questions highlighted in the study (see Figure 5.2, p. 170) which highlight the multi-faceted landscape of social studies education for Maldivian teachers and explore both insights and challenges. This exploration focuses on the intricate details of how teachers conceptualise the NCF and their challenges in shaping their pedagogy through professional learning opportunities in the Maldives.

7.2.1 Teachers' Understandings of Social Studies

The study's first sub-question, *what understandings do teachers have social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives National Curriculum Framework?*, suggested a spectrum of interpretations among the participants regarding their understandings of social studies in the NCF. The teachers' shared understandings of social studies as a multidisciplinary field reflected the curriculum's intentions to provide a comprehensive view of the society. This aligned with the NCF's emphasis on students valuing "their roots, explore their past and understand their contexts, appreciate the interrelationships between people across time, environments, and cultures while developing civic efficacy" (NIE, 2015a, p. 43). The analysis of teachers' perceptions of social studies education provides insights into the alignment between their views and the objectives outlined in the Maldives NCF. The study highlights the diversity of

interpretations among teachers regarding the scope of social studies education. While some teachers emphasised its multidisciplinary nature, others focused on broader concepts such as environmental awareness, community, values, and social issues. These various interpretations reflect the nature of social studies and its potential to address a wide range of societal concerns beyond disciplinary content (NIE, 2015a). However, it was evident that these interpretations seem to align more closely with the surface-level textbook understandings outlined in the curriculum, indicating a need for a deeper engagement with the subject matter.

In discussing the implications of the findings regarding teachers' understanding and internalisation of the profound meaning and purpose of social studies, it is essential to draw upon relevant literature and scholarly perspectives. Brookhart (2011) underscores the importance of teachers possessing both pedagogical knowledge and deep content knowledge. This insight highlights the critical role of teachers' understanding of general principles about how students learn and their deep understanding of the content areas they teach. Furthermore, Deng (2018) suggested there exists a crucial interrelation between Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and effective teaching, emphasising the significance of teachers' ability to engage with the subject matter they teach. The observation from this study indicates that while teachers in the Maldives demonstrate a foundational understanding of social studies as outlined in the NCF (NIE, 2015a), there appears to be a gap in between the depth of their understanding and personal insights into the subject. This raises questions about the extent to which have they internalised the deeper meaning and purpose of social studies in their own pedagogical approach.

The question posed to the participants, '*what does social studies mean to you?*', aimed to elicit not only their understanding of teaching social studies in relation to the NCF but also their personal connection to the subject. While participants highlighted the curriculum definition of social studies, the research setting may have not fully facilitated their ability to showcase their personal insight and connection to the discipline. The uncertainty of participants' expression of their personal connection to social studies underscores the extent to which teachers conceptualise and engage with the subject on a personal level. Perhaps, a rephrasing of the question could have

hinted at inviting participants to express their personal connection to social studies more explicitly, or it is also possible that the teachers may have a limited deep understanding, highlighting the need for more professional learning and development in social studies. However, for the purpose of this study, the responses gathered provide insight into teachers' understanding and perception of social studies within the context of the Maldives. Understanding teachers' personal connections to social studies is crucial to designing teaching strategies that foster a deeper appreciation and engagement with the subject among educators. This is because the teacher's understanding of a subject can influence how they teach to their students (Shapiro & Last, 2002) when aligning pedagogical practices with the broader goals and objectives of social studies education as outlined in the NCF. Ultimately, addressing these gaps in understanding and internalisation can contribute to the enhancement of social studies instruction and student learning experiences in the Maldives.

The nature of social studies, as highlighted by the participants, suggests its potential to contribute significantly to students' holistic development. The emphasis on fostering responsible citizenship echoes the broader goals of education in democratic societies, as stated in the Maldives NCF (NIE, 2015a). However, the participants exhibited varying perspectives on the subject. While some viewed it as essential for civic engagement and societal development, others considered it as a 'useless subject'. This diversity in perception highlights the challenges in aligning the curriculum with teacher beliefs. As Ali (2006) notes, teachers often interpret the syllabus and national curriculum independently, leading to varying implementations and understandings of the subject. In this study, despite acknowledging its importance, all four participants especially Malak, felt disconnected from the subject due to lack of resources and felt that social studies is not adequately supported by textbooks and resources. Branda (2023) and Parry and Metzger (2023) argue that limited resources and time pressures can diminish enthusiasm for teaching, further exacerbating teachers' disengagement with the subject. This sentiment further emphasises the discrepancies in how the subject is valued and across different schools. According to Russell III and Waters (2021), research indicates that social studies develops students to become informed and engaged citizens, which is essential for the functioning of society. In the context of the Maldives, addressing environmental challenges such as climate change and

sustainability, cultural preservation and identity, civic engagement and democratic participation, and economic development can be addressed through effective social studies education. Hence, the participants' perspectives underscore the vital role of social studies in shaping active and informed citizens, aligning with the curriculum's objective and broader societal needs. Therefore, the participants' views on social studies education appears to align with the broader socio-cultural context of the Maldives, where understanding one's cultural heritage and societal context holds significant value (Mathew et al., 2017). This alignment suggests the NCF resonates with teachers' perceptions of social studies as a subject that encompasses various disciplines that foster an understanding of societal dynamics and civic engagement, which, as stated, are crucial aspects of the Maldivian society. This specificity ensures that educational practices are tailored to address the societal dynamics, and civic engagement needs unique to the Maldivian context.

Moreover, the participants' recognition of the importance of cultural preservation aligns with the growing emphasis on culturally relevant education. Kurt (2020) argues that connection of social studies education to cultural background enhances the engagement and promotes a sense of identity and belonging among students. This emphasis on cultural relevance is further supported by socio-cultural theory, as proposed by Vygotsky and Cole (1978), which posits that learning is deeply influenced by social interactions and cultural contexts. In the Maldivian context, where cultural heritage is highly valued, integrating Dhivehi language into social studies instruction can enhance students' understanding and foster a sense of pride and connection to their heritage. Thus, the choice of language in social studies instruction plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of their cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging within society.

However, findings from this study indicate that across ten participants, each of them holds varying perspectives on the medium of instruction in social studies classrooms. While 40% of teachers advocate for English, citing its global relevance and the accessibility of resources, 30% emphasise that teaching in Dhivehi allows for a deeper engagement with Maldivian history and cultural concepts. The remaining 30% of teachers argue for a blended approach, using Dhivehi for culturally specific topics,

while incorporating English to equip students with skills for the globalised worlds. These findings align with the existing literature on language use in Maldivian education. Research suggests that prioritising English-medium instruction may contribute to cognitive barriers, as students may struggle to articulate complex ideas in a second language (Bosch et al., 2023). Moreover, while young people express pride in Dhivehi as a marker of identity, its marginalisation in formal education could weaken students' connection to their cultural heritage (Mohamed, 2020). Some scholars advocate for a bilingual or translanguaging model that allows for a fluid movement between English and Dhivehi to enhance learning experiences while maintaining language proficiency in both (Bosch et al., 2023; Mohamed & Nihaadh, 2023). The findings of this study highlight the practical implications of such models, as teachers recognise the need to balance cultural identity and preservation with global competencies.

Ultimately, the debate over language choice in social studies is not just about communication but pedagogical effectiveness. To help students grasp both Maldivian and global perspectives, teachers need strategies and autonomy to integrate both languages effectively. This highlights the need for professional learning opportunities to navigate bilingual instruction. Moreover, language choice has broader implications for teaching practices and aligns with the objectives of the NCF (NIE, 2015a), which emphasises fostering responsible citizenship and cultural preservation. Drawing on socio-cultural theory, teachers can design learning experiences that resonate with students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing engagement and promoting deeper learning outcomes in social studies.

The integration of Islamic beliefs, values and perspectives into social studies education emerged as a significant theme, highlighting the alignment between Islamic principles and the content of social studies education. Participants emphasised how teaching Islamic values alongside social studies topics enhances students' understanding of both subjects and fosters respect, critical thinking, and cultural appreciation which further aligns with the Islamic emphasis placed on social studies topics in the NCF (NIE, 2015a) and social studies syllabi (NIE, 2015b, 2015c, 2022b, 2022c). By integrating Islamic principles into social studies education, students gain

insights into citizenship in a Muslim country, and understanding what it means to be a part of a Muslim society, and learning how to navigate social and political situations according to Islamic principles. This holistic approach not only deepens students' understanding of social studies concepts, such as identity, cultural heritage or people, places and the environment (NIE, 2015a), but also equips them with practical skills and knowledge relevant to their lives within their cultural and religious context. Malak also suggested that integrating vocational training into social studies, such as carpentry or gardening, could provide students with practical skills that can help them prepare for real-life and future employment. While such skill development may not fall within the core aims of primary social studies, it could be argued that the subject can help students explore the social roles and value of vocational skills within their communities and society. Similarly, this finding resonates with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), which posits that a child's cognitive development is significantly shaped by the interactions with tools and people in their environment. For example, students may engage with the Quran or the traditions and practices of the religious figures, such as our Islamic Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which holds significant importance in Islamic education and serves as a fundamental tool for learning about religious teachings and principles. Moreover, interactions with family practices, which often reflect Islamic traditions and customs, contribute to the socio-cultural environment in which children grow and learn. Thus, integrating Islam into social studies education aligns with the NCF's vision of equipping every child for life (NIE, 2015a). By incorporating Islamic perspectives, teachers provide students with opportunities to engage with social studies from diverse perspectives, contributing a more inclusive environment that aligns with the ethos of the Maldives NCF.

However, the findings highlight varying perspectives among participants regarding the influence of Islam on social studies education which underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of cultural and religious influences on educational practices (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). The consensus among three participants, Balqis, Nora, and Sarah suggests a recognition of the connection between Islamic principles and social studies. Malak's alternative viewpoint, where she expressed scepticism regarding the influence of Islam on social studies education, prompts further exploration into the factors influencing teachers' beliefs. Flores and Day (2006)

suggest that teachers' perspectives can be shaped by personal experiences, training, and contextual factors. Malak's scepticism illuminates the intricate interplay of these factors, which profoundly shape teachers' perspectives. This finding underscores the impact of these influences on how teachers approach social studies education, and emphasises the need for tailored and context-specific teaching approaches. In the context of my study, these findings have significant implications. The recognition of the connection between Islamic principles and social studies education, alongside the acknowledgement of diverse perspectives, highlights the complexity of teaching social studies in the Maldives. It emphasises the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of cultural and religious influences on educational practices and highlights the need for inclusive and contextually relevant pedagogical approaches. Moreover, it underscores the significance of considering teachers' beliefs and experiences in shaping teaching practices.

Consideration of teachers' beliefs and experiences in shaping teaching practices is important because it acknowledges the diversity of perspectives and approaches that teachers bring to the classroom. In the context of the Maldives, where Islam plays a central role in society and education (NIE, 2015a) understanding teachers' beliefs and experiences regarding Islam is crucial for designing pedagogical approaches that are culturally relevant. Additionally, recognising teachers' individual ideas and experiences allow for the development of inclusive and effective teaching strategies that cater to the diverse needs of students. Drawing on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as conceptualised by Shulman (1986) and further developed by Grossman (1990), teachers can navigate the intersection of subject matter content, pedagogical strategies, and cultural sensitivities to create engaging and effective learning experiences for their students. By integrating PCK into their teaching practices, it is important for targeted professional learning opportunities to address these factors.

7.2.2 Teachers' Challenges in Social Studies Professional Learning

Transitioning to the study's second sub-research question, *what challenges and limitations do teachers face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?*, the research explored these ideas towards teaching the subject and shed light on the obstacles hindering effective pedagogy and professional learning in social studies education. By examining these challenges and limitations, the study highlighted the complexities in shaping pedagogy and curriculum delivery within the Maldives NCF.

The study's exploration into teachers' perceptions of social studies education indicated a spectrum of attitudes towards teaching the subject, despite teachers acknowledging its significance. Some teachers exhibited a lack of genuine enthusiasm due to being influenced by constraints such as limited resources, time limitations, and insufficient professional learning opportunities (Branda, 2023; Parry & Metzger, 2023). While this lack of enthusiasm may not directly cause a disconnect between teachers' understanding and students' engagement, it can contribute to creating a disengaged learning environment and hinder teachers' interpretation and implementation of the curriculum (Andersone, 2017; Mkandawire, 2010; Stein et al., 2007). The study revealed challenges related to resource constraints and infrastructure limitations, which further exacerbate the difficulties faced by teachers in delivering quality social studies education. Participants cited inadequate access to instructional materials, outdated curricular resources, and limited technical infrastructure as significant barriers that impeded their ability to engage students in meaningful learning experiences. These resource-related challenges underscore the importance of investing in educational infrastructure and providing teachers with the necessary tools and resources to effectively implement the social studies curriculum.

One prominent challenge emphasised by the participants is the limited availability of professional learning opportunities tailored specifically to the needs of social studies educators. The teachers recognised the importance of continuous professional learning, and expressed frustration over the lack of targeted training and support in enhancing their pedagogical practices within the realm of social studies. This finding

indicates a need for educational stakeholders to prioritise the design and implementation of professional learning initiatives that address the unique demands of social studies education, such as equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to effectively deliver the curriculum.

Additionally, the findings illuminate the systematic challenges within the educational ecosystem that hinder teachers' autonomy and creativity in shaping their pedagogical approaches. Despite the guidelines outlined in the Maldives NCF (NIE, 2015a), participants highlighted discrepancies between the prescribed teaching time and actual time allocated for social studies instruction. While the NCF specifies 45 minutes for three social studies periods per week, all participants reported receiving only 35 minutes for three periods, indicating a distinct disparity (NIE, 2015a). Participants expressed frustration over bureaucratic constraints, standardised testing pressures, and top-down directives that restrict their ability to innovate and tailor instructions to meet the diverse needs of students. The school schemes of work provided to teachers offer thought-out pedagogical instructions and approaches to follow, leaving little room for innovative approaches (Smith & Johnson, 2019). Naz and Murad (2017) underline the importance of innovative thinking strategies for teaching and learning stating that, "to facilitate all these students with personal differences under the same roof, a teacher has to adapt curriculum and lesson plans while bringing innovations in his teaching methods" (p.1). However, Di Biase (2015) argued that teachers in the Maldives tend to adopt a systematic approach, relying on pre-determined formats outlined in textbooks and schemes of work as 'instructional recipes'. This approach limits the scope for creativity in teaching and fails to embrace student-centred learning, which Di Biase (2015) emphasised is vital for meaningful engagement, rather than merely passively receiving information from the teacher. Additionally, the Education Sector Analysis Plan (MoE & MoHE, 2019) identifies resource shortages as a key factor in poor curriculum implementation, leading to ineffective learning and highlighting teachers' insufficient skills for student-centred learning and limited understanding of the curriculum. Hence, this lack of autonomy and resources limits teachers' capacity to think innovatively and adapt their pedagogical strategies to address the unique learning styles and interests of their students.

With the limited time allocated for teaching social studies, teachers highlighted the challenge for covering all curriculum topics adequately to prepare students for exams. This demonstrates a notable disconnect between the vision outlined in the Maldives NCF and the practical realities faced by teachers in implementing social studies education. As Balqis emphasised, teachers often prioritise preparing students for tests due to time constraints (Balqis, Interview), indicating a discrepancy between the vision of the curriculum of preparing every child for life (NIE, 2015a) and the day-to-day priorities of teachers. While the NCF aims to promote holistic learning experiences and foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and cultural appreciation through social studies (NIE, 2015a), the pressure to cover curriculum content and prepare students for exams often taken precedence in the classroom, as highlighted by the participants.

Additionally, the study explored teachers' perceptions of teaching strategies and their application within social studies classrooms. The participants suggested a diverse range of approaches were employed to enrich students' understanding of social studies concepts, including individual projects, group work, discussions, and real-life examples. Despite facing obstacles such as time constraints and a focus on exam-driven education, teachers remained committed to creating meaningful learning experiences that prioritise critical thinking and engagement with real-world issues. Incorporating theories such as social constructivism, social reconstructionist and socio-cultural theory into the discussion helps teachers to understand the broader implications of the challenges faced by teachers in social studies education. Social constructivism (Raskin, 2008; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), emphasises the active role of learners in constructing their understanding of the world through social interactions and experiences. In the context of teachers' social studies pedagogy, this theory suggests that students learn best when they engage in meaningful, collaborative activities that allow them to explore diverse perspectives and construct their own interpretations of historical events, societal issues, and cultural phenomena (Amineh & Asl, 2015). However, the practical application of social constructivist principles in the classroom may be hindered by factors such as time constraints, standardised testing pressures, and limited resources, as observed in the study. For instance, time constraints resulting from a crowded curriculum and limited instructional hours may limit teachers' ability to implement student-centred, inquiry-based approaches

effectively. Additionally, pressures stemming from standardised testing requirements may compel teachers to prioritise rote learning and content coverage over more interactive and exploratory learning experiences. Moreover, limited resources, including access to sufficient teaching guides, and educational materials such as field trips, may further constrain teachers' capacity to create engaging, hands-on learning environments conducive to social constructivist pedagogy. These challenges indicate the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address systematic barriers and facilitate the effective implementation of social constructivist approaches in Maldivian social studies classrooms.

Similarly, social reconstructionist theory posits that education serve as a tool for social change and empowerment, maintain that students critically examine and transform their social realities (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970). In the context of teachers' pedagogy and professional learning, this theory underscores the importance of fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and cultural awareness among students. However, the disconnect between the vision outlined in the NCF and the day-to-day priorities, such as standardised testing preparation, administrative requirements, and time constraints, of teachers suggests a need for a greater alignment between curriculum goals and classroom practices to effectively implement social reconstructionist principles. Furthermore, socio-cultural theory highlights the interplay between social interactions, cultural context, and cognitive development (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This theory emphasises the importance of considering students' cultural backgrounds, experiences and social contexts in teaching and learning of social studies, In the context of teachers challenges they perceive in professional learning, this suggests that meaningful learning experiences should be culturally relevant, engaging, and responsive to students' diverse needs and perspectives. In the context of social studies education in the Maldives, Nind et al.'s (2016) pedagogy model offers insights into how teachers can navigate the constraints of standardised curricula, time limitations, and limited resources while promoting meaningful learning experiences for students. By prioritising flexibility, differentiation, and collaboration in their pedagogical approach, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs and interests of their students.

However, when faced with rigid curricular guidelines and limited opportunities, teachers may struggle to enact student-centred teaching approaches for creativity and innovation. Moreover, the disconnect between educational goals outlined in the NCF and the day-to-day priorities of teachers further complicates the application of pedagogical models like Nind et al. (2016). While the model advocates for personalised, student-centred teaching and learning experiences teachers may find themselves prioritising exam preparation and content coverage due to external pressures and constraints. Certainly, achieving personalised, student-centred teaching and learning experiences alongside exam preparation and content coverage is an ideal scenario. However, in practice, teachers often face challenges in balancing these priorities due to various constraints. In my study, participants expressed concerns about time limitation and pressure to cover curriculum content in preparation for both formative and summative assessments.

The literature corroborates these findings, indicating that teachers frequently encounter tensions between student-centred approaches and exam-focused teaching. Hargreaves (2003) discussed how external pressures, such as standardised testing, can influence teachers to prioritise content coverage over pedagogical innovation. Additionally, Darling-Hammond (2007) emphasised the need for a balanced approach that integrated both academic rigor and student-centred learning experiences. However, she acknowledged the challenges teachers face in implementing such an approach within the constraints of standardised curricula and testing environments. Smith and Johnson (2019) and Naz and Murad (2017) discussed the importance of collaborative learning and argued that diverse learning styles in the classroom must be acknowledged. They suggested that teachers should have the autonomy to innovate, but written school schemes of work often suggest a more prescriptive program centred around providing structured, ready-made strategies that may limit pedagogical innovation. Hence, while the Nind et al. (2016) model advocates for personalised, student-centred teaching, external pressures and constraints often hinder full implementation in practice. Thus, the findings of this study suggests that teachers face challenges and limitations in incorporating socio-cultural perspectives into their pedagogical practices due to constraints such as standardised curricula and limited professional learning opportunities. Professional learning opportunities would

need to focus specifically on strategies for integrating socio-cultural perspectives into teaching practices, that foster cultural competence among teachers, promote diversity and inclusion of various teaching strategies in the classroom, and provide resources and support for addressing the social studies topics effectively.

The absence of explicit reference to these three theoretical frameworks among the study participants raises important questions about the state of professional learning and pedagogical discourse within the field of social studies education in the Maldives. The participants' recognition of the lack of professional learning opportunities echoes broader concerns about the need for targeted professional development in specific subject areas (Wei et al., 2009). It suggests a potential gap in teachers' knowledge and awareness of foundational theories that underpin effective pedagogical practice. This challenge is further compounded when teachers are assigned to teach subjects that are outside of their expertise, which can compromise their quality of instruction (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). One plausible explanation for this gap may lie in the professional learning opportunities available in the Maldives. If teachers have not been exposed to these theories or provided with opportunities to engage critically with educational research and theory, it's understandable that they may not incorporate them into their practice or reference them in discussions about their teaching approaches. This points to the need for a more robust and comprehensive professional learning initiative that prioritises theoretical knowledge and pedagogical innovation in social studies education. Furthermore, the absence of theoretical discourse in teachers' responses raises questions about the state of pedagogical discourse within the field of social studies education in the Maldives. Are teachers encouraged to engage critically with educational theory and research as part of their professional learning and development? Is there a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing that promotes the exchange of ideas and best practices?

However, it is also important to consider the role of the researcher in shaping the focus and direction of the study. If theoretical frameworks were not explicitly introduced or discussed during the data collection sessions, it is possible that participants may not have spontaneously referenced them in their responses. This highlights the

researcher's responsibility to facilitate discussions that encourage critical reflection and exploration of theoretical perspectives among participants.

Overall, observations in the existing literature provide insights into the complexities of navigating social studies pedagogy among Maldivian teachers. While challenges such as limited resources and enthusiasm gaps exists, the study also illuminates teachers' dedication to creating meaningful learning experiences that promote critical thinking, engagement, and cultural appreciation among students. These findings support the views that these Maldivian teachers were able to activate and shape their social studies pedagogy through reflection, underscoring the importance of addressing challenges and fostering continuous professional learning to enhance social studies education in the Maldives.

7.3 Enhancing Teachers' Pedagogy through Reflective Practice: Self-Observations and Impacts

In this section, the focus narrows to the third and fourth sub-questions highlighted in this study (see Figure 6.2, see p. 222), investigating the landscape of social studies education among Maldivian teachers and examining their perspectives on reflective practice. This exploration also unfolds a dual trajectory, firstly scrutinising how teachers perceive reflective practice activates and shapes their social studies pedagogy for student learning; secondly, it navigates through the benefits that teachers perceive from the use of reflective practice towards their social studies pedagogy and professional learning.

7.3.1 Teachers' Understanding of Reflective Practice in Relation to their Social Studies Pedagogy

The study explored reflective practice with the third sub-question of my study, *how does teacher reflective practice shape social studies pedagogy for student learning?* This inquiry illustrates the dynamic relationship between teachers' reflective processes and their social studies pedagogy. The teachers' thoughtful contemplation and self-

evaluation through reflective practice demonstrated enhancement of their teaching strategies, directed towards improving student outcomes. The findings in Chapter 6 indicate the impact of reflective practice on teachers' social studies pedagogy, drawing insights from the experiences of Maldivian teachers engaged in reflective practice. Moreover, the findings highlighted a tapestry of diverse yet interconnected approaches, with a heightened focus on the practice of reflection on teacher's pedagogical decisions.

The exploratory cross-case analysis illuminates how reflective practice plays a pivotal role in shaping the teaching strategies employed by teachers in both face-to face and online social studies classrooms. Through self-evaluation of their teaching strategies, the teachers gained insights into their effectiveness and identified areas for improvement. This reflective process enabled them to think about how they may refine their social studies teaching approaches and adapt them to better meet the needs of their students. In face-to-face classrooms, the participants engaged in ongoing reflection through their reflective narrative texts on their teaching pedagogy, considering factors such as student engagement, comprehension, and participation. They actively monitored student learning outcomes and planned to adjust their instructional approaches based on student feedback, which closely aligns with Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988). This model provides a structured framework for teachers to systematically reflect on their experiences and identify opportunities for improvement. By engaging in the stages of description, feelings, evaluations, analysis, conclusion and action planning, teachers deepen their understanding of their social studies pedagogy and make informed decisions in order to enhance student learning. For instance, in Balqis' reflection 2, she *describes* the lesson on Sustainability of International Organisations and *evaluates* its effectiveness. She expresses her *feelings* of dissatisfaction with students limited critical thinking skills and identifies the need to develop this skill further. Balqis critically *analyses* the reasons behind the students' difficulties and *concludes* that despite challenges, the lessons was successful in promoting critical thinking. She *plans* to continue using the same approach in future lessons, but rather "depending on the text given in the social studies textbook", she aims to encourage students engage in "discussions and thought processes" (Balqis, reflection 2). This aligns with literature on reflective practice, which

emphasises its role in promoting deep thinking about teaching methods and enhancing pedagogical understanding (Hattie, 2008).

Reflective practice, Schön (1983) noted, involves the deliberate analysis of one's teaching experiences to gain deeper insights into instructional methods. The findings from the interviews echo Schon's sentiments and shed light on the advantages of reflective practice within the domain of teacher-student interactions. A pivotal benefit derived from reflective practice is the enhanced understanding of students' needs. This resonated with Dewey's (1933) notion that reflection is a process of active, persistent, and careful consideration. Nora's emphasis on using reflection to adapt teaching methods to students' understanding aligns with Dewey's conceptualisation. Personalised instruction, a significant outcome of reflective practice, aligns with the principles of differentiated teaching (Moon, 2013). Balqis' recognition of the need for diversified questioning techniques echoes Moon's advocacy for tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. This alignment highlights reflective practice as a catalyst for fostering inclusive pedagogy. Malak highlighted that reflection plays a crucial role in enhancing student learning, particularly for diverse learners and believes that reflection prompted a teacher to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate various learning styles. In the findings, Balqis acknowledged the prevalence of rote learning among students, which she associated with their emphasis on test preparation and their limited opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. Her observations highlight a pressing concern in social studies education regarding the ways assessment pressures can shape student learning habits. This observation highlights the importance of fostering critical thinking skills among students, which is a central goal of social studies curriculum. As teachers address this issue, theoretical frameworks such as Bloom's Taxonomy and social inquiry can be useful.

Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) provides a hierarchical structure for understanding cognitive processes, ranging from lower-order thinking skills (such as remembering and understanding) to higher-order thinking skills (such as analysing, evaluating, and creating). The emphasis on rote learning, noted by Balqis in her interview, often prioritises lower-order thinking skills, such as remembering and understanding, at the expense of higher-order thinking skills, such as analysing, evaluating, and creating.

Balqis' observation about the reduction in the quality of learning over time aligns with the idea that an overemphasis on rote-learning methods may contribute to a decline in the application of higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Liu et al., 2022). Liu et al. (2022), who researched on the importance of cultivating higher-order thinking skills among students, further emphasised that "textbooks were filled with facts that students were expected to memorise and most tests assessed students' ability to remember these facts" (p.636). This aligns seamlessly with the all four participants' responses on how social studies teaching and learning is mainly expected students to prepare for tests, which reveals a traditional approach to teaching and assessment.

Nonetheless, the participants' engagement in reflective practice signifies a shift to a more student-centred and dynamic pedagogical approach in social studies education. The improvement in classroom management through enhanced teacher-student interactions resonates with the work of Marzano (2003), who posited that effective classroom management is essential for creating an environment conducive to learning. Hattie (2008) added another layer to this understanding, emphasising that reflective practice plays a crucial role in helping teachers build the necessary skills and competencies to effectively deliver the social studies curriculum. Hattie's (2008) research supports the notion that reflective practice can significantly impact teacher performance, leading to improved instruction, stronger teacher-student relationships, and greater professional growth. Sarah's strategic adjustments to manage time constraints showcase how reflective practice contributed to dynamic and responsive classroom management. This aligns with Marzano's emphasis on the importance of effective classroom management, as reflective practice contributes to the continuous improvement of teaching strategies, ultimately enhancing outcomes for students (Hattie, 2008; Marzano, 2003).

Similarly, in online classrooms, teachers navigated the challenges of virtual instruction by exploring innovative teaching methods and leveraging technology to enhance student learning and engagement. Through self-reflection and peer collaboration, Nora and Balqis adapted their teaching strategies to suit the online learning environment that came about due to the COVID-19 pandemic; they both incorporated

multimedia resources and interactive activities to maintain student interest and participation. This fostered dynamic connections in the classroom and promoted student engagement and understanding. Their experiences highlight the pivotal role of reflective practices in facilitating the transition to online learning and promotes student-centred approaches in virtual classrooms. As highlighted in the literature, reflective practice enables teachers to critically examine their assumptions, beliefs, and practices, leading to an enhanced understanding of their pedagogy (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). Additionally, the reflective practices observed among teachers resonate with the principles of the action reflection spiral, as proposed by McNiff and Whitehead (2011). This model emphasises the iterative process of inquiry, reflection, and action, enabling teachers to individually investigate and address issues in their practice. The data demonstrated that by integrating action reflection principles into their reflective practices, teachers were able to enhance their social studies pedagogy in terms of their teaching strategies, thus improving their teacher-student engagement in the classroom for future social studies lessons. However, through data analysis, it became evident that the extent to which teachers can enhance their social studies pedagogy through reflection is closely tied to their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of social studies. This highlights the importance of targeted and specialised professional learning opportunities in social studies education for teachers.

The findings indicate that reflective practice can play a pivotal role in shaping teachers' social studies pedagogy, enabling them to tailor instruction to individual student needs, adapt to changing educational landscape, and foster continuous professional learning growth. However, the limitation that surfaced with reflective practice was that teachers need to actively cultivate their PCK of social studies education to fully capitalise on its benefits. Without a solid understanding of the subject matter and its pedagogy, reflective practice alone may not be sufficient driver to significant improvements in social studies pedagogy. Therefore, alongside reflective practices, ongoing professional learning and development opportunities that specifically target the enhancement of teachers' PCK in social studies are imperative for sustained growth and effectiveness in the classroom. In spite of that proviso, by engaging in reflective practice, teachers were able to reflect on creating stimulating and inclusive learning environments that prepare students for the challenges of the modern world. Through

self-evaluation of teaching strategies, teachers refine their approaches, embrace innovation, and pursue continuous professional growth opportunities.

7.3.2 Teachers' Benefits of Using Reflective Practice

Finally, addressing the fourth sub-question of this research, *what benefits do teachers gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy?*, reflective practice serves as an enhancement tool for professional growth and development, offering teachers opportunities to critically evaluate their teaching methods, refine their approaches, and enhance student learning outcomes. The fourth sub-question highlights the importance and benefits that the participants observed towards their social studies pedagogy through reflective practice. These reflections align with social constructivist theory, which asserts that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and reflective processes, and, in turn, allows teachers to refine their teaching approaches.

In this study, the investigation of the participants' engagement in reflective practice within social studies pedagogy elucidates its pivotal role in fostering professional growth and enhancing teaching effectiveness. The participants' collective voice underscores a critical issue, the dearth of subject-specific professional learning opportunities tailored to the unique demands of social studies teaching. As Sarah noted, the prevailing professional learning sessions in school tend to encompass broad teaching strategies applicable across subjects and neglect the specialised needs for teaching social studies. This sentiment aligns with the broader educational discourse emphasising the necessity of social studies subject-specific professional learning. The literature on professional learning aligns with the participants' experiences, highlighting the importance of tailored and subject-specific training. Darling-Hammond (2017) argued that effective professional learning should be coherent, content-focused, and context-specific. The absence of specialised professional learning sessions for teaching social studies, as emphasised by Balqis, represents a missed opportunity for target strategies, resources, and discussion relevant to the intricacies of the field. The significance of subject-specific training is

further accentuated by studies such as Ingersoll and Strong (2011), who argued that teacher professional learning should be designed to address the specific challenges and content knowledge required in a particular subject area.

The statistical data from the Qualtrics questionnaire reaffirms the prevalence of a generalist approach to professional learning, with a higher frequency of face-to-face workshops for social studies (Table 5.2, see p. 213). This trend aligns with the global discourse on professional learning, indicating a need for a shift toward subject-specific training (Guskey, 2003). The lack of structured professional learning sessions for teaching social studies, as highlighted by Nora, not only raises concerns about the neglect of subject-specific expertise but also underscores a potential gap in the overall professional learning approach. The participants' highlighted a reliance on informal sharing amongst themselves within their respective school settings, to address teaching strategies and content accuracy further emphasises the need for a more organised and formalised professional learning approach. Although, informal sharing among teachers can be valuable for exchanging practical strategies and experiences, it may not always provide teachers with the depth of knowledge and insight that formalised professional learning opportunities can offer. Formalised professional learning often involves structured sessions led by experts or facilitated discussions that are informed by educational theories such as social Inquiry-based or collaborative learning theories, latest research findings, and evidence-based practices. Darling-Hammond (2017) emphasised that collaborative learning environments and sustained, coherent professional learning development opportunities are essential for teacher learning. Formal opportunities allow teachers to explore deeper into pedagogical theories, critically analyse research, and explore innovative teaching methods that may not be readily accessible through informal sharing alone. The participants' reflective practices resonate with socio-cultural theory, which highlights how teachers' learning is shaped by their interactions within their communities and cultural contexts of their teaching practices.

Furthermore, the insights provided by Balqis and Sarah on the need for dedicated professional learning sessions for teachers engaged in social studies, as well as collaborative platforms with neighbouring schools, resonate with the literature

advocating for structure and collaborative approaches to professional learning. Hence, formal professional learning sessions can provide a platform for teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry, where they collectively investigate teaching challenges, experiment with new approaches, and reflect on their practice in a supportive and intellectually stimulating environment. Therefore, the participants' recognition of the lack of professional learning opportunities echoes broader concerns about the need for targeted professional development in specific subject areas (Wei et al., 2009). The integration of reflective practice with the adaptation to evolving learning trends, especially during the pandemic, corresponds with literature emphasising the role of teachers as lifelong learners (Sachs, 2003). The participants' experiences align with the literature on the use of reflective practice for navigating education challenges and leveraging in teaching (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2004).

The participants' experiences of adapting their communication styles and support mechanisms demonstrate the impactful role of reflective practice on relational dynamics. In essence, the benefits outlined by the participants suggest reflective practice's potency in shaping meaningful teacher-student interactions, aligning with established education principles, and enriching the social studies pedagogical landscape. The benefits derived from self-evaluation of teaching strategies are well supported by the literature on reflective teaching (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). The process of identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement aligns with the broader discourse on teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Balqis' advocacy for collaborative discussions and peer observation resonates with literature emphasising the importance of a supportive professional learning community (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Vermunt, 2014). There is an opportunity for schools to promote a collaborative culture for their teachers who teach social studies in order to develop their scholarly teaching skills. Such a collaborative culture can be established by offering opportunities for the teachers to be involved in on-going professional learning, during in which they can develop their thinking and reflect on their teaching. These opportunities would enable them to develop an evidence-based and informed practice to improve their teaching roles. However, all four participants noted that social studies teachers in Maldivian schools, including themselves, had limited opportunities to engage in ongoing professional

development programmes that support collaboration and professional learning. Instead, in-service PL is typically limited to short, intensive blocks of minimum 15 hours annually, often delivered in lecture style workshops with limited collaboration and reflection (Mohamed et al., 2018). These sessions, disconnected from classroom realities, fail to support the type of learning envisioned by the curriculum, leading to disengagement (Di Biase, 2015; Naseer, 2018; Shiyama, 2020).

In examining the participants' social studies pedagogy, it is essential to consider the alignment with established pedagogical frameworks such as the five dimensions of pedagogy outlined in the NCF and Aitken and Sinnema (2008) Aotearoa New Zealand model of evidence-formed pedagogy (see Figure 3.3, see p. 78). Firstly, the NCF delineates five key dimensions of effective pedagogy (see Figure 3.4, see p. 79) which provide a framework for teachers to aspire to achieve in their teaching practice. However, it was evident from my observations in this study that the participants exhibited limited familiarity with the pedagogies recommended in the NCF. Instead, their focus appeared to be more on the school syllabus and school schemes of work. Consequently, none of the participants explicitly referenced these pedagogical dimensions in their discussions or reflections on their teaching practices. Nonetheless, despite the limited familiarity with the NCF, teachers engaged in reflective practices through their reflective narrative texts and interviews.

From my observations, these reflective exercises allowed the participants to investigate their cognitive processes, which aligns with the social constructivism theory of constructing their social studies pedagogical understanding and teaching approaches. Similarly, drawing upon literature on reflection and professional learning, the Timperley model (2011) of professional inquiry posts a cyclic process which emphasises the iterative nature of reflection, whereby teachers engage in ongoing cycles of inquiry and action to enhance their teaching practices and student learning. While the model offers a structured framework for reflection practices, critics such as Hattie (2008) suggest that while the model provides a useful framework for professional learning, teaching is a complex and situated activity influenced by various contextual factors, and a more flexible and adaptive approach to reflection may be necessary to address the diverse needs of students and teachers. By examining their

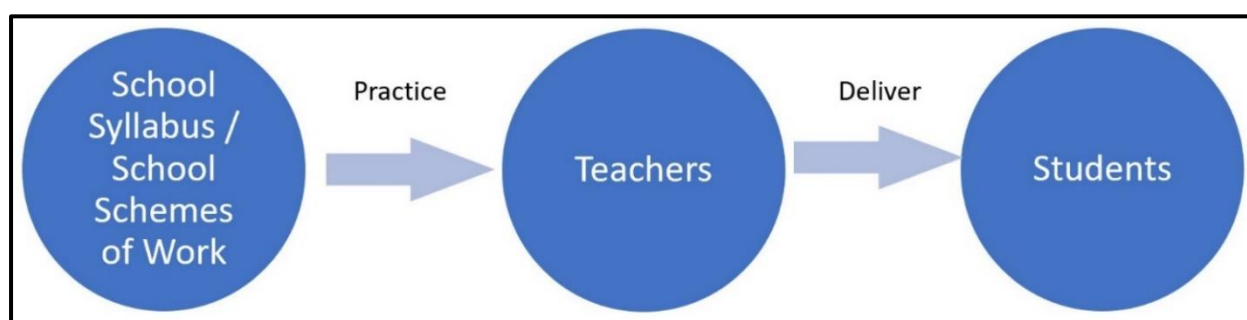
past teaching experiences and critically self-evaluating their effectiveness, teachers sought to inform and improve their future social studies teaching practices. Through this reflective approach, they aimed to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical application in the classroom, ultimately enhancing the quality of their pedagogy.

In synthesising the findings observed in my study, it becomes apparent that reflective practice holds significant potential as a dynamic and essential element of effective social studies pedagogy for teachers. However, it is evident that reflective practice may not be widely embraced among Maldivian primary teachers (Mohamed et al., 2018; Moosa, 2018). Although Balqis did highlight her active engagement in reflective practices, either individually or in collaboration with her colleagues. Nevertheless, the culture of reflection appears to be underemphasised and underutilised within the Maldivian primary schools (Nasheeda et al., 2024), leaving teachers to their professional development largely on their own, especially in implementing the intended social studies curriculum.

The prevailing understanding of the Maldivian NCF suggests a predominantly linear pedagogy approach to curriculum delivery, as depicted in Figure 7.1 below.

Figure 7.1

Linear approach to Curriculum Delivery in Pedagogy: Insights from Research Findings



In this model, teachers often adhere to predetermined sequence of topics and activities given in the school syllabus and school scheme of work, limiting opportunities for reflection and adaptation based on student needs and feedback. Consequently, this rigid approach may compromise the effectiveness of the learning experience for

students. Furthermore, the linear nature of this approach may hinder the integration of new ideas and or modifications to pedagogical methods ultimately impeding innovation and professional learning growth in teaching practices. Additionally, the constraints imposed by the linear pedagogy approach, limited allocated time and resources, further exacerbate the prevalence of rote learning. When teachers are bound by a predetermined sequence of topics and activities dictated by the school syllabus and school schemes of work, they may feel compelled to focus on covering content quickly rather than facilitating meaningful engagement and understanding. This notion as suggested by all four participants in the study due to this time constraint leads to a sense of urgency to move through the material quickly, leaving little room for deeper exploration, discussion, and learning experiences. This can lead to a classroom environment where rote learning is prioritised as a means to ensure students meet curriculum requirements and perform well on exams. In the discussions about the participants' teaching practices, it became evident that some teachers focused primarily on content delivery, sometimes overlooking the fundamental principles underlying social studies. When this occurs, students' understanding and appreciation of the subject can be compromised (Duschl, 2000). This observation aligns with the findings of this study where Malak noted how her students struggled to understand the significance of studying social studies. As a result, students might miss out on developing critical thinking skills and the ability to engage with the subject's broader, more meaningful objectives.

In the context of social studies education, where the curriculum is interdisciplinary and aims to foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and cultural appreciation, the need for understanding is particularly crucial. However, when teachers due to time constraints feel pressured to rush through content to meet curriculum requirements or prepare students for exams, the quality of learning experiences may be compromised. Students may be left with superficial understanding of concepts, and lack the opportunity to explore deeply into topics, connect them to real-world contexts, or engage in meaningful discussions and inquiry. This is where reflective practice become indispensable. By engaging in reflective practice, participants in this research demonstrated adaptability and a commitment to continuous improvement. This increased adaptability enabled teachers to make more informed decisions about

spacing, prioritise key concept, and integrate flexible strategies that better align with both curriculum goals and student needs, helping to alleviate time pressures without compromising depth of learning. This study demonstrates how reflective practice aligns with social reconstructionist theory, positioning social studies education as a powerful tool for fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, civic engagement, and social responsibility. The participants' reflections highlight the importance of purposeful teaching strategies that aim not just to deliver content, but to empower students to understand and act on real-world social issues.

7.4 Conclusions

The purpose of the OPAR was to investigate the dynamics of social studies education in the Maldives, focusing on teachers' perspectives and their implementation of the Maldives NCF through reflective practice. Through an exploration of teachers' views on the intrinsic value of social studies, the research indicates a perceived lack of opportunities for teachers to provide meaningful feedback on curriculum content and direction, thus posing a risk to the social studies curriculum's responsiveness to evolving educational needs and societal changes.

At the heart of this research is a deep concern for preserving and sustaining Maldivian cultural heritage and identity, particularly in the face of globalisation, tourism and environmental challenges. This study illustrates the potential of social studies as a powerful tool, whereby teachers guide students in developing an understanding of their cultural roots, national identity, and the interconnections between society and the environment, though this potential is not yet fully realised in practice. As the Maldives undergoes rapid changes, maintaining a balance between development and cultural preservation becomes increasingly important. Social studies enables students to recognize the importance of sustaining traditional knowledge, protecting natural resources, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility for their heritage.

Ultimately, this study highlights that the effectiveness of social studies education can be influenced by teachers' ability to activate and shape their pedagogy through

reflection. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that students understand and engage with their culture, language, society, history, and environment. However, for social studies to fulfil its potential as a vehicle for cultural and environmental sustainability, teachers must have a strong pedagogical content knowledge to support and deepen their understanding of social studies pedagogy. In this context, reflective practice becomes a vital tool, helping teachers critically assess their teaching methods, refine their instructional strategies, and create meaningful learning experiences that equip students with the knowledge and skills to sustain Maldivian culture and identity.

A conclusion to each of my four sub-sections (7.4.1, 7.4.2, 7.4.3, 7.4.4) of this research is summarised below.

7.4.1 RQ 1. What understandings do teachers have of social studies as conceptualised in the Maldives NCF?

In exploring teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning in social studies within the context of the Maldives NCF, it is evident that there exists a spectrum of interpretations among educators. While the curriculum outlines comprehensive objectives, ranging from historical exploration to citizenship education, teachers' understandings varied in depth and alignment. While some educators grasped the multidisciplinary nature of social studies, others focused on broader concepts like environmental awareness and community values. Acknowledging these differences, the study underscores the need for a deeper understanding and engagement with the subject matter beyond the surface-level interpretations outlined in the curriculum. Addressing this gap in understanding and internalisation could significantly enhance social studies instruction and student learning experiences in the Maldives. This entails exploring local narratives, historical events, and societal dynamics that shape the Maldivian identity. By exploring into these aspects, teachers can tailor their social studies pedagogy to be more relevant and meaningful to students, which can lead to a deeper connection and appreciation for their own heritage and societal context. Such an approach not only enriches social studies instruction but also empowers students to become active participants in shaping the future of their communities and nation.

7.4.2 RQ 2. What challenges and limitations do teachers face in social studies professional learning in a Maldivian context?

The exploration into challenges and limitations faced by teachers in social studies professional learning suggests a multifaceted landscape shaped by constraints such as limited resources, time restrictions, and inadequate professional learning opportunities. These obstacles may hinder effective pedagogy and curriculum delivery within the Maldives. Despite recognising the significance of continuous professional learning, teachers expressed frustration over the lack of targeted social studies professional learning, training and support in enhancing their pedagogical practices within the realm of social studies. Additionally, systematic challenges within the educational ecosystem, including bureaucratic constraints restricts teachers' autonomy and creativity in shaping their pedagogical approaches. Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that prioritises targeted professional learning and development, curriculum alignment and systematic changes to support teachers in delivering quality social studies education.

7.4.3 RQ 3. How does teacher reflective practice shape social studies pedagogy for student learning?

The investigation into how teachers perceive their reflective practice shapes social studies pedagogy for student learning demonstrates the dynamic and pivotal role of reflective practice can play in the pedagogical landscape. Through reflective processes such as self-evaluation and critical analysis, teachers can deepen their understanding of effective teaching strategies and tailor their approaches to meet the diverse needs of students. The findings underscore the significance of reflective practice in enhancing teaching effectiveness, fostering student engagement, and promoting continuous professional growth. Ultimately, reflective practice can serve as a catalyst for teachers to create a stimulating and inclusive learning environment that prepares students for the challenges of the modern world.

7.4.4 RQ 4. What benefits do teachers gain through their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy?

Exploring the benefits that teachers perceive from their use of reflective practice in social studies pedagogy sheds light on its profound impact on professional growth and development. Participants highlighted the need for subject-specific professional learning opportunities tailored to the unique demands of social studies learning, emphasising the importance of collaborative learning environments, and sustained professional learning development opportunities. Reflective practice served as a tool for enhancing teacher effectiveness, fostering meaningful teacher-student interactions, and aligning with established pedagogical frameworks.

However, it is important to consider whether reflective practice is feasible in the Maldivian context. The study suggests that while reflective practice offers significant benefits, the current educational environment in the Maldives may present challenges including limited access to specialised social studies professional learning and development opportunities, time constraints, and structural barriers. To fully realise the potential of reflective practice, changes would be needed at both policy and school levels. This could include the establishment of dedicated spaces for reflection, increased support for ongoing PLD, and a shift towards more collaborative teaching practices. Addressing these challenges could help integrate reflective practice into the Maldivian education system, ensuring it contributes effectively to the professional development of teachers and the quality of social studies education.

In essence, this research provides insights that can inform policy and practice, steering the trajectory of social studies education in the Maldives towards greater excellence and relevance in the ever-evolving educational landscape.

7.5 Limitations of this Study

I acknowledge several significant limitations in the conduct of this research.

Firstly, the shift to online data collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic and border closures introduced unforeseen challenges. The pandemic-induced isolation faced by participants and their loved ones affected their focus and engagement with the research activities. The time zone difference of 8 hours between Maldives and New Zealand posed difficulties in scheduling and conducting online workshops and interviews. Participants' unfamiliarity with platforms like Qualtrics and Zoom, compounded by variable internet connections, initially hindered the smooth execution of the workshops. The limitation of online interaction also impacted the establishment of a robust rapport with participants, despite efforts to provide unplanned support and create engaging activities for online classrooms.

Secondly, the selection of participants was contingent upon school leaders, and the sample size ultimately relied on the cooperation of these leaders. While the initial recruitment involved 10 teachers from six schools, only four participants from four different schools completed the entire data collection process. This limited sample size raises concerns about the transferability of the study's findings. The current study faced limitations due to unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled the research activities to transition to an online format. Conducting future research with an in-person, on-the-ground approach would undoubtedly bring several advantages. Direct observation of classrooms and in-person interactions would offer a more immersive understanding of the teaching and learning environment. Researchers could capture attitudes, non-verbal cues, and contextual factors that might be missing in an online setting. Moreover, in-person observations would enable a more personalised and engaging interaction with participants, fostering a stronger rapport and trust. This, in turn, could lead to more candid responses and a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, on-site visits would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the local context, allowing researchers to appreciate the unique challenges and opportunities that specific schools and regions may present. While online research provides a pragmatic solution

during challenging times, future endeavours could consider a blended approach, combining both online and in-person methodologies. This hybrid approach would harness the benefits of direct observation while still leveraging the efficiency and accessibility offered by online platforms.

Thirdly, the research is bounded by the inherent challenges of examining a complex educational context within a specific timeframe. The dynamic nature of social studies education in the Maldives introduces an ever-evolving landscape, and this study captured only a snapshot of this ongoing process. In the context of the Maldives NCF and prevailing educational practices, it is evident that social studies undergoes continual evolution, reflecting changes in societal needs, educational goals, and pedagogical approaches. Therefore, while this study offers valuable insights into current practices and perspectives, it recognises that the landscape of social studies education in the Maldives is subject to continuous transformation beyond the scope of this research endeavour. Additionally, the study relies on participants' self-reported data, subject to potential biases and variations in interpretation. The qualitative nature of the research emphasises depth over breadth, limiting its scope. These inherent constraints underscore the need for future longitudinal studies and a more extensive exploration of diverse perspectives within Maldivian social studies education.

Fourthly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and teachers added an unforeseen layer of complexity to the study. The challenges faced by educational institutions prompted the Maldives Ministry of Education to adopt a new academic calendar, shifting the end-of-year holiday to the first term. The new calendar starts the first term from August to November with a term break in December, and the second term from January to June with an end-of-year holiday in July. This adjustment was a response to the difficulties encountered during the pandemic, where the traditional academic schedule was disrupted due to the unfamiliarity and challenges associated with online teaching. Consequently, this change in the academic calendar influenced the timeframe of the study, which affected the participants' availability and potentially influencing their perspectives on social studies education in a period of adaptation and adjustment.

Fifthly, the methodology used in the study encountered several limitations, including challenges related to data collection and participant selection. The shift to online data collection amid the COVID-19 pandemic presented unforeseen obstacles, such as participants' struggles with focus and engagement due to pandemic-induced isolation. Moreover, logistic issues like 8-hour time zone difference between Maldives and New Zealand posed scheduling difficulties for online workshops and interviews. Participants' unfamiliarity with digital platforms and variable internet connectivity further complicated data collection efforts. Additionally, the study's reliance on school leaders for participant recruitment in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a limited sample size, which raises concerns about the generalisability of findings. Moreover, the study encountered limitations related to the participants' limited understanding of the subject, social inquiry processes, learning theories and the Maldives NCF, which may have hindered their ability to fully engage in reflective practice into improve their social studies pedagogy. This lack of deep understanding of social studies education and the NCF posed constraints on the extent to which reflective practice could enhance teaching strategies and teachers' social studies pedagogy. Therefore, while reflective practice was intended to foster improvements in social studies pedagogy by enhancing teachers' knowledge and understanding, the limited awareness of the subject matter among participants may have impeded the true effectiveness of this process. Moreover, the research's qualitative nature and reliance on self-reported data introduce potential biases and limitations in interpretation, emphasising the need for future longitudinal studies to address these constraints and provide a more comprehensive understanding of social studies education in the Maldives.

The study's temporal constraints and qualitative approach offer a snapshot rather than a comprehensive understanding of the continually evolving social studies landscape in the Maldives. These limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretations and suggest avenues for future research, including longitudinal studies and a broader exploration of diverse perspectives within the Maldivian social studies education context.

7.6 Contribution of this Study

This study makes a significant contribution in the Maldives to the field of social studies education, and teacher reflective practice. Within the Maldivian context, it provides insights into how primary teachers navigate social studies pedagogy balancing national curriculum requirements within their own instructional experiences. These findings highlight the importance of subject-specific professional learning and emphasises the role of reflective practice as a means of pedagogical growth.

In the broader field of social studies education in the Maldives, this research adds discussions on teacher agency, curriculum interpretation and enactment, and the challenges of implementing inquiry and student-centred learning approaches. By examining teachers' reflections, this research suggests the potential of critical reflection as a tool for PLD and instructional decision-making. A potential contribution of this study lies in its use of online action research as a model for teacher development, particularly in bridging the gap between theory and classroom practice. Through reflection, teachers were able to experiment with and refine their pedagogical approaches. This research highlights how participatory, inquiry-driven learning fosters teacher agency, confidence-building, and ownership of professional growth. It reinforces that reflection is not just a retrospective process but an active, ongoing mechanism for pedagogical transformation. However, given the study's limitations, particularly the short-term engagement with reflective practice, further cycles of action research could provide deeper insights into how teachers sustain reflection over time. Establishing school-based professional social studies professional learning could perhaps offer teachers a structured yet adaptable space to continue engaging in reflection while addressing practical constraints such as time and workload.

These contributions offer valuable implications for policymakers, teacher educators, and practitioners seeking to enhance the effectiveness of social studies education in the Maldives. Recognising the role of reflective and action research-driven teacher learning can inform future PLD models, ensuring teachers are active participants in shaping their pedagogical practices.

7.7 Implications

The findings of this study present several implications for social studies education in the Maldives. Firstly, the findings demonstrate the critical need for a more collaborative and iterative approach between curriculum developers and teachers, emphasising the importance of ongoing communication channels. Secondly, the identified challenges in the implementation of the Maldives National Curriculum Framework (NCF) suggest a demand for targeted professional development, particularly subject-specific training for teachers of social studies. The study highlights the role and responsibility of teachers in translating the objectives outlined in the curriculum into meaningful learning experiences for students. While the curriculum already advocates for inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and active citizenship, teachers require support in effectively implementing these in the classroom. Hence, this necessitates targeted professional learning initiatives aimed at enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge in social studies education. Reflective practice emerges as a vital tool in this regard, enabling teachers to evaluate their instructional methods, address diverse needs of students, and continually refine their teaching approaches to align with the goals of the curriculum. By empowering teachers with the necessary support and resources, education stakeholders can ensure that curriculum objectives are realised, to ultimately benefit students' learning experiences and outcomes. Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, as evidenced by changes in the academic calendar and the shift to online teaching, emphasizes the necessity of adaptability and resilience in the face of unforeseen challenges.

7.7.1 Implications for the Maldives' Ministry of Education

There are various implications for the Ministry of Education (MoE) and curriculum developers. Firstly, there is a need to prioritise the integration of reflective practice into teacher training programs and ongoing professional learning and development initiatives. Providing teachers with the necessary skills and opportunities to engage in reflective practice enhance their teaching effectiveness and promote continuous improvement in social studies pedagogy. Secondly, curriculum developers should

consider the diverse needs and contexts of schools across the Maldives, including those in the outer atolls. This entails developing curriculum materials and resources that are flexible, adaptable, and relevant to the unique circumstances of different regions. By taking into account factors such as limited allocated time and resources, curriculum developers can ensure that the curriculum is more responsive to the needs of all students and teachers.

These obstacles faced by teachers in the Maldives are critical factors that should be acknowledged and addressed in any discussion about enhancing teachers' social studies pedagogy. The constraints, as stated above, impact teachers' ability to effectively implement reflective practices and develop contextually relevant resources. Reflective practice is crucial for Maldives teachers in-service specifically due to the unique socio-cultural context and educational landscape of the Maldives. Drawing upon socio-cultural theories such as Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and social constructivism, it is evident that learning is deeply influenced by social interactions and cultural contexts. In the Maldivian context, where cultural heritage holds significant importance, integrating reflective practice into teachers' social studies pedagogy allows teachers to contextualise their teaching within students' cultural backgrounds. Moreover, this emphasis on reflective practice aligns with the goals of social studies education in the Maldives, which aims to nurture responsible citizenship and promote cultural preservation. This, in turn, further contributes to the holistic development of students' as informed and active citizens of the society, capable of addressing local and global challenges while preserving their beliefs, traditions, and cultural heritage.

Additionally, there is a need to rethink the linear approach to curriculum delivery and move towards a more flexible and student-centred pedagogical approach. Embracing a student-centred approach aligns with the goals of social studies education which seeks to develop critical thinking skills, promote cultural understanding, and foster active citizenship. By giving teachers both autonomy and support allows them to tailor their teaching methods and resources; this means students can engage more deeply with the material and connect it to their own experiences and cultural contexts. This process reflects the principles of Dewey's (1963) social inquiry. Dewey emphasised the importance of active learning, where students can engage in meaningful

investigations of real-world problems. By adopting a more student-centred approach to curriculum delivery, teachers can create opportunities for students to explore topics of personal relevance, inquire into social and environmental issues towards sustainability, and collaborate with peers to develop solutions. This social inquiry into preserving and sustaining the Maldives' past and present for the future generations is significant because "we need to change our social and economic systems to reduce our demands on nature, and we need to actively realise that we cannot replace the ecosystem services that nature provides" (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 2). By integrating social inquiry learning experiences focused on sustainability and environmental stewardship into teachers' social studies pedagogy, teachers can inspire students to become proactive citizens of change in shaping a more sustainable future for the Maldives.

Curriculum developers can play a key role in facilitating this shift from a linear approach to student-centred pedagogical approach by providing teachers with subject-specialised social studies professional learning opportunities. By prioritising inquiry-based teaching, critical thinking, and cultural relevance, teachers can cultivate a generation of students who are not just passive learners but active participants in their own education. This shift aligns with broader goals of social studies education in the Maldives NCF, which include fostering critical thinking skills, promoting cultural understanding, and nurturing active citizenship. Ultimately, the aim is to empower students to become informed citizens who can contribute meaningfully to the Maldives society. Curriculum developers can facilitate this process by creating platforms for teachers to exchange ideas, resources, and experiences, thereby fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation in the education sector. Teachers can work together to share the best practices, resources, and experiences, so that the professional growth and enhancing the quality of teachers' social studies pedagogy in the Maldives can be enriched. Through collaborative efforts and fostering partnerships among educational stakeholders, including schools, teacher training institutions, and government agencies, the quality of teachers' social studies pedagogy will be enhanced. Such efforts will enrich both the teaching profession and the educational experience for students across the Maldives. The result will reinforce the overarching aim of preparing students for life (NIE, 2015a); that is, being able to navigate the complexities of the

evolving world, equipped with the knowledge, skills, values necessary for responsible citizenship and lifelong learning.

Overall, the implications for Ministry of Education Curriculum in the Maldives are importance of prioritising teacher professional learning and development, tailoring curriculum materials to diverse context, promoting student-centred pedagogy, and fostering collaboration among educational stakeholders. By addressing these areas, curriculum developers can contribute to the ongoing improvement of social studies education and ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes across the Maldives.

7.7.2 Implication for Teacher Education

The implications for teacher education derived from this study showcase the imperative for specialised training programs targeted at social studies teachers in primary schools. The significance of specialised training programs, such as social studies professional development sessions, in primary schools lies in their ability to deepen teachers' understanding of social studies pedagogy and relevant theoretical frameworks. By providing focused professional learning and development (PLD), teachers can explore learning theories such as socio-cultural, social constructivist, and social reconstructionist theories, which are foundational to understanding and further enhancing teachers' social studies pedagogy. Through specialised coursework and practical experiences in PLD, teachers can gain insights into how these theories inform pedagogical practices, curriculum development, students engagement strategies in the context of social studies education. Specialised social studies PLD programs enable teachers to explore student-centred teaching approaches such as inquiry-based and collaborative teaching approaches, which can enhance their understanding and implementation of pedagogy in their social studies lessons. By understanding and implementing these pedagogical approaches, teachers can create dynamic learning environments where students can develop essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication skills, and civic engagement, which are integral to social studies education.

In addition, to enhancing teachers' understanding of theoretical frameworks and pedagogical approaches, social studies specialised PLD offers opportunities for teachers to develop reflective practices. Through guided reflection exercises, collaborative discussions, and mentorship opportunities, teachers can better understand their role as a teacher, gain insights into students' engagement, and deepen their understanding of their social studies pedagogy and its impact on student learning. By engaging in reflective practice, teachers can critically examine their instructional decisions, assess the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, identify areas for growth, and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. This reflective approach to PLD fosters a culture of continuous improvement and empowers teachers to make informed adjustments to their social studies pedagogy. Furthermore, specialised PLD programs can contribute to enhancing teachers' confidence and competence in delivering comprehensive social studies instruction. Through targeted PLD, teachers can gain practical strategies for addressing diverse student needs, integrating technology effectively, and promoting cultural relevance in their teaching. Ultimately, investing in social studies specialised PLD for teachers in primary school is essential for preparing teachers with the knowledge, skills, and pedagogical strategies to meet the evolving needs of students and society.

Presently, the Maldives National University and faculties responsible for teacher education should recognise the unique demands of social studies pedagogy and incorporate subject-focused training models into their curriculum. As a social studies teacher educator working in a university setting, I would take a proactive step to address the identified need for specialised training programs for social studies teachers in primary schools. This could involve collaborating with the Maldives National University and other relevant institutions to develop and implement targeted professional development courses specifically tailored to enhancing social studies pedagogy. Additionally, I would leverage my expertise and experience to contribute to the design and delivery of these training programs, ensuring they are effective in meeting the unique demands of social studies education in the Maldives. By taking an active role in teacher education and professional development, I could contribute positively to the enhancement of social studies pedagogy and student learning outcomes in primary schools. This helps aspiring teachers receive comprehensive and

subject-specific preparation, which would equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of social studies education in primary settings. Moreover, professional development opportunities should be designed to address the specific challenges and content knowledge required in the social studies domain, such as enhancing teachers' targeted subject-specific pedagogy, deepening their content knowledge, and fostering critical thinking skills in social studies education. This emphasis on subject-focused education with global best practices is highlighted by scholars like Ingersoll and Strong (2011). By tailoring teacher education to the distinct needs of social studies instruction, educational institutions can contribute significantly to the enhancement of teaching quality and student learning outcomes in this critical subject area. Additionally, ongoing collaboration between teacher education institutions and practicing teachers can foster a dynamic feedback loop, ensuring that teacher education programs remain responsive to the evolving landscape of social studies education.

7.7.3 Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study highlight the need for further research endeavours that extend beyond the confines of government schools in Male'. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of social studies education across the diverse islands of the Maldives, future research should encompass schools from various geographical areas, including those in the outer atolls. The inclusion of schools from diverse geographical areas in the Maldives, including outer atolls, is crucial to capturing the full spectrum of challenges, resources, and teaching practices in Maldivian social studies education. These schools may face unique circumstances such as limited access to resources, cultural differences, and varying student demographics, which can significantly impact pedagogical approaches and educational outcomes. This expansion in scope should facilitate a more holistic exploration of the contextual factors influencing social studies pedagogy, allowing the researcher to capture the subtle variations that may exist in different regions.

Additionally, while this study provides valuable insights into the teachers' perspectives and practices, a crucial avenue for further research involves conducting a detailed content analysis of social studies materials. By scrutinising the content of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 social studies textbooks, workbooks, and teacher guides, researchers could provide insights into the curriculum. This in-depth analysis can shed light on the alignment between curriculum intentions and classroom implementation and provide a richer understanding of the educational materials that shapes students' social studies learning. These insights offer valuable recommendations for curriculum developers so they can refine and enhance content, thus ensuring better alignment with pedagogical goals and student learning needs.

In conclusion, these implications drawn from this study may contribute to the development of the Maldivian social studies education landscape. These implications collectively advocate for an adaptable, content-specific, and continuously evolving education system in the Maldives.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Approved Ethical Consideration granted by the UOW

Te Kura Toi Tangata
Division of Education
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand, 3240

DivEd Ethics Committee
fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz
07 8384500 ext. 7870
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



22/11/2019

Dear Sharuda Saeed

Division of Education Ethics Application Approved FEDU087/19

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled "Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection" was approved by Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee on November 22nd, 2019.

Please be aware that the Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards

Co-chair

Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee

Appendix B - Consent Letter sent to Maldives Ministry of Education

9th September 2020
Minister of Education
Velaanaage 8th Floor
Ameeru Ahmed
Magu Male' Maldives.

Dear Dr. Aishath Ali,

Subject: Approval to undertake doctoral research at four government schools in Male'

I am seeking approval to undertake doctoral research at four government schools in Male'. I am Sharuda Saeed a PhD student studying at The University of Waikato in New Zealand. As part of this research, I would like to invite your school to participate in my project. The Project Title is: *'Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection'*.

Research settings

The proposed study's setting is in the Republic of the Maldives. The School of Education Research Ethics Committee at The University of Waikato has granted ethical approval subject for this research (see Appendix A). The committee requires me to obtain your informed consent to conduct the research. The research will be carried out using teacher participants from the four government schools of the capital, Male', Maldives.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are: a) to engage Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflections; b) to offer an opportunity for the teacher participants to gain an understanding of the impact of using reflective practices to shape their teaching in order to grow as reflective practitioners; c) to understand how teachers conceptualise Social Studies in the context of the Maldives National Curriculum framework (NIE, 2015), and to understand the teachers' current social studies pedagogy.

This study intends to identify the areas needed to inform professional learning for primary teachers who teach Social Studies in K1 -K2 students in Male' schools. The research is expected to contribute to participant teachers' thinking and to help them grow as reflective practitioners. The study also offers opportunities for teachers (who are not participants) to experience their colleagues' stories, their practices and to promote a culture of learning in the school context.

Participants

I am requesting your permission to conduct the study in any four government schools (primary schools) preferably (Imaadhudheen School, Aminiya School, Iskandhar School and Kalaafaanu School). The criteria for selecting participants for the research will be: primary teachers who are working in a government school, and who have taught Social Studies to any level from Key Stage1 (Years 7-9, Grade1 to Grade 3) to Key Stage 2 (Years 10-12, Grades 4 to Grades 6) for more than two years. I will select two teachers from each school; one K1 level teacher and one K2 level teacher. The gender of the teachers does not matter, and teachers who are willing to take part, will be included. The study adopts a qualitative participatory action research (PAR) approach, where participants and I will be working together.

Research procedure

Once approval is granted, I will email letters of request to the school principals including necessary information about my research, and the consent forms for schools and participants. I will then make a request of the principals to share with me the names and email addresses of the interested teachers. After I receive consent from the school principals with the names of the interested teachers and their email addresses, I will send them an email requesting a Zoom meeting at a time convenient for them.

I will arrange a virtual meeting (Zoom/ Google Meet or any other platform) in the second week of October 2020. I will explain my research process and inform them how they will engage in my study. Teachers will be given time for any queries, before agreeing to participate. If teachers agree to participate, consent forms will be sent to them for their signature and to be emailed back to me after the meeting. The consent forms will be written in English Language as English Language is used as a medium of instruction in schools. All information I collect from participants will be used for the research purposes and will be kept confidential. The participants will be invited to review and validate the transcripts of their audio taped interviews and they are free to withdraw from the research any time they choose.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of participating schools and participating teachers will be protected. However, given the small size of the school system of the education community in the Maldives, it may be possible for members of the community to guess the identity of individuals and their schools by the information they provide. This risk needs to be understood by participants, but will be minimised wherever possible, and every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of all participants, although this cannot be guaranteed.

COVID-19 pandemic

I understand the current global pandemic has affected all the sectors and the systems of the country. In the first instance I had intended to conduct the research by physically being present in the Maldives. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic I have chosen an alternative method to carry out this study. Therefore, your full support and cooperation is important for me to complete this study, especially under the current uncertain times.

For your information, **The Table of Proposed Research Timeline** (see Appendix B) is attached with this letter. I will be grateful if you could email me your notice of acceptance before 23rd September 2020. If you have any questions or if you would like to receive further information about the project, please contact Sharuda Saeed.

My Contact Details: Ms. Sharuda Saeed PhD Candidate, or my chief supervisor: Senior Lecturer, Dr. Philippa Hunter, at the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato.

Thanking you

Sincerely,



Sharuda Saeed

(Doctoral student, The University of Waikato, New Zealand)

Appendix C - Approved Consent Letter from Maldives Ministry of Education

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Ministry of Education

Policy Planning and Research Division

Malé, Maldives

To Whom It May Concern

Approval for collecting information from Schools

This is to inform that Ms. Sharuda Saeed, (A058858) who is doing PhD at University of WAIKATO, New Zealand, has the permission to collect information required for her research project from the schools of Maldives.

Research Topic:

"Engaging Maldivian Primary Teachers' Social Studies Pedagogies through Reflection".

Main Objectives:

- To engage Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflections.
- To offer an opportunity for the teacher participants to gain an understanding of the impact of using reflective practices to shape their teaching in order to grow as reflective practitioners.
- To understand how teachers' conceptualise Social Studies in the context of the Maldives National Curriculum framework (NIE, 2016), and to understand the teachers' current social studies pedagogy.

Data Needed:

Online / Phone interview with participants / online questionnaires to be fill by participants, Conduct online workshops, write reflective texts (5 per teacher through Google Drive or Dropbox).

Interviewee/s:

Teachers of schools of Maldives.

Please provide your assistance and support in collecting the information for the research

15 September 2020



Note: - The researcher is allowed to conduct online and phone interviews or questionnaires, face to face interviews and classroom observations are not allowed given the current situation.

- The researcher must obtain prior approval from the school before conducting the research.
- The findings of the research should be shared with the Ministry of Education- statistics@moe.gov.mv

Velaaage, 9th Floor, Ameer Ahmed Magu, Malé 20-096, Maldives
Tel: 332 3261, 332 3262 Fax: 332 1201

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ފޯން: 332 3261, 332 3262 ފެކްސް: 332 1201

Appendix D - Consent Letters sent to Schools

Consent to participate in Research – Schools

Research Title: *Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection.*

I have been given information about the research by Sharuda Saeed and have understood the purpose of this research project. I had the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher by email for clarification and received responses to my satisfaction. I understand that a teacher can withdraw from the research any time they choose. I understand that if a teacher withdraws from this project, any data that is provided will be destroyed by Sharuda Saeed and will not be used for this research or any other purpose.

I understand that any information provided by teachers of this school will be kept confidential within the group, the researcher, and her supervisors. I understand that the information provided will be used for this research project only, and if there is any further use written consent will be required. I understand that the audio-recording of online interviews and workshop discussions and pedagogy will be electronically destroyed five years after the thesis has been published.

The confidentiality of participating schools and of participating teachers will be protected. However, given the small size of the school system of the education community in the Maldives, it may be possible for members of the community to guess the identity of individuals and their schools by the information they provide. This risk needs to be understood by participants, but will be minimised wherever possible, and every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of all participants, although this cannot be guaranteed.

I _____ of _____ school, Maldives agree to participate in the entitled research on '*Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection*' by Sharuda Saeed.

- I agree to approve teachers' participation in this research;
- I understand that the teachers will have an opportunity to review the transcripts of interviews;
- I understand that information collected from the questionnaire, workshops, interviews, and reflective texts will only be used for thesis writing, in conference papers and research publications;
- I understand a copy of the thesis will be lodged in the University of Waikato electronic repository;
- I understand the published results will not use the name of our school, and no opinions will be attributed to our school in any way that will identify us, without our written consent;
- I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

Signature: _____

Name of the X school principal: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E - Research Information Sheet sent to the participants

Dear (Participant)

Research Title: *Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection.*

With the permission of your school, I invite you to participate in this research. Let me first introduce myself and give you a brief overview of this research. I am Sharuda Saeed a PhD student at The University of Waikato in New Zealand. I am conducting a research entitled, '*Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection*', and I seek your participation as a participant in this study.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are: a) to engage Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflections; b) to offer an opportunity for the teacher participants to gain an understanding of the impact of using reflective practices to shape their teaching in order to grow as reflective practitioners; c) to understand how teachers conceptualise Social Studies in the context of the Maldives National Curriculum framework (NIE, 2015), and to understand teachers' current social studies pedagogy.

Participants

Participants are the primary teachers who are working in a government school, teaching the subject Social Studies to any level from Key Stage1 (Years 7-9, Grade1 to Grade 3) to Key Stage 2 (Years 10-12, Grades 4 to Grades 6) for more than two years: Two teachers from each school; one K1 level teacher and one K2 level teacher. The gender of the teachers' does not matter, and teachers who are willing to take part, will be included. I intend to understand the primary teachers' perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and experience in using reflective practice in Social Studies teaching and to explore the benefits participants could gain through reflective practices. The study adopts a qualitative participatory action research (PAR) approach, where the researcher and the participants will work together to experience Social Studies pedagogy. The school of your employment has granted permission for you to participate in my research if you are willing.

The Schools of Education Research Ethics Committee at The University of Waikato has granted ethical approval subject for this research. Participation is entirely voluntary; you may withdraw without having to give reasons any time you choose. If you choose to withdraw, any material provided up to that point will be omitted from my research and destroyed or returned to you. However, if you withdraw after 1st November 2020, the data you have provided will still be used in the study.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of participating schools and participating teachers will be protected. However, given the small size of the school system of the education community in the Maldives, it may be possible for members of the community to guess the identity of individuals and their schools by the information they provide. This risk needs to be understood by participants, but will be minimised wherever possible, and every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of all participants, although this cannot be guaranteed.

COVID-19 pandemic

I understand the current global pandemic has affected all the sectors and the systems of the country. In the first instance I had intended to conduct the research by physically being present

in the Maldives. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic I have chosen an alternative method to carry out this study. Therefore, your full support and cooperation is important for me to complete this study, especially under the current uncertain times.

The attached consent form that includes a request for permission to audio-record interviews. If you agree to participate, please complete the form, sign it, and return it to me. For your information **The Table of Proposed Research Timeline** is attached with this email.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact Sharuda Saeed.

My Contact Details: Ms. Sharuda Saeed PhD Candidate
or my chief supervisor Senior Lecturer, Dr Philippa Hunter, at the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. If you agree to participate, please kindly sign the consent form. Your signature on the consent form indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of the consent form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the researcher, Sharuda Saeed.

Your assistance will be invaluable in helping me conduct this research

Thanking you

Best Regards



Sharuda Saeed

Appendix F - Consent Letter sent to the participants

Research Title: *Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection.*

I have been given information about the research by Sharuda Saeed and have understood the purpose of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from the project without having to give reasons at any time I choose. I can do this by e-mailing Sharuda Saeed or her supervisor through the email addresses given below. I understand that if I withdraw from the project, any data I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed by Sharuda Saeed. However, if I withdraw after 1st November 2020, the data I have provided will still be used in the study.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential within the group, the researcher and her supervisors. I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for this research project only and if there is any further use written consent will be required. I understand that the audio-recordings of interviews and workshop discussions and pedagogy will be electronically destroyed five years after the thesis has been published.

The confidentiality of participating schools and of participating teachers will be protected. However, given the small size of the school system of the education community in the Maldives, it may be possible for members of the community to guess the identity of individuals and their schools by the information they provide. This risk needs to be understood by participants, but will be minimised wherever possible, and every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of all participants, although this cannot be guaranteed.

I _____ of _____ school, Maldives agree to participate in the entitled research on '*Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' Social Studies pedagogies through reflection*' by Sharuda Saeed.

- I have read the required information related to the research;
- I agree to complete the questionnaire, to participate in workshops, to meet for an interview, and to write and share narrative reflective texts in a provided online space (Google Drive or Dropbox) and I understand that the researcher may wish to clarify ideas after collecting the narrative texts;
- I agree that online interviews and workshop discussions will be audio-recorded;
- I will have an opportunity to review the transcripts of the online interviews;
- I understand that information collected from the online questionnaire, workshops, interview, and reflective texts will only be used for thesis writing, in conference papers and research publications;
- I understand a copy of the thesis will be lodged in the University of Waikato electronic repository;
- I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed;
- I may contact the researcher Sharuda Saeed for any further questions or the chief supervisor Dr Philippa Hunter, The University of Waikato, New Zealand through her email.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix G – Research Timeline

The table of the proposed research timeline

No	Time frame	Method	With whom	Evidence of records collected	Place	Time
1	4 th week of Sept 2020	Introductory meeting with the participants. I will explain the study and ascertain willingness to participate. Teachers will be asked to sign their consent forms after reading information sheet about the research. Questionnaire and workshop schedules will be shared through email with the participants.	Participant and myself	Consent forms	Online meeting Gmail	15 – 30 minutes
2	1 st week of Nov 2020	Qualtrics questionnaire sent to collect general and their social studies teaching information.	Participant	Questionnaire	Qualtrics Questionnaire	15-20 minutes
3	1 st workshop (2 nd week of Nov 2020)	One participatory learning workshop will be conducted on Zoom. The workshops will be based on Social studies concepts covered in K1-K2.	All participants and myself	Audios of conversation Handouts	Online Zoom	One session of 2hrs Total 2 hours
December – 1st Term Holiday, COVID-19 Lockdown						
4	2 nd workshop (2 nd week of Jan 2021) 3 rd workshop (4 th week of Jan 2021)	Two participatory learning workshops will be conducted on Zoom. The workshops will be based on Social studies concepts covered in K1-K2. The workshops will also highlight reflective practice to the participants to shape their teaching.	All participants and myself	Audios of conversation Handouts	Online Zoom	Two sessions of 2hrs Total 4 hours
5	Feb 2021 to June 2021 (five months)	Collect reflective narrative texts, participants will be provided an online space in Google Drive to document and share three reflective texts. Their stories will be confidential within the group. Online spaces will be an opportunity for participants to communicate with me.	Participants and myself	Reflective stories from participants	Through internet	20-30 minutes in a month
June 28th – Maldives Academic Year End Holiday; August – Maldives Academic Calendar Changed						
6	3 rd week of Sept 2021 – 3 rd week of Oct 2021	One to one interview through Zoom will take place. Interviews will be scheduled according to participants convenience.	Participants and myself	Audio recordings of one-to-one interview	Online	30-45 minutes
7	4 th week of Dec 2021	Participants will be invited to check interview transcripts after transcribing. They can receive those through email to check and correct if necessary and return via email. Revision Timeline (24/12/2021 – 07/01/2022)	Participants	Emailed transcripts	Through internet	Not more than 30 minutes

Appendix H - Online Qualtrics Questionnaire

Questionnaire

SECTION A – DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (Please tick the appropriate boxes)

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

2. What is your Nationality? ☐ Maldivian ☐ Other

if other please indicate: _____

3. How old are you? ☐ Under 25 ☐ 25-29 ☐ 30-39
☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60+

4. How many teachers teach social studies in grades 1 to 6 in your school?

5. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?

Please mark one choice

☐ Master's degree	☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Post graduate Certificate	☐ Advanced Diploma
☐ Diploma	☐ Advanced Certificate
	☐ Other

6. What is your employment status as a teacher?

☐ Full time ☐ Part time

7. How long have you been teaching Social Studies?

☐ This is my first year ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-5 years ☐ 6-10 years

☐ 11-15 years ☐ 16-20 years ☐ More than 20 years

SECTION B – TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES

1. What does Social Studies mean to you?

2. What are your views of the place of Social Studies in the National Curriculum Framework [NCF] in the Maldives?

3. How do you place social studies into your classroom teaching?

4. What do you think is the purpose of teaching social studies to young students?

5. What are your thoughts about teaching Social Studies in English rather than Dhivehi?

6. Describe the best Social studies lesson you have ever taught? Why do you say it is the best lesson?

7. How do you encourage students to explore and learn about current social issues in the Maldivian context?

8. How do you evaluate your students' Social Studies learning?

SECTION C – SOCIAL STUDIES PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning is defined as activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise, and other characteristics as a teacher. Please only consider professional learning you have taken after your initial teacher training/education.

1. During the last 12 months, have you participated in any of the given activities below?

- ☐ Professional learning workshop for social studies
- ☐ Face to face workshop in school related to teaching
- ☐ Face to face workshop outside school related to teaching
- ☐ Online workshop related to teaching
- ☐ Coordination meeting with teachers teaching social studies

2. Have you participated in any professional learning programme for Social Studies teachers in the past? Please explain your experience.

3. How has COVID-19 impacted on your teaching of Social Studies?

SECTION D - SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHING AND LEARNING

How often do you use the following activities in your Social Studies lessons?

	Often	Sometime	None
1. Students research and collect information on a problem.	☐	☐	☐

2. Students make presentations to the class.	☐	☐	☐
3. Students work in groups on a project.	☐	☐	☐
4. Students work individually on a project.	☐	☐	☐
5. Students read from a textbook and complete a worksheet based on their reading.	☐	☐	☐
6. Students explore their values and those of others.	☐	☐	☐
7. Students are encouraged to solve problems.	☐	☐	☐
8. Students are encouraged to make decisions.	☐	☐	☐

Which of these development opportunities do you engage in for your social studies teaching and learning?

	Often	Rare	Never
9. I collect evidence/feedback from students to improve my Social Studies teaching in classroom.	☐	☐	☐
10. I discuss my Social Studies lessons and assignments with my colleagues to get their feedback.	☐	☐	☐
11. I get opportunities to work collaboratively with social studies teachers in my school.	☐	☐	☐

Appendix I - First Workshop Schedule

First Workshop Schedule Conceptualization and Reflective Practice

Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teacher's social studies pedagogies through reflection

Purpose

The main purpose of the first workshop is getting together, setting the scene, and understand each other's role to work in a shared purpose of the research.

Learning Outcomes

The research group by participating workshop one can develop a shared understanding of:

- the nature and the purpose of Social Studies
- the use of the subject Social Studies, its content, benefits of the subject in the curriculum
- ideas of about Social Studies concepts

Time	Content	Duration
10:00-10:20	Let's get to know each other (Treasure box)	20 mins
10:20- 10:40	The research project Outcomes	20 mins
10:40-10:55	What is Social Studies for teachers and students?	10 mins
10:55-11:10	The place of Social Studies in the school NCF? How does Social Studies develop students' thinking?	15 mins
11:10-11:20	Importance of Social studies as a subject in the Maldivian curriculum? SS K1 &K2 NCF	10 mins
11:20-11:50	(SS Concepts) SS K1 &K2 NCF Activity 1: AWW Board	35 mins
11:50-12:00	Wrap up the session	10 mins

Appendix J - Second Workshop Schedule

Second Workshop Schedule Conceptualization and Reflective Practice

Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teacher's social studies pedagogies through reflection

Purpose

The main purpose of the second workshop is getting to know more about each other's role's to work in a shared purpose for the research and Social Studies pedagogy. An aim is to open a way to rethink and reflect on teachers' experiences in teaching and learning.

Learning Outcomes

By participating in the workshop participants can develop shared understandings of:

- Social Studies concepts;
- the pedagogy of the subject Social Studies;
- reflect on teachers' experiences in teaching;
- rethink and reflect on ways to teach and generate ideas of Social Studies pedagogy;

Time/Content	Activities	Duration
9:45-10:00	Get online, welcome everyone, see everybody gets connections and try to set things ready for workshop	15 mins Main room
Prior to workshop Setting the scene		
10:00-10:30	Each person will introduce themselves share an item/object/image and share one of their own teaching experiences of which reflects their Social Studies thinking. They will relate the objective to themselves and their identity (E.g. it can be family/ history/culture/ personal feelings/profession)	30 mins Main room
Share one of their own SS teaching and reflect on their own SS teaching (Ice break)		
10:30- 10:40	1. Briefly summarize the project research outcomes Focusing on: • Purpose • Confidentiality • Participatory research • Benefits for everyone • How the research will be carried out • Appreciate their participation	10 mins Main room
Outcomes	2. Discuss the session outcomes 3. Answer any question from participants.	
10:40-11:15	Discuss topics given under all the strands	

SS concepts (SS Concepts) SS K1 &K2 NCF	Have all workshop participants to discuss and answer the following questions in groups about the key ideas of the curriculum 1. Discuss the understanding of the topics (concepts) in different strands in SS NCF • Which of SS strands (Culture and Identity, People places, and Environment, the Economic world, Time Continuity and Change, Active citizenship and Investigation, communication, and participation) do you find interesting or challenging to teach and why? 2. Discuss how you find information to teach in SS. • What are the challenges you face when collecting information to teach SS? • How do you overcome those challenges? 3. Which resources do you use in your Social Studies teaching? • What are the challenges in finding resources? • How do you overcome those challenges? Get them to write their ideas on sticky notes Activity 1: Sticky note on Jamboard Discuss what they shared in the Breakout room in the main room	Total (30mins) 2 mins Set task Main room AND 14 mins move into Break rooms 14 mins Main room
11:15-11:30 Social Studies [NCF]	What are your views of the place of Social Studies in the National Curriculum Framework [NCF] in the Maldives? (Question from the questionnaire which has an error, give as a task to write their answers on a sticky note) Activity 2: Sticky note on Jamboard Discuss what they shared in the breakout room in the main room	(Total 15 mins) 2 Main room 8m Break rooms 5m main room
11:30-11:50 Generate ideas among the participants and reflect own pedagogy	Thinking about Pedagogy. What is it? Discuss different authors definitions How can teachers develop Social Studies pedagogy? Listen to their ideas and discuss Get them to write their ideas on sticky notes. Discuss their work. Activity 3: Sticky note on Jamboard	(Total 20 mins) 2m Main 10m Break rooms 8m main room

	Discuss what they shared in the Breakout room in the main room The reflection notes they wrote on the sticky notes based on the given activity.	
11:50-12:00	Talk about the next workshop on reflective practice	10 mins
Wrap up the session	Wrap up by thanking them	Main room

Appendix K - Third Workshop Schedule

Third Workshop Schedule Conceptualization and Reflective Practice

Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teacher's social studies pedagogies through reflection

Purpose

The main purpose of the third workshop is to:

- Share and understand each other's thinking about social studies pedagogy in a participatory research project;
- Reflect on current social studies teaching and learning experiences;
- Revisit the whole nature and purpose of the research project.

Focus

By participating in workshop 3 the group will share and generate:

- Social studies teaching experiences
- Ideas about social studies pedagogy
- Ways to develop social studies pedagogy through activity reflection
- Reflective processes of documenting and evaluating future social studies pedagogy
-

Time/Content	Activities	Duration
9:45-10:00 Prior to workshop Setting the scene	Get online, welcome everyone, see everybody gets connected.	15 mins Main room
10:00-10:30 Share their own ideas about 'Special place' Ice breaker	Each person will relate their own ideas about 'A Special place' (E.g. spiritual, physical, historical, political, cultural, heritage, religious, making living, natural beauty, connection- past memories), which reflects their own thinking and talk about it. Relate this to themselves and their experience (could bring an image, object, a poem) to share (An icebreaker which would help them to gradually get into reflection)	30 mins Main room
10:30- 10:40 Outcomes	1. Discuss the research project purpose focusing on: • Purpose • Confidentiality • Participatory research • Benefits for everyone • How the research will be carried out • Appreciate their participation 2. Discuss the session outcomes 3. Answer any question from participants.	10 mins Main room
10:40-11:00	What is reflection?	Total 20 mins

Reflections	Activity: Share a link on chat log where they click and write their thoughts on a text box at the Google Doc Watch a video on ‘what is reflective teaching? definition and method’. Source: Jack (2015, July 9). <i>What is Reflective teaching? Definition and methods: Uploaded by study.com video team.</i> https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-reflective-teaching-definition-methods-quiz.html Discuss about the video Discuss Purpose of reflection E.g.: - (dimension) profession/personal - professional (curricula outcomes/school expectations) - personal/ own feelings in connection - values						Discuss 10mins Video 4 mins Discussions 6mins																		
11:00-11:30	Discuss with all the participants the given activity below on Approaches to Social Inquiry page: 21 Adopted from the Source: Chadwick, D. (2008). Approaches to social inquiry. <i>New Zealand: The Ministry of Education.</i> <table><tr><th colspan="3">Activity My Special place</th><th colspan="3"></th></tr><tr><th>Links to a social Inquiry approach</th><th>Activity</th><th>What to look for</th><th>Exploring values and perspectives</th><th>Ask the students to reflect on places that they find significant or important and ask them to draw the place that is special to them. Then have the students design a postcard, write a song or poem, or create a screen saver that is illustrated with the drawing. Ask them</th><th>Developing critical thinking</th></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Why are places important?</td><td></td><td>Through teacher-student discussion, look for an understanding about why a place is important to a student and/or to his or her family</td></tr></table>						Activity My Special place						Links to a social Inquiry approach	Activity	What to look for	Exploring values and perspectives	Ask the students to reflect on places that they find significant or important and ask them to draw the place that is special to them. Then have the students design a postcard, write a song or poem, or create a screen saver that is illustrated with the drawing. Ask them	Developing critical thinking				Why are places important?		Through teacher-student discussion, look for an understanding about why a place is important to a student and/or to his or her family	Total 30mins
Activity My Special place																									
Links to a social Inquiry approach	Activity	What to look for	Exploring values and perspectives	Ask the students to reflect on places that they find significant or important and ask them to draw the place that is special to them. Then have the students design a postcard, write a song or poem, or create a screen saver that is illustrated with the drawing. Ask them	Developing critical thinking																				
			Why are places important?		Through teacher-student discussion, look for an understanding about why a place is important to a student and/or to his or her family																				

Reflection Let's think differently SS concepts (SS Concepts) SS K1 & K2 NCF					to include a description of a place and its environment: • where the place is (situated); • why the place is (significant) important for them in what ways; • what do they do there (what activities are people involved); • how are the ideas about place and environment are related? • How will you describe this place? Ask students to share the examples of their work with other members of the class. The postcards, poem and so on could	<i>and to others</i> Building conceptual understandings Look for student insight into the idea that different people could view this place differently	

					then be displayed on a local, regional, or national map to show where the places are.		
	• Discuss the activity and share ideas; • Discuss and relate the same activity to teach places in the Maldives as supported by the NCF; • Through discussion how might the activity be adapted or developed. • Contribute your thoughts. • Write a summary reflection about the activity using evaluative notes on the given google doc (3 sentences based on what/how/why) Activity: Notes on Google Doc Discuss what they shared in the Breakout room in the main room The reflection notes they wrote on the sticky notes based on the given activity Later in the main room discuss with the group • Do they have any question to add to the activity? • Would you use this type of activity with your students? How and why? • What would you want children to learn from this kind of activity? What social studies ideas are there? • How might the activity be further developed?						
11:30-11:45	Talk about writing reflective texts • When? • How? • Why?						15 mins Main room
What's next Writing Reflections (one on each month)							
11:45-12:00	Wrap up by thanking the group and explain what happens next						15mins Main room
Wrap up the session							

Appendix L - First Online Reflection

Research Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teacher's social studies pedagogies through reflection by Sharuda Saeed

Research Participant:

School:

Reflection 1

This research activity is the first of a series of 5 reflections which research participants will write up through the research.

The first reflection focuses on 'Reflecting on my Social Studies teaching and learning in action'

Purpose

The main focus of this reflection is to find out what the participants are doing in their social studies teaching (how, what, why?).

The prompts given below may be useful for your first piece of reflective writing

- Selection - about what to teach / connection to the curriculum
- Choice of context- why?
- Planning decisions/ purpose / concepts / resources /activities
- Reflection on your teaching; what was effective / what went well / what was problematic/ what Social Studies learning was evident? Why? What evidence of student learning/ engagement?
- Would you teach this again – in the same way or what changes might you make?

Appendix M - Second Online Reflection

Research Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teacher's social studies pedagogies through reflection by Sharuda Saeed

Research Participant:

School:

Reflection 2

This research activity is the second of a series of 5 reflections which research participants will write up through the research.

The second reflection is an open reflection on 'My role as a social studies teacher.'

Purpose

The main focus of this reflection is to find out what the participants are doing in their social studies teaching (how, what, why?).

The prompts given below may be useful for your second piece of reflective writing

- my feelings as a social studies teacher
- my interests and possibilities as a social studies teacher/ teaching concepts/ activities
- my challenges / limitations as a social studies teacher/ teaching concept
- my opinion about the ways social issues in the Maldives society are considered / reflected in social studies curriculum and pedagogy
- changes that I might bring into the social studies curriculum

Appendix N - Third Online Reflection

Research Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' social studies pedagogies through reflection: Sharuda Saeed.

Research Participant:

School:

Reflection 3

This research activity is the third of a series of 5 reflections which research participants will write up through the research.

The third reflection focuses on 'Reflecting on effective online Social Studies teaching during COVID-19'.

Purpose

The main focus of this reflection is to find out what you the participants are doing in your social online studies teaching (how, what, why?).

Reflection Focus

'In what ways have your Social Studies teaching and learning practices changed during COVID-19 over 2020-2021?'

The prompts given below may be useful for your third piece of reflective writing

o Reflect on your change to teaching online;

- How have you managed with Social Studies online teaching?
- What has your school expected you to do in moving to online Social Studies teaching?
- Are your learners' parents involved in online Social Studies teaching? If so, how are they involved?
- Describe your interest in, and challenges/ limitations of online Social Studies teaching?
- Is there any change in the present curriculum you used to teach based on online teaching?
- What kind of resources do you use in online Social Studies teaching?
- What sort of activities do you include in your online Social Studies teaching?
- How do you engage students in online Social Studies teaching?
- Have you changed ways of assessing your students in online Social Studies?
- Reflect on your online teaching activities using selected resources; what was effective / what went well / what was problematic/ what Social Studies learning was evident in students? How do you know? What evidence of student learning/ engagement is apparent to you?
- Would you recommend continuing online teaching in Social Studies in the same way or what changes you might request to bring?

Appendix O - Fourth Online Reflection

Research Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teachers' social studies pedagogies through reflection: Sharuda Saeed.

Research Participant:

School:

Reflection 4

This research activity is the fourth reflection of the series of 4 reflections which the research participants will write up through the research.

The fourth reflection focuses on 'Interests, challenges and limitations that you face teaching Social Studies in Maldives under normal circumstances (pretend non COVID-19 infected world)

Purpose

The main focus of this reflection is to find out what you the participants are doing in your social studies teaching (how, what, why?).

Reflection Focus

'Interests, challenges and limitations that you face teaching Social Studies in Maldives under normal circumstances (pretend non COVID-19 infected world)

The prompts given below may be useful for your fourth piece of reflective writing.

- **Reflect on your interests, challenges and limitations in teaching Social Studies;**

Interests and challenges

- What drives you to teach Social Studies?
- Describe any challenges that you come across while teaching Social Studies.

Curriculum

- How do you meet the curriculum requirements in Social Studies teaching?
- If you were given the chance to add or remove any content/topic from the Social Studies curriculum, what would it be?
- Describe your perspective on the citizenship education and the Islamic values included in the Social Studies curriculum.

Resources and activities

- Describe any process you use and challenges you face in finding reliable resources to teach Social Studies.
- How do you manage resources and media to assist students to consider Islamic values in them?
- What methods have you used that effectively engage students in Social Studies lessons?
- What suggestion would you have for effective student assessment in Social Studies teaching?

Professional Learning

- Reflect on your Social Studies teaching professional learning; what was effective/ what was less effective.
- How could effective professional learning be implemented for Social Studies teachers?

Appendix P - Online Semi-structured Interview Questions

Research Title: Engaging Maldivian primary teacher's social studies pedagogies through reflection by Sharuda Saeed

Interview Questions

Teachers Perceptions/ beliefs

- How do you feel about teaching social studies? (Is it important/interesting to you? Why/why not? Can you tell me about one experience you have in teaching social studies?)
- What do you hope that students will learn through your teaching of social studies (concepts, skills, values, citizenship, tradition, culture, identity)?
- What is the connection between social studies and Maldivian society for you?
- Do you think that Social Studies supports the development of young people? (Thinking, values, and attitudes)? In what ways is social studies different to other subjects for you?

SS Curriculum

- Drawing on your experience, what connection do you see between social studies and Islam? How do you see Islam influences teaching of social studies? Please explain.
- What kind of young citizen does the Maldives curriculum aim to develop? Could you explain your thinking?
- Do you think the Maldives curriculum supports the teaching of social studies to primary students? Could you explain your thinking?

SS teaching

- How would you describe your approach to teaching social studies? What has helped you to develop this?
- What Social Studies concepts, ideas and/or skills in K1/K2 are the hardest to develop learners' understanding of? Why do you think this is?
- How do you include current issues, either local or global, in your social studies teaching?

Reflections

- How do you feel about writing reflections as a social studies teacher? Might you continue to do them?
- What are your interests and possibilities when you start writing reflections?
- What do you see as your challenges and limitations when writing reflections as a social studies teacher?
- What impact has reflecting on teaching social studies through this study had for you?
- Through reflecting on your teaching of social studies, have you made any changes, or do you plan to make any changes to your teaching?
- With your experience of writing reflections about your feelings and ideas about teaching Social Studies, what would you recommend for reflection by future Social Studies teachers in the Maldives?
- What else have you gained by being involved in this study process?

Recommendation

- With your experience of teaching Social Studies what would you recommend for professional learning of Social Studies teachers in the Maldives?