

# Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning Social Studies: A Literature Review

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**Abstract.** The unprecedented circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 crisis have affected K-12 education systems in most countries around the world. It is widely recognized that this crisis has presented opportunities and challenges for various school subjects. The purpose of this study was to examine the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning social studies. The study reviewed the content of 53 articles on K-12 social studies and its associated subjects (e.g., geography, history, and civic education) published between January 2020 and July 2022. Overall, the research findings indicated that COVID-19 prompted social studies teachers and educators to prioritize important content areas in the social studies curriculum (e.g., health education, human-rights education, digital citizenship, and children's everyday geographies), integrate a wide range of technologies, and implement innovative teaching practices. In spite of these opportunities, there were some common challenges that raised concern across international contexts, including pedagogical challenges, accessibility and connectivity challenges, administrative challenges, and insufficient professional development for teachers. The study recognized the need for more research on social studies, particularly in the area of learning loss.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; impacts; learning; social studies; teaching

## 1. Introduction

Since the end of 2019, the COVID-19 crisis has spread globally and become a major challenge in almost every area of human activity. It has affected educational systems and led to the closure of schools and institutions of higher education worldwide. At its height it was interrupting the education of more than 1.6 billion students (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2022). In response to the unprecedented disruptions caused by COVID-19, many educational systems around the world have substituted traditional face-to-face interaction with online learning options through e-platforms in an attempt to support students to continue their education from home.

Within the context of COVID-19, educational technology has played a significant role in softening the impact of the pandemic on education by serving as the only

platform for teaching, learning, and assessment (Abdedoyen & Soykan, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). As UNESCO (2021, p. 1) highlights, “the pandemic heightened the importance of technology and digital innovations in strengthening the resilience of learning systems and in reimagining the future of education and learning”. In unusual and unprecedented circumstances, teachers and students were required to adapt rapidly to technological innovations.

The impact of COVID-19 on education has already been the subject of educational research (e.g., Adedoyin & Soykab, 2020; Almarashdi & Jarrah, 2021; Woltran et al., 2021). Initially, the literature identified a wide range of challenges facing education from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade (K-12). For example, Marshall et al. (2020) indicated that the unexpected circumstances K-12 teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic prevented them from making a normal transition to remote instruction. Most teachers had never taught online before the transition to remote teaching, and very few teachers had received meaningful professional development in this area. Teachers rated all teaching functions, such as lesson planning, differentiated instruction, assessment, and engaging with parents, to be challenging in the context of remote teaching. Woltran et al. (2021) identified five main challenges facing elementary teachers: a lack of direct interaction between teachers and students, a notable increase in teacher workloads, concern over the availability of equipment, a lack of technology skills among teachers and students, and the inability to provide support for at-risk students. Other studies explored student engagement in online learning during COVID-19 (e. g., Bray et al., 2021; Devitt et al., 2020). Bray et al. (2021) found that meaningful connection between teachers and their students enhances student engagement, particularly among at-risk students. In addition, using innovative instruction and encouraging the development of student skills was shown to increase student engagement.

Despite various challenges associated with teaching and learning during the pandemic, several studies have pointed to certain opportunities. The transition from traditional teaching to online learning led teachers to deal with many new technological tools (e.g., Google classroom, Zoom, and interactive boards) and consequently, the potential has arisen for more innovative teaching practices to overcome the limitations associated with e-learning (Chang, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2020; Pourdavood & Song, 2021). Additionally, there were opportunities for teachers and educators to collaborate with each other to improve online teaching and develop digital skills (Hibszer & Tracz, 2021; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2020; Pourdavood & Song, 2021). Online learning also offered new possibilities of assessing students’ learning (access to tests and activities) and the use of e-platforms in extracurricular learning activities for the purpose of individualized instruction (Hibszer & Tracz, 2021).

There are a number of determinants of effective teaching and learning in the context of distance education. Piotrowska et al. (2022) identified eight determinants: teacher’s capacity, student’s capacity, law or institutional determinants, technological and temporal determinants, distance learning models, assessment models, and communication. The teacher’s capacity, for example, depends on content knowledge, pedagogical and didactic preparation, and the ability to use digital technologies.

International research has highlighted the importance of research on K-12 educational levels and careful assessment of teaching and learning for various school subjects during the pandemic (Alea et al., 2020; Polat, 2022). The motivation for this study came from the need for more research on teaching and learning for social studies during the pandemic. Social studies as a school subject is of vital importance to the education of students because it promotes essential knowledge, skills, and values essentials for effective citizenship. As the National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS] (1994, p. 3) indicated, the main purpose of social studies is to “help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world”. Social studies, and its associated subjects such as geography and history, are considered to be core subjects in many educational systems around the world (e.g., Açıkalın, 2011; Al-Maamari et al., 2014; Mitchell & Lambert, 2015).

Within the current context of COVID-19, social studies educators have expressed an interest in exploring “crisis education”, which examines the various roles of education in addressing the essential knowledge, skills, and values needed for students in a time of crises (Kidman & Chang, 2020). In fact, COVID-19 offered both challenges and opportunities for social studies teaching and learning and its associated subjects (Chang, 2020; Usher & Dolan, 2021). Usher and Dolan (2021) argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has many geographical dimensions. For example, the spatial aspect of the pandemic can be communicated through maps accompanied with statistical data and vocalizations. The pandemic has highlighted socioeconomic inequalities around the world and has raised a wide range of important environmental questions. In relation to civic education, the pandemic has created learning opportunities on many issues ranging from the local to the global scale, including solidarity, economic inequality, and human rights (Besand, 2020; Mitoma & Marcus, 2020). Maguth (2020, p. 37) argued that COVID-19 has highlighted “the significance of social studies by serving as a refuge for youth and families to navigate and better understand this disaster. This includes serving as a cathartic space for learners grappling with current events as they unfold”.

Although there are several studies that shed light on some aspects of social studies education during the COVID-19 pandemic, we know little about collective findings on the impacts of the pandemic on social studies and its associated subjects. Therefore, this study was conducted to add to the current body of knowledge. With this in mind, the purpose of the current study was to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on social studies teaching and learning. In particular, the following question guided the current study: what opportunities and challenges have arisen in teaching and learning social studies during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## 2. Methodology

The current study used a literature review method to examine the opportunities and challenges which have arisen in teaching and learning social studies during COVID-19. Following Creswell's (2012) guidelines, the literature review began by identifying key words, locating research studies from online databases, evaluating research studies, summarizing the literature, organizing the literature, and writing the review.

### 2.1 The Literature Search

A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted to identify relevant studies. The search of articles began using the Scopus database. This step yielded 11 published articles; these were deemed unlikely to provide a comprehensive picture of social studies teaching and learning during the pandemic. The search was then extended to include Google Scholar and ERIC, which are considered comprehensive databases for educational research. The keywords used for the search were "social studies" and "COVID-19", "geography education" and "COVID-19", "history education" and "COVID-19", "citizenship education" and "COVID-19", and "civic education" and "COVID-19". Other relevant keywords were also used during the search process, such as "online learning", "e-learning", "remote learning", "Coronavirus", "curriculum", "teaching", "learning", "opportunities and challenges", and "K-12 education". An additional search was conducted to ensure the inclusion of related articles from certain academic journal websites such as *The Social Studies*, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, and *Teaching Geography*.

### 2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select articles for this review. In order to be included, articles had to be (a) relevant to K-12 social studies and its associated subjects (such as geography, history, and citizenship education) with a focus on COVID-19; (b) published between January 2020 and July 2022; (c) published in peer-reviewed academic journals; and (d) written in English or Arabic. It should be noted that a professional report (Rawlings Smith & Kinder, 2022) was included in this analysis because it was found relevant to the purpose of this study. Articles were excluded if they (a) did not explicitly address K-12 social studies during COVID-19, (b) focused on social studies or its associated subjects in a higher education context, and/or (c) were published in conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, and commentaries. A total of 53 relevant articles (50 English articles and 3 Arabic articles) were identified for the analysis.

### 2.3 Analysis of the Articles

Content analysis was used to examine the opportunities and challenges of social studies teaching and learning during COVID-19. It was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to synthesize existing educational literature on a particular topic or problem concerning human behavior (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

Using a classification scheme, each study was read and analyzed according to the basic information (title, author, year of publication, and journal), purpose/aim of the study, methodology, and opportunities and challenges related to teaching and learning social studies during COVID-19. This analysis allowed the studies to be organized and the similarities and differences between them to be identified.

Themes were developed inductively from the analysis of the articles. Attempts were made to read each article thoroughly and identify the opportunities and challenges. Of the 53 articles, 15 articles were examined by an independent reviewer to identify the opportunities and challenges in the studies. The results were discussed to resolve any differences in the analyses.

### 3. Findings

The findings are organized into an overview of the studies reviewed, opportunities of teaching and learning social studies, and challenges of teaching and learning social studies.

#### 3.1 Overview of the Studies Reviewed

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the studies were in the area of general social studies (47.2%) followed by geography education (35.8%). In terms of year of publication, most of the studies were published in 2021 (45.3%). The qualitative research methodology was the most widely used methodology (41.5%). The studies used a wide range of data collection tools, including questionnaires/surveys (32.3%), interviews (27.7%), and documents (20%). Most participants in the studies were teachers (50%) and K-12 students (34.8%).

**Table 1: Characteristics of the studies**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Social studies areas</i>		
Social studies	25	47.2
Geography education	19	35.8
Civic/citizenship education	6	11.3
History education	3	5.7
Total	53	100
<i>Year of publication</i>		
2020	17	32.1
2021	24	45.3
2022	12	22.6
Total	53	100
<i>Research methodologies</i>		
Qualitative research studies	22	41.5
Quantitative research studies	12	22.6
Mixed research studies	6	11.3
Theoretical studies (conceptual studies, review, and reflection on practice)	13	24.5
Total	53	100
<i>Data collection tools</i>		
Questionnaires/surveys	21	32.3
Interviews	18	27.7
Documents	13	20.0
Observations	8	12.3
Focus groups	1	1.5
Checklist	1	1.5

Portfolios	1	1.5
Achievement test	1	1.5
Fieldwork activities	1	1.5
Total	65	100
<i>Participants</i>		
Teachers	23	50
K-12 students	16	34.8
Pre-service teachers	3	6.5
Other participants (school heads, professionals, others)	4	8.7
Total	46	100

### 3.2. Opportunities Related to Teaching and Learning Social Studies during COVID-19

As indicated in Table 2, the most frequently emphasized opportunities were prioritizing curricular content and approaches (34%), followed by technology integration (28.3%), and innovative teaching practices (22.6%).

**Table 2: Opportunities related to teaching and learning social studies during COVID-19**

<b>Opportunities</b>	<i>f (n=53 studies)</i>	%
Prioritizing curricular content and approaches	18	34
Technology integration	15	28.3
Innovative teaching practices	11	20.8
Teacher collaboration and support	5	9.4
Flexible teaching	2	3.8
Implementing alternative ways of teaching	2	3.8

#### 3.2.1. Prioritizing Curricular Content and Approaches

A large number of studies (34%) focused on prioritizing curricular content and approaches (Al Edwan et al., 2021; Besand, 2020; Chang, 2020; Davies-Craine, 2021; Dolan & Usher, 2022; Forsythe & Chan, 2021; Giménez-Beut et al., 2022; Hassan, 2021; Hazen, 2020; McCorkle, 2020; McKendrick & Hammond, 2020; Mitoma & Marcus, 2020; Morri, 2020; Piedmont, 2020; Sittner, 2021; Sloggett, 2021; Usher & Dolan, 2022; van der Schee, 2020). The reviewed studies stressed a wide range of important curricular content and approaches, including health education, justice-centered education, digital citizenship education, human rights education, and children's everyday geographies (Table 3). For example, Sittner (2021) asserted the value of teaching geography of health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that it is "an invaluable topic providing students of all ages with opportunities to explore large data sets and develop their analytical skills; it can also deepen their understanding of issues linked to population pressures, urbanisation, migration, globalisation and sustainable development" (p. 24).

**Table 3: Examples of curricular content and approaches emphasized in the studies**

Examples	Studies
Developing empathy for others, tackling issues of misinformation, and hands-on activities through geo-technologies	Chang (2020)
Human-rights education	Mitoma & Marcus (2020)
Contextualizing the COVID-19 pandemic and providing students with reliable information	Hazen (2020)
Engaging children in their everyday geographies	McKendrick & Hammond (2020)
Enhancing fieldwork provision to cope with the COVID-19 restrictions	Sloggett (2021)
Geography of health	Davies-Craine (2021); Sittner (2021)
Connecting students with real-world and everyday experiences, focusing on current events, problem solving, the local environment, and global issues	Usher & Dolan (2021)
Consumer education	Al Edwan et al. (2021)
Justice-centered education	Forsythe & Chan (2021)
Digital citizenship	Hassan (2021)
Geo-literacy	Dolan & Usher (2022)

### 3.2.2. *Technology Integration*

As identified by 15 studies (28.3%), the COVID-19 pandemic offered the opportunity for integrating a wide range of technologies in social studies instruction (Akbulut et al., 2020; Akmal et al., 2021; Al-Nofli, 2022; Altunay, 2022; Atubi & Obro, 2020; Bagoly-simó et al., 2020; Chang, 2020; Dhimitri et al., 2021; Erol, 2021; Firomumwe, 2022; Geraghty & Kersiki, 2020; Jamiludin & Darnawati, 2021; Palaz, 2022; Piotrowska et al., 2022; Wagiono et al., 2022). Examples of technologies and applications were Google Earth, online atlases, Wordwall, Class 123, Padelt, Liveworksheets, and interactive boards. In the context of civic education, Akbulut et al. (2020) reported examples of the use of social media to increase student participation in national festivals during school closures.

### 3.2.3. *Innovative Teaching Practices*

Some studies (20.8%) focused on innovative teaching practices to enhance social studies instruction (Akinola, 2022; Chua et al., 2021; Khoiron et al., 2021; Kusumaningrum & Pramudiani, 2021; Nasution et al., 2021; Petrikovičová et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2021; Sudarmiani et al., 2021; Tetep & Dahlena, 2021; Torrau, 2020; Wagiono et al., 2022). For example, Chua et al. (2021) presented ways of simulating fieldwork by incorporating technology-enabled virtual field trips using 360° video clips, Google Cardboard and other curriculum materials and artefacts to enhance the authenticity of geographical investigation experiences for students in Singapore.

### 3.2.4. Teacher Collaboration and Support

Five studies (9.3%) indicated opportunities for teacher collaboration and support through professional development activities (Al-Nofli, 2022; Brown, 2020; Geraghty & Kersiki, 2020; Palaz, 2022; Rawlings Smith & Kinder, 2022). In England, for example, Rawlings Smith and Kinder (2022) noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had increased low-cost online professional development opportunities for teachers and educators, making them a more competitive space than previously. Based on the Southern African context, Brown (2020) identified several professional development activities for history teachers, including local and international webinars, conferences, and the availability of online teaching resources. In Oman, pre-service social studies teachers viewed their teaching experience during the pandemic as being valuable due to the professional support that they had received from cooperating teachers and administrators, including hands-on training in the use of instructional software and e-platforms (Al-Nofli, 2022).

### 3.2.5. Flexible Teaching

Two studies (3.8%) identified that COVID-19 offered an opportunity for social studies to be taught in a flexible way. Participants in Altunay's (2022) study stressed that one of the benefits of distance education was the opportunity for time- and place-independent learning. Palaz (2022) discussed "flexibility in space" whereby teachers and students could connect to online learning anywhere.

### 3.2.6. Implementing Alternative Ways of Teaching Social Studies

Two studies (3.8%) indicated an opportunity for using alternative ways of teaching social studies. Hensley et al. (2021) noted that teaching online encouraged participants to develop diverse ways of presenting social studies content. Given the limitations of online learning, pre-service social studies teachers in Al-Nofli's study (2022) reported the use of several teaching approaches in order to accommodate all students, including brainstorming, inquiry, problem solving, and the use of interactive visual aids.

## 3.3. Challenges of Social Studies Teaching and Learning during COVID-19

Analysis of the studies revealed several challenges involved in teaching and learning social studies during the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 4). Pedagogical challenges were the most frequently mentioned challenges (43.4%) followed by challenges associated with accessibility and connectivity (32.1%).

**Table 4: Challenges of social studies teaching and learning during COVID-19**

Challenges	<i>f</i> ( <i>n</i> =53)	%
Pedagogical challenges	23	43.4
Challenges associated with accessibility and connectivity	17	32.1
Administrative challenges	9	17
Lack of adequate professional development	8	15.1
Assessment of student learning	5	9.4
Other challenges	8	15.1



### 3.3.1. Pedagogical Challenges

Within this theme, the most frequently mentioned challenges were centered on the lack of active participation in online learning (47.8%), lack of communication (39.1%), lack of student motivation (26.1%), missed fieldwork opportunities (26.1%), and classroom management (21.7%) (Table 5).

**Table 5: Pedagogical challenges**

Challenges	<i>f</i> (n=23 Studies)	%
Lack of active participation	11	47.8
Lack of communication	9	39.1
Lack of student motivation	6	26.1
Missed fieldwork opportunities	6	26.1
Classroom management	5	21.7
Inability to use a wide range of instructional strategies	4	17.4
Locating digital resources	2	8.7
Difficulty in executing hands-on activities	2	8.7
Difficulty in planning hybrid learning	2	8.7
Student time management	1	4.3
Difficulty in meeting students' learning styles	1	4.3
Pacing of instruction	1	4.3
Difficulty in explaining abstract concepts	1	4.3
Low acquisition of knowledge and skills	1	4.3
Difficulty in developing some geography skills (e.g., observations and making GIS maps)	1	4.3

Concerns over students' active participation in online social studies classes were reported by 11 studies (47.8%) (Abu Tayeh & Al-Khawaldeh, 2022; Akbulut et al., 2020; Akca, 2020; Al-Nofli, 2022; Altunay, 2022; Babacan & Ceviz, 2022; Cakmak & Kakar, 2021; Elmorshed, 2020; Jamiludin & Darnawati, 2021; Palaz, 2022; Rawlings Smith & Kinder, 2022). For example, Babacan and Ceviz (2022) found that public and private school geography teachers reported inadequate student engagement in online classes (e.g., asking questions, raising hands, and engaging in discussions). Rawlings Smith and Kinder (2022) indicated that even digitally confident teachers raised concerns over implementing active learning strategies such as group work and inquiry.

For nine studies (39.1%), communication was cited as a challenge facing the online delivery of social studies education (Akbulut et al., 2020; Akca, 2020; Al-Nofli, 2022; Altunay, 2022; Babacan & Ceviz, 2022; Bagoly-simó et al., 2020; Erol, 2021; Manfra et al., 2022; Piotrowska et al., 2022). As Piotrowska et al. (2022) indicated, teacher-student communication plays an important role in online learning. It should support students' involvement and their social-emotional development, and be regular, frequent, and explanatory. Overall, studies varied in their focus on communication. For example, Bagoly-simó et al. (2020) provided details on communication with colleagues, school heads, and students. They noted that there was confusing and fragmented communication, particularly with disadvantaged students.

It was clear from the studies that social studies teachers faced critical pedagogical challenges during the pandemic. Other pedagogical challenges are reported in Table 5.

### 3.3.2. *Challenges Associated with Accessibility and Connectivity*

The second major challenge across the reviewed studies, in many educational contexts, was associated with accessibility and connectivity (32.1%) (Abu Tayeh & Al-Khawaldeh; Akca, 2020; Akbulut et al., 2020; Akmal et al., 2021; Al-Nofli, 2022; Altunay, 2022; Atubi & Obro, 2020; Babacan & Ceviz, 2022; Bariham et al., 2020; Cakmak & Kakar, 2021; Erol, 2021; Firomumwe, 2022; Geraghty & Kersiki, 2020; Jamiludin & Darnawati, 2021; Palaz, 2022; Rawlings Smith & Kinder, 2022; Yasin, 2022). Some studies pointed to students having poor Internet networks and insufficient hardware (computers, laptops, tablets, etc.) as the main challenges facing social studies instruction. Poor Internet connection affects teaching and learning in many ways, including affecting the quality of communication between the teacher and students and the quality of multimedia used during live sessions, reducing students' motivation, and preventing them from accessing and persisting with online classes (e.g., Altunay, 2022; Palaz, 2022). Insufficient technology infrastructure to support online learning in schools was also reported in the studies, with teachers having difficulty accessing school platforms.

### 3.3.3. *Administrative Challenges*

Administrative challenges facing social studies teachers were cited by nine studies (17%). Examples of administrative challenges included finding the balance between supervision and support for students, the availability of learning spaces, equipment, and parental supervision (Bagoly-simó et al., 2020), limited instructional time for social studies or its associated subjects (Al-Nofli, 2022; Babacan & Ceviz, 2022; Bagoly-simó et al., 2020; Rawlings Smith & Kinder, 2022), limited coverage of COVID-19 in the curriculum (Akbulut et al., 2020), modifying the curriculum for online learning (Babacan & Ceviz, 2022), a reduction in the scope of the curriculum (Piotrowska et al., 2022), more time for class preparation and communication with students and parents (Piotrowska et al., 2022), a lack of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy to guide online learning in secondary schools (Bariham et al., 2020), and a lack of coordination between school districts and schools as well as the absence of a vision and regulations for implementing online learning (Yasin, 2022).

### 3.3.4. *Lack of Adequate Professional Development*

Another noteworthy challenge reported by 15.1% was related to the lack of professional development (Altunay, 2022; Bariham et al., 2021; Dhimitri et al., 2021; Erol, 2021; Firomumwe, 2022; Hensley et al., 2021; Jamiludin & Darnawati, 2021; Yasin 2022). Erol (2021) pointed out that the majority of social studies teachers raised concern over their teaching performance. During their teacher training they had not received any e-learning instruction. They participated in online learning activities by trial and error or benefited mostly from experienced teachers in their schools. Evidence from the reviewed studies shed light on the lack of digital literacy among social studies teachers (Bariham et al., 2021; Dhimitri et al., 2021; Jamiludin & Darnawati, 2021).

### 3.3.5. Assessment of Student Learning

Concerns over assessment of student learning were reported by five studies (9.4%) (Abu Tayeh & Al-Khawaldeh, 2022; Al-Nofli, 2022; Babacan & Ceviz, 2022; Jamiludin & Darnawati, 2021; Petrikovičová et al., 2021). Assessment was a challenging aspect of teaching social studies during the pandemic in terms of using suitable assessment methods, determining student achievement levels, and dealing with individual differences (Al-Nofli, 2022). Additionally, Babacan and Ceviz (2022) reported that attending online classes regularly helped students to achieve more learning outcomes. Petrikovičová et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of formative assessment and recognition of the student's efforts.

### 3.3.6. Other Challenges

Other additional challenges mentioned in the reviewed studies included: the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' skills and competencies (Abu Tayeh & Al-Khawaldeh, 2022; Elmorshed, 2020; Rawlings Smith & Kinder, 2022), student absenteeism (Babacan & Ceviz, 2022; Palaz, 2022), students' health problems (Akca, 2020; Brown, 2021), and teacher isolation (Manfra et al., 2022).

## 4. Discussion

The unprecedented circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 crisis provided several opportunities for social studies and its associated subjects. The reviewed studies prioritized several content areas for students, including health education, justice-centered education, consumption education, everyday learning experiences, and global issues (Table 2). Indeed, this recognizes the importance of social studies in promoting knowledge, skills, and values associated with effective citizenship. As the NCSS (1994) indicated, K-12 social studies programs should address recent issues and real-life problems and issues related to academic disciplines. They should help students "develop a deeper understanding of how to know, how to apply what they know, and how to participate in building a future" (p. 5).

An important opportunity highlighted in the reviewed studies was associated with the integration of technology into social studies teaching. Rawlings Smith and Kinder (2022) indicated that teachers who were digitally literate and vertically connected with online technologies pre-pandemic were well positioned to teach online and support students and colleagues during the pandemic. The increased integration of technology was also noted in other school subjects such as science education (Al Darayseh, 2020; Chadwick & McLoughlin, 2020) and English language instruction (Astutik, et al., 2022; Marchlik et al., 2021).

The reviewed studies reported several challenges for teaching social studies during the pandemic. The most frequently mentioned challenges were pedagogical challenges, including lack of active participation, lack of communication, and lack of student motivation (Table 5). Erol (2021) pointed to certain activities and strategies that enhance student participation and motivation in online learning for social studies such as comic strips, cartoons, animations, videos, games, and interactive activities. In spite of this, however, challenges associated with accessibility and connectivity have had profound effects on social studies instruction. Crompton et al. (2021) pointed to a variety of resources to

support online learning, including physical (hardware/software), cognitive (skills and knowledge), spatial, and infrastructure resources.

The absence of fieldwork was very apparent due to safe distancing measures adopted by school administrations. However, it is interesting to see that some researchers reported opportunities for fieldwork through virtual fieldtrips (Chua et al., 2021; Firomumwe, 2022) and the use of school grounds (Sloggett, 2021). This finding suggests that COVID-19 prompted teachers to implement innovative teaching practices.

With a rapid switch to online learning, professional development for teachers was a key factor for successful implementation of online learning (Brown et al., 2021; Dolighan & Owen, 2021). However, it is clear from the reviewed studies that there is a need to enhance social studies teachers' skills in a wide range of areas, including the use of online platforms, geotechnologies, and active learning in online formats (Altunay, 2022; Bariham et al., 2021; Dhimitri et al., 2021; Hensley et al., 2021; Piotrowska et al., 2022; Yasin 2022). This finding is consistent with international research findings on teachers of other school subjects (Chadwick & McLoughlin, 2020; Marchlik et al., 2021; Woltran et al., 2021).

Analysis of the studies raised concern over the status of social studies or associated subjects during the pandemic. In Germany, geography teachers experienced explicit or implicit discrimination against school geography, including a focus on mathematics, German, and science at the expense of other school subjects (Bagoly-simó et al., 2020). In England, teaching time available for geography at Key Stage 3 was "significantly constrained" (Rawlings Smith & Kinder, 2022). In Oman, there was only one hour per week devoted to social studies instruction across grade levels (Al-Nofli, 2022). This was due to reduced online study hours and the emphasis given to other school subjects such as Arabic, English, and mathematics. In Poland, Piotrowska et al. (2022) indicated that distance education did not enable the geography curriculum requirements to be fully met. There was a reduction in the curriculum materials covered during online teaching compared to traditional teaching. Given this problem, social studies teachers were less likely to develop essential knowledge, skills, and values during the pandemic.

Despite school closures caused by the pandemic in many countries around the world, learning loss was not a significant topic in most of the reviewed studies. It refers to the difference between what students would have learned in a normal academic year and what they learned during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pier et al., 2021). In one study, Piotrowska et al. (2022) reported a low possibility of developing geography skills in the areas of, for example, observations and measurements, creating maps with GIS, and group presentations. It is worth noting that a recent report by UNESCO and the Council of Europe (2021) pointed out that the majority of students in Europe and the MENA region "lost out on opportunities to have their voice heard and to learn the competences to assert their rights as a result of the pandemic" (p. 15). Opportunities for students to express their opinions concerning school life, community actions, classroom discussions, and volunteering were deeply impacted during the lockdowns. These opportunities represent core competencies of the social studies curriculum.

Further research is needed to explore learning loss in order to develop a better understanding of the effect of the pandemic on student learning in social studies.

### **5. Limitations**

One limitation regarding the findings was related to the range of inclusion criteria mentioned in the methodology, including time period and keywords used in this review. As mentioned earlier, it was difficult to find studies with the same keywords because of the variability of words used in the titles of the studies. In addition, the reviewed studies varied widely in many ways, including in terms of objectives, educational contexts, sample sizes and demographics, data collection tools, and timing of data collection. This had implications for the findings of the current study. As Hulk and Zhang (2022) reported in their analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on K-12 education, participants in studies conducted in the early period of COVID-19 might have changed their behavior and perceptions after becoming accustomed to online education. Furthermore, social studies is a broad school subject and encompasses a wide range of sub-disciplines and themes. It is possible that some studies were not included in this review. Despite the limitations, this study provided an overview of the opportunities and challenges facing social studies teaching and learning within the context of COVID-19.

### **6. Conclusion**

The current study explored K-12 social studies in the unprecedented context of COVID-19 that led to both challenges and opportunities. Based on the main findings of the study, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 prompted social studies teachers and educators to prioritize important content areas in the social studies curriculum (e.g., health education, human-rights education, digital citizenship, and children's everyday geographies), integrate a wide range of technologies, and implement innovative teaching practices. In spite of these opportunities, there were some common challenges facing social studies that raised concern across international contexts, including pedagogical challenges, technical and administrative challenges, and insufficient professional development.

It is hoped that this study will help social studies teachers and researchers reflect on social studies and further explore their practices. Further research is needed to explore more recent studies on the impact of COVID-19 on social studies. In addition, there needs to be a greater focus on learning loss that K-12 students experienced in the area of social studies. Although some studies highlighted challenges associated with assessing student learning, learning loss was not the primary focus of the studies. Furthermore, in response to an integration of technology in social studies teaching during the pandemic, there is a need to explore if this opportunity will continue in the post-pandemic context.

## 7. References

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