


Integrating Cultural Heritage into Civic Education: Practices, Challenges, and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of cultural heritage (CH) into Civic Education (CE) in lower secondary schools in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam, with a focus on teachers' perspectives. Surveying 46 CE teachers, the research identifies both the pedagogical value and systemic challenges of CH integration. Teachers recognize heritage as essential for fostering civic responsibility, cultural identity, and student engagement. However, implementation is uneven, relying largely on individual initiative rather than curricular mandates. Key barriers include insufficient teaching resources, limited teacher training, and rigid curricula, which constrain experiential and interdisciplinary approaches. Despite these challenges, teachers express strong aspirations for clearer guidelines, expanded access to heritage materials, and professional development opportunities. The findings highlight the potential of CH as a transformative component of CE, while underscoring the urgent need for institutional support, school-community partnerships, and curriculum innovation. The study contributes strategic recommendations to strengthen heritage-based civic education in Vietnam.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Civic Education, Curriculum Integration, Teacher Perspectives, Thai Nguyen City.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of cultural heritage into educational curricula is increasingly recognized as a vital component of holistic development, fostering a sense of identity, belonging, and civic responsibility among students (Estiastuti et al., 2019). In the context of citizenship education, this integration aims not only to transmit knowledge of historical and cultural traditions but also to develop critical thinking skills, ethical reasoning, and a deeper understanding of social values (Nguyen, Luc, N & Mua, 2024). The incorporation of local culture and global perspectives in education demonstrates positive impacts, notably in enhancing students' awareness and appreciation of heritage while simultaneously developing their global communication skills (Kanoksilapatham, 2014). Within the specific context of Thai Nguyen city, a region rich in cultural identity and historical significance, exploring how cultural heritage is integrated into the teaching of Civic Education in secondary schools becomes particularly important. Civic Education, as a subject, plays a pivotal role in shaping students' awareness of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, promoting democratic values, and encouraging active participation in community life. By combining cultural heritage into the Civic Education curriculum, educators can create learning experiences that are more engaging and relevant, connecting students with their local context while preparing them to become responsible and informed global citizens.

The role of integrating cultural heritage education contributes to the formation of character and national identity; the integration of heritage further promotes the acquisition of knowledge and perspectives that help students become culturally grounded. The integration of cultural heritage (CH) into education has gained momentum globally as educators and policymakers recognize its role in preserving identity and promoting civic values. Estiastuti et al. (2019) emphasize that cultural education contributes to the formation of character and national identity. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2024) point out the dual benefits of heritage integration in knowledge acquisition and ethical development. Kanoksilapatham (2014) highlights that combining local and global perspectives helps students become culturally grounded yet globally competent. Further supporting this view, Smith (2006) argues that heritage education fosters a sense of history and critical thinking, enabling students to engage more deeply with their communities. Meanwhile, De Luca (2017) identifies that integrating cultural narratives into the curriculum can enhance students' empathy and intercultural competence. In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen and Pham (2020) found that local cultural content boosts student motivation and strengthens community ties when used in Social Studies and Civic Education classes. Furthermore, UNESCO (2015) has advocated for the inclusion of intangible cultural heritage in national curricula as a strategy for sustainable development and social inclusion. Finally, Tran and Doan (2022) suggest that educational approaches emphasizing local culture can reinforce both academic outcomes and students' identity formation, particularly in multi-ethnic regions like Northern Vietnam. These perspectives collectively provide a robust theoretical framework supporting the integration of cultural heritage into Civic Education teaching, especially in regions with rich cultural diversity such as Thai Nguyen.

METHOD

This study investigates the current situation, advantages, disadvantages, and needs of teachers in integrating cultural heritage education into Civic Education subjects at secondary schools. The survey subjects were 46 secondary school teachers in Thai Nguyen, selected through teacher groups in December 2024, and participation in the survey was entirely voluntary. The objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of this activity, serving as a basis for discussions and recommendations to support teachers more effectively in integrating cultural heritage education. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire with questions on a 5-level Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), aiming to gather information on teachers' perceptions of aspects such as frequency of integration, perceived suitability of cultural heritage content, availability of materials, program flexibility, professional competence, and student interaction with integrated cultural heritage content. The data were then processed and presented as percentages for each response option.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study explores the practical application of integrating Cultural Heritage (CH) into Civic Education (CE) teaching and its impact on educational practices in secondary schools. This integration is crucial as it not only diversifies teaching methodologies within the curriculum but also plays a significant role in preserving cultural identity and developing students' qualities and competencies. The analyses herein utilize reliable statistics and item-total statistics to rigorously assess teachers' perceptions and the current effectiveness of integration practices in secondary schools.

Current Status of Integration and Perception of the Role of Integrating CH Education in CE Teaching

Analysis of survey data from teachers in Thai Nguyen City reveals a positive attitude towards integrating cultural heritage into CE, but the level of implementation varies. Figure 1 illustrates that 18.4% of teachers frequently integrate cultural heritage into their CE teaching, 34.2% do so occasionally, 27.6% rarely, and 19.7% never. This indicates that although more than half of educators are making efforts, the level of integration is uneven, with a notable portion never integrating it.

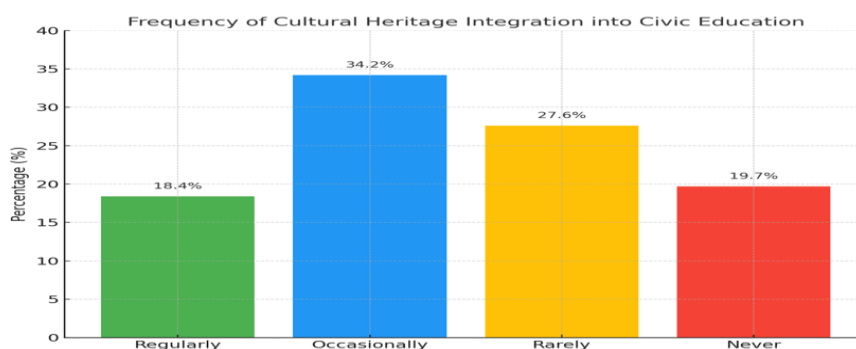


Figure 1. Level of Cultural Heritage Integration in CE Teaching

Research indicates that in Vietnamese secondary schools, integrated education is infrequent and relies more on individual teachers' enthusiasm and proactiveness than on systematic curriculum requirements. Furthermore, the most commonly used integration methods include classroom discussions on local customs and traditions (61.2%), incorporating regional historical figures (54.3%), and organizing field trips to cultural sites (39.5%). However, only 22.7% of respondents reported using interdisciplinary projects that engage students in research related to cultural heritage and the community, despite their high pedagogical value.

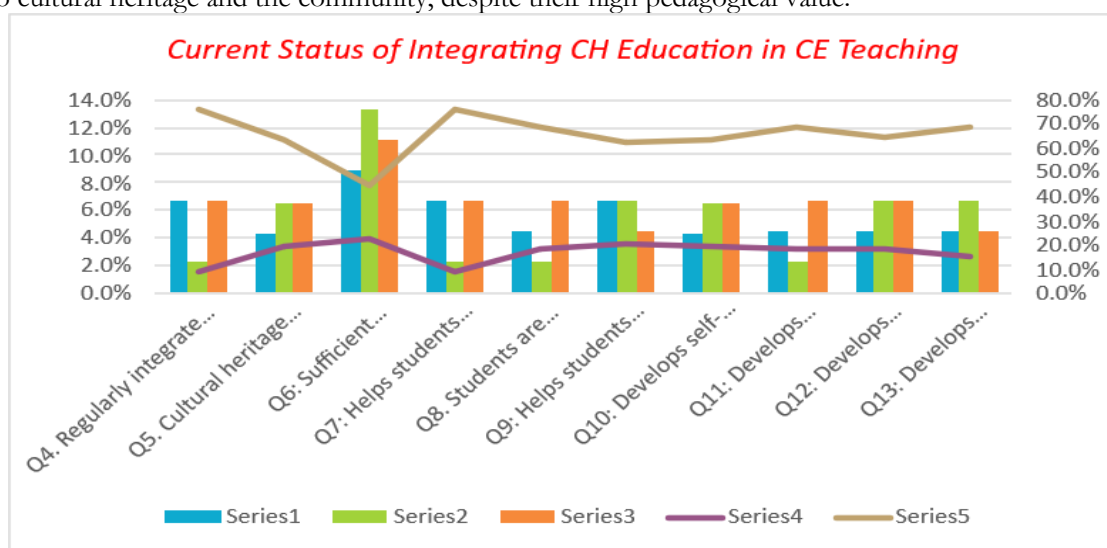


Figure 2. Current Status of Integrating CH Education in CE Teaching

The chart reflects the frequency of integrating cultural heritage education in CE teaching through question groups Q4 to Q13. The data show a disparity in awareness and reasonable implementation among target groups, with levels 3 and 5 often achieving higher rates, especially in Q6 and Q13 (≈13% and 11%). Meanwhile, indicators in Q9 and Q10 tend to decrease, reflecting the level of practical implementation. The composite line graph fluctuates around 60–75%, indicating a relatively high consensus on the role of integrated heritage education in CE. Overall, the role of integration has been recognized but lacks synchronicity and requires further support in terms of content, methods, and resources (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Data from the chart show that integrating cultural heritage education in CE significantly contributes to the development of students' core competencies, yet the extent remains limited and uneven. In items Q10 and Q11 – related to critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration competencies – target groups rated them at an average level (≈7–9%), reflecting that integration has not truly delivered these competencies. This might be due to teaching methods being overly theoretical, lacking practicality and experiential learning. Conversely, items Q12 and Q13 show a trend of improved skills (≈10–11%), seen when there are new changes in methods and enhanced heritage experiences, providing students with conditions to develop quite positive competencies such as teamwork and critical thinking. Additionally, if heritage content is effectively integrated, it will contribute to forming critical thinking, communication, and cultural-historical competencies, as well as an awareness of preserving traditional values (Nguyen and Pham, 2021). However, the practical implementation effectiveness is still limited due to a lack of synchronicity between content, methods, and organizational conditions. Therefore, curriculum adjustments, enhancement of pedagogical capacity, and design of active learning activities linked to local realities are needed.

Difficulties and Challenges

According to the teacher survey, many difficulties hinder the effective integration of cultural heritage. As depicted in Figure 2, the most cited challenge is the lack of teaching materials related to local cultural heritage (67.2%), followed by time constraints within the fixed Civic Education curriculum (54.9%), and inadequate training in pedagogical methods related to cultural heritage integration (46.7%). These factors can directly affect the effectiveness of developing student competencies through heritage education if there are no systematic solutions from both management and professional aspects (Tran and Nguyen, 2022). Despite policy mechanisms, Vietnamese schools often lack institutional support mechanisms for integrating cultural heritage, creating a gap between curriculum vision and actual implementation at the secondary school level.

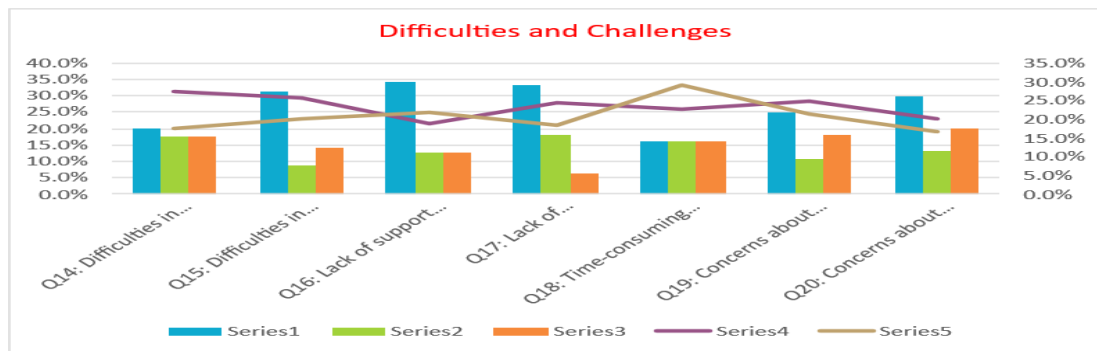


Figure 3. Difficulties and Challenges in Integrating Cultural Heritage

Aspirations and Necessary Support

Contrary to the diversity of opinions on difficulties, the section on aspirations and necessary support shows almost absolute consensus on the need for support. Teachers expressed a strong interest in receiving systematic guidance and organizational support to integrate cultural heritage effectively. Figure 3 shows that 71.3% of respondents called for clearer curriculum guidelines, 65.4% needed access to cultural and historical archives or field trips, and 58.8% advocated for targeted teacher training programs.

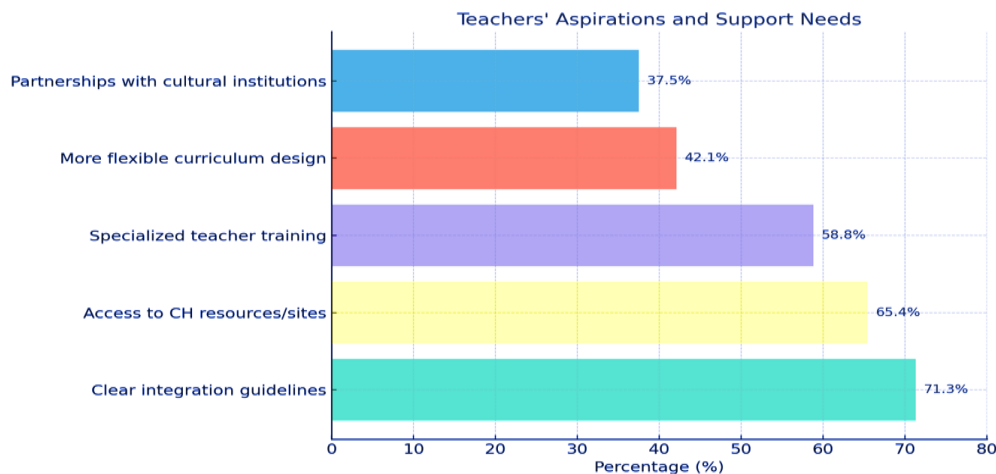


Figure 3. Teachers' Aspirations and Support Needs

This also implies that when educators are equipped with appropriate training and partnerships with organizations – especially with local museums and heritage institutions – students will be more engaged and perform better in civic knowledge assessments. These findings reinforce the need for curriculum development that extends beyond individual classrooms.

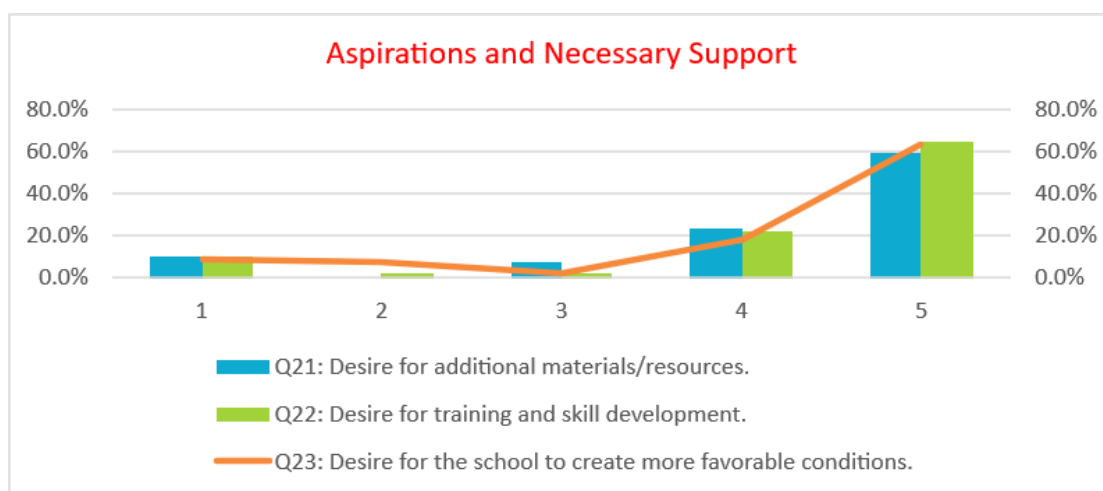


Figure 4. Aspirations and necessary support

The data show that the highest expectations are concentrated at level 5 (Very necessary), with Q23 and Q22 nearing 70% utilization, reflecting teachers' desire for facilitation and support from the school and for professional skills training. Conversely, the response rate for levels 1 to 3 is very low (below 10%), indicating that most respondents do not consider these factors to be less necessary. Notably, the trend line for Q23 shows a strong upward trajectory, highlighting the important role of school management in facilitating the effective organization of heritage education activities (Iran and T. A. Nguyen, 2022). Overall, it can be affirmed that the successful development of heritage education in the CE program requires the simultaneous enhancement of teaching resources, specialized teacher training, and the creation of a supportive teaching and learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that integrating cultural heritage education into Civic Education (CE) constitutes a valuable approach to fostering students' holistic competencies, notably critical thinking, communication, and cultural-historical literacy. Yet, its implementation effectiveness still falls short of its pedagogical potential. This limitation arises from three primary causes: (1) teachers' restricted capacity in instructional organization and professional experience; (2) insufficient provision of teaching resources and systemic support from schools and educational authorities; and (3) students' limited awareness of the significance of cultural heritage in their learning. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to strengthen teacher professional development, ensure the availability of supportive pedagogical tools, and design educational activities that enhance students' appreciation of cultural heritage. By tackling these issues, cultural heritage integration in CE can move from isolated practice to a sustainable and impactful educational strategy.

Although a considerable number of teachers incorporate cultural heritage into their Civic Education (CE) lessons, integration remains fragmented and largely dependent on individual initiatives rather than curriculum mandates. While teachers acknowledge its value, implementation is hindered by challenges in activity design, limited access to instructional materials, and insufficient opportunities for practical application, which together reveal a gap between curricular expectations and classroom capacity. The low frequency of systematic integration (18.4%) underscores the need for targeted strategies. As Smith (2006) emphasizes, heritage education requires structured pedagogical frameworks and continuous institutional support. The prevalence of ad hoc or superficial practices—such as isolated cultural anecdotes—diminishes the potential of cultural heritage integration to cultivate critical thinking and civic identity.

These difficulties, especially the shortage of teaching resources and inadequate professional training, reflect systemic shortcomings in Vietnam's secondary education system. Consistent with Nguyen and Pham (2020), who highlighted teachers' limited access to culturally relevant content, particularly in rural or ethnically diverse areas, this disconnect between policy ambition and classroom realities constrains the transformative role of heritage education. At the same time, the survey reveals strong teacher demand for clearer curriculum guidelines (71.3%), improved access to cultural resources (65.4%), and more supportive teaching conditions. This reflects both positive professional attitudes and an urgent policy gap, suggesting that teachers' awareness and aspirations have not been fully matched by systemic backing.

The findings further align with international best practices that advocate flexible curriculum design and interdisciplinary collaboration such as partnerships with museums, cultural associations, and local authorities (UNESCO, 2015); (De Luca, 2017). Such collaborations can bridge the divide between abstract knowledge and students' lived experiences, fostering not only cognitive understanding but also emotional connection and civic engagement. Importantly, the results show that cultural heritage should not be treated as supplementary content; when meaningfully embedded, it becomes a powerful medium for civic education, enabling students to internalize national traditions while developing essential qualities, life skills, and community-oriented values.

Finally, the study reinforces Kanoksilapatham's (2014) argument that blending local heritage with global perspectives nurtures both rootedness and openness in learners. Achieving this, however, requires positioning cultural heritage integration as a core component of CE embedded within lesson planning, assessment frameworks, and teacher professional development. In sum, realizing its full potential demands coordinated action across multiple levels: policy reform, teacher capacity-building, resource development, and a reorientation of the CE curriculum toward integrated, practical, and experiential learning.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the current status of integrating cultural heritage into Civic Education at secondary schools in Thai Nguyen City, Vietnam. The results affirm that embedding cultural heritage in Civic Education is not only a sound pedagogical orientation but also a meaningful pathway to fostering students' core competencies. Teachers widely recognize its role in cultivating national identity, civic responsibility, and cultural awareness. However, the study reveals a gap between recognition and practice: classroom implementation remains uneven, heavily reliant on individual teachers' initiative rather than systematic support. Limitations in instructional organization, teacher expertise, and the broader pedagogical environment continue to constrain effectiveness. These findings underscore an urgent need for targeted professional development, adequate teaching resources, and stronger institutional facilitation from schools and educational authorities to ensure cultural heritage integration becomes both sustainable and impactful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **For Educational Institutions:** It is necessary to strengthen the role of schools in supporting teachers to develop heritage education activities, including adjusting teaching plans, creating favorable conditions in terms of time, facilities, and collaboration with local cultural and heritage organizations. Efforts should be made to facilitate professional expertise, resources, and practical learning environments (Nguyen and Le, 2021).
- **For Teachers:** Teachers should proactively participate in training courses and professional development programs on integration methods and organizing experiential activities linked to heritage, helping to enhance practical skills and innovate teaching thinking (Pham, 2022). They should also develop active teaching methods such as projects, experiential learning, and learning through heritage exploration.
- **For Curriculum and Policies:** The Ministry of Education and Training needs to issue specific guidelines on integrating cultural heritage education into the Civic Education curriculum, while also developing appropriate guidance materials for each region, making it easier for teachers to access and apply. Policy support is needed regarding time, learning materials, and textbook pricing (Tran and Le, 2022).
- **Interdisciplinary Integration Provision:** It is necessary to provide connections between the education, culture, and local government sectors in organizing heritage education activities, creating conditions for students to access practical learning environments. Diversify forms of learning organization such as field trips, learning projects, and gamification of heritage content, thereby inspiring interest and comprehensively developing students' competencies, especially civic competence.

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