

TEACHING DIFFICULT HISTORY IN THE DEEP SOUTH OF THAILAND: HOW TEACHERS APPLY JUSTICE-SENSITIVE PEDAGOGY INTO THE CLASSROOMS

¹Pattawee Daengkomane ² Hsiao-Lan Chen

^{1, 2} National Taiwan Normal University, Republic of China (Taiwan)

Corresponding Author E-mail: pattaweedaengkomane@gmail.com

Article Received: April 26, 2026. Revised: May 20, 2026. Accepted: May 23, 2026.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is: 1) to examine how teachers conceptualize Justice-sensitive Pedagogy (JSP); 2) to explore how teachers apply JSP in teaching difficult history topics; and 3) to investigate the institutional, political, and pedagogical constraints affecting the implementation of JSP in the deep south provinces of Thailand. A qualitative case study approach was used to study six secondary school teachers from six schools with diverse educational contexts. In addition, interviews were conducted with two university educators and two education policymakers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis.

The results show that teachers viewed JSP not as a completely new teaching method, but rather as an approach they had already applied indirectly in classroom practice. This indirect teaching strategy was influenced by the national curriculum, which does not explicitly include difficult history content, resulting in teaching practices that depended largely on individual teachers' choices and interpretations. The findings also indicate that ongoing violence in the three southern provinces, as well as differences between public schools and private Islamic schools, affected the design of teaching and learning activities. Institutional limitations, political sensitivities, and pedagogical challenges were found to constrain the implementation of JSP in schools. This study argues that the effectiveness of JSP cannot rely solely on the individual abilities of teachers, but requires systematic support through teacher training, curriculum development, learning materials, and educational policies. This study provides practical insights and theoretical support for the development of history education and peace-oriented pedagogy in conflict-affected contexts.

Keywords: Justice-Sensitive Pedagogy, Difficult History, History Education, Deep South Thailand

Introduction

Thai education often portrays the three southernmost provinces—Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat as integral parts of the nation but they occupy an interesting place in the national historical imagination. The Malay Muslim communities in this region still remember their past before being annexed by Siam during the colonial era, the cultural oppression stemming from nationalist policies in the mid-20th century, and the unresolved violence.

This feature of the educational landscape in the deep south may be one of the most pedagogically consequential, the gap between what history is known from official narratives and community historical consciousness. Although history curricula often ignore local history, particularly the history of conflict between central authority and regional powers, students gain experience of this history through family stories and community accounts, detailing why their areas were rife with violence and control.

Justice-sensitive Pedagogy (JSP) is an approach widely used in teaching history in conflict zones, yet it remains relatively under-explored in Thailand. JSP pertains to those societies afflicted by historical injustice in which the stakes of what gets taught and what gets silenced go well beyond academic performance (Davies, 2017; Novelli et al., 2017; Ramírez-Barat & Duthie, 2017). This literature is mostly rooted in post-conflict societies that have some institutional acceptance such as the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa, a shared history curriculum in Northern Ireland or a citizenship education project following peace-agreement with respect to Colombia. Thailand's Deep South provides a structurally distinct context—of an unresolved and persistent conflict where no formal reconciliation process takes place, where the state is not only silent regarding its place in historical injustice but also actively ignore calls for such recognition, and where teachers have to contest with autonomous demands placed by justice-sensitive history education.

Objectives of this Research

1. How do teachers conceptualize JSP.
2. How do teachers apply JSP to teach difficult history topics.
3. What institutional, political and pedagogical constraints affect the implementation of JSP.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018; Stake, 2006) to examine the implementation of Justice-sensitive Pedagogy (JSP) in teaching difficult history topics in the Deep South provinces of Thailand. The study involved six secondary school history and social studies teachers from Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The participants

represented institutional variation, including three teachers from private Islamic schools and three teachers from public schools. Teaching experience ranged from one to twelve years, allowing the study to explore different stages of JSP practice and professional development. The participating schools also represented diverse educational contexts, including urban and rural settings. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants teachers

Code	Pseudonym	Gender	Teaching Experience	School Type	Location
TA	Adam	Male	12 yrs	Islamic private school	Narathiwat
TB	Bobby	Male	4 yrs	Public school	Narathiwat
TC	Charlie	Male	3 yrs	Islamic private school	Pattani
TD	Diana	Female	1 yr	Public school	Yala
TE	Evan	Male	4 yrs	Islamic private school	Yala
TF	Federick	Male	1 yr	Public school	Pattani

2. Research Participants

The participants consisted of six secondary school teachers teaching history and social studies in the Deep South provinces of Thailand. This study included teachers from both public schools and private Islamic schools to reflect institutional diversity in the region. Additional participants included two university teacher educators and two policymakers involved in curriculum and education development.

3. Research Tools

Four main research tools were used in this study to collect qualitative data: 1) semi-structured interview protocols for teachers, 2) classroom observation and field note forms, 3) lesson plan design tasks based on the JSP framework, and 4) interview protocols for teacher educators and policymakers.

4. Shared Pedagogical Framework

A shared Justice-sensitive Pedagogy (JSP) framework was introduced to all participating teachers before lesson design and classroom implementation. The framework aimed to establish a common understanding of JSP principles and their application in teaching difficult and controversial historical topics.

5. Lesson Design

Each teacher designed two lesson plans focusing on difficult and controversial historical topics related to the Southern Thailand context. The lesson plans included learning objectives, teaching methods, instructional activities, historical content, and assessment strategies. The lesson design process reflected each teacher's interpretation and adaptation of JSP within their own school context.

6. Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted in several stages. First, all six teachers participated in initial interviews exploring their professional background, understanding of JSP, and experiences teaching sensitive historical issues. Second, teachers designed lesson plans based on the shared JSP framework. Third, classroom observations were conducted while teachers implemented their lessons, with the researcher observing from the back of the classroom and recording field notes. Fourth, follow-up interviews were conducted for approximately 30 minutes with each teacher to reflect on teaching decisions, classroom experiences, and challenges encountered during implementation. Finally, interviews were conducted with two teacher educators and two policymakers to obtain broader perspectives on the integration of JSP into teacher education and educational policy.

7. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The researcher identified recurring themes and patterns with high frequency across the interview transcripts, lesson plans, and classroom observations. Major themes included teachers' views of JSP as morality-based teaching, the use of indirect teaching approaches, the practice of multi-perspectivity, and institutional and political limitations affecting JSP implementation. Comparative analysis was then conducted to examine similarities and differences among cases across different school contexts. Perspectives from teacher educators and policymakers were incorporated to strengthen the interpretation of the findings. Finally, the results were interpreted in relation to relevant conceptual frameworks and literature to provide recommendations for improving the effectiveness of JSP in conflict-affected educational contexts.

Research Result

1. The teacher views JSP as a way of teaching that values morality

When teachers teach difficult history, especially the traumatic history of communities that conflict with national history, teaching these topics is valuable and a duty. Many incidents in the three southern provinces involved injustice and violence. Teaching these stories is considered an ethical responsibility for teachers, ensuring students understand what happened in the past. Most teachers feel that teaching traumatic history is something they already do, but simply discussing it is enough. Having a JSP framework helps them design more effective lessons.

Teacher Adam, who teaches at a small community school, explains this interestingly: it's an "Amanah," meaning sacred obligation. He says, "When I teach history at this small school, I'm not just teaching the content, but also the Amanah from the parents, to teach their children the history of their community." Adam continues that even though he

wasn't familiar with the JSP framework before, many of its elements were things he already used to teach his students.

Teacher Evan teaches at a large, Islamic private school. The atmosphere is lively, and he's the head of the history department, holding a master's degree in history. He agrees with the JSP approach: "Learning about the past is a duty teachers must fulfill, even if the state doesn't want us to teach it. We have a duty to speak the truth, and ultimately, history must emphasize evidence." Meanwhile, Teacher Federick, considered a younger teacher in a public school, observes that public schools have a strict framework: history is a subject that shapes nationhood, so anything that contradicts this is considered a risk. "But I try to teach by giving students diverse perspectives, encouraging analysis, and asking questions, which is part of JSP," he says. This teaching style isn't new; many teachers already do it. If JSP were officially supported, such as with teaching manuals or resources, teachers wouldn't have to constantly worry about self-censorship and could fully dedicate themselves to teaching this challenging history.

Regarding how teachers perceive their role, these teachers' opinions reflect that they don't view JSP as a novel teaching method, but rather something they already use in the classroom. They see teaching for justice as more about ethics than opposing the state.

2. Indirect Teaching and Multi-Perspectivity in JSP Practice

Although all teachers in this study demonstrated a strong understanding of Justice-sensitive Pedagogy (JSP), classroom implementation revealed that they commonly applied JSP through indirect teaching strategies and multi-perspectival approaches. Across lesson plans and classroom observations, teachers rarely addressed political violence or controversial historical events directly. Instead, they used leading questions, historical inquiry, role-playing activities, and comparative analysis of multiple sources to encourage students to think critically about historical conflicts and social issues.

The most explicit example was Adam's questioning strategy. Rather than directly discussing a specific conflict, he used broader analytical questions related to regional diversity, inequality, and state reform, asking students to consider why some groups supported reforms while others opposed them. This indirect teaching approach functioned as an adaptive strategy in a conflict-affected environment where openly discussing resistance to the state could be politically sensitive. Through questioning techniques, historical evidence, and discussion of multiple perspectives, teachers were able to create safer spaces for critical reflection without directly confronting sensitive political issues.

Another example was Charlie's lesson on the construction of the Saen Saep Canal during the early Rattanakosin period. Charlie connected national history with local historical memory by discussing how people from the southern provinces were reportedly conscripted as laborers after losing wars against Siam. These narratives, transmitted through local

community memory rather than official textbooks, enabled students to connect national historical narratives with local experiences. This demonstrated the importance of teachers' broader historical knowledge and their ability to integrate local history into classroom teaching.

Many teachers also employed the historical method to promote critical thinking and multi-perspectivity. For example, Bobby taught the Tak Bai violence through document investigation and source analysis, requiring students to reconstruct events using information from multiple sources. This method encouraged students to ask questions, analyze evidence, interpret historical information, and present findings collaboratively.

Role-playing activities were another common instructional strategy. Students were assigned different social roles, such as government officials, local administrators, community members, journalists, and merchants, in order to examine historical events from different perspectives. While this method encouraged empathy and perspective-taking, classroom observations revealed some limitations. Students often relied on personal assumptions rather than historical evidence when representing their assigned roles, limiting the depth of analysis.

An exception was Evan's lesson on the cultural suppression policies of the Phibunsongkhram government. Evan employed a three-source structure consisting of official government documents, Malay community narratives, and scholarly analysis. The comparison between state narratives and community experiences created opportunities for meaningful critical discussion and deeper historical analysis. The inclusion of academic perspectives further strengthened students' ability to compare evidence and engage in reflective discussion.

These findings suggest that indirect teaching and multi-perspectivity are not signs of weak JSP implementation, but rather contextually adaptive practices shaped by political sensitivities, institutional limitations, and ongoing violence in the Deep South. In this context, JSP emerged not as direct political confrontation, but as a pedagogical approach that encourages critical inquiry, moral reflection, and dialogue through historically grounded and carefully mediated classroom practices.

3. Limitations and challenges of JSP

Comparing two types of schools, public schools and private Islamic schools, significant differences were found. Observational data on teaching revealed that the classroom atmosphere in private Islamic schools was more relaxed, and students were more willing to express their opinions and participate in activities. Teachers feel less pressured, and students express themselves more freely. The advantage of the current history curriculum, while specifying what to teach but not how to teach, allows teachers freedom to teach using methods they deem appropriate. Conversely, the atmosphere in public schools is quite different. Some teachers experience anxiety whenever they have to teach difficult history topics. Even though public and private schools use the same curriculum and allow teachers

discretion in their teaching methods, fear of bureaucracy and state authority causes teachers to avoid discussing the subject. A sense of safety is crucial to the JSP.

Developing teachers who are confident in teaching difficult history may need to start in the university. In interviews, two university teacher educators agreed that we should promote JSP from the time teachers are studying curriculum and teaching methodology. If teachers learn these methods, they will have a better understanding of how to teach in the classroom. The problems in current history education, as observed by both professors, include rote memorization and a chronological learning approach, focusing on content rather than historical methodology. There is a lack of innovative and engaging teaching perspectives. They believe JSP is highly effective, especially for use in the deep south of Thailand.

Implementing a JSP at the national level may be difficult. Interviews with policymakers reveal that history, a subject under particular scrutiny for its role in national identity building, is viewed with suspicion. Political parties that play a key role in pushing education policy are often reluctant to get involved in revising history curricula that contradict mainstream history in order to maintain their popularity. However, they see it as more feasible and effective at the local or classroom level, as the curriculum allows teachers to design their lessons according to their strengths. Another policymaker shares this view, emphasizing the need to start at the local, classroom, and school levels. This allows teachers to see JSP as a teaching method that rekindles societal importance for justice, considered a crucial step in ending violence.

Research Discussion

JSP was adopted and adapted even by the six teachers who were willing to do so, and they often aligned JSP with pre-existing ethical orientations tied to their professional identity, their religiosity or faith community affiliation; however, its enactment remained uneven, fragile and contingent on personal agency. The courage to teach sensitive topics, as demonstrated by teachers Adam and Ivan, may not only be due to personal courage but also to the institutional structure of the private Islamic school. Even though the history curriculum didn't specify learning standards and indicators related to local history, the teachers were able to integrate the content with national history.

When teaching sensitive topics, many teachers tend to emphasize indirect teaching methods, such as role-playing, open-ended questions using illustrative scenarios to introduce the lesson, or integrating local history into national history. This approach does not diminish the value of the JSP methodology; rather, it contributes to its effectiveness, as sensitive content can undermine established identities and familiar beliefs (Britzman, 2000). This research argues that indirect teaching is a context-dependent form of moral commitment within an unstructured environment.

Multi-perspectivity across cases was structurally there, but in the most part dialogically limited. This pattern expands on the findings from Northern Ireland that the extent to which students are willing to truly occupy different perspectives is determined not by structure but by how authentically safe their school climate is for such engagement (Barton & McCully, 2005). Findings confirm a tension outlined in existing literature about the epistemic space available for multi-perspectival inquiry (Carretero, 2011) being structurally constrained when curricula are organized around national identity production.

Observations of teachers' lesson plans reveal that teachers in public schools experience greater anxiety, both from institutional reprimands and political scrutiny. These are significant structural conditions that influence teachers' learning design, including teaching materials, content, and methods, ultimately affecting students. To maximize the effectiveness of Justice-sensitive Pedagogy, simultaneous action is needed at three levels: structural, curriculum, and institutional culture and teaching methods (Davies, 2017). Curriculum reform without pedagogical reform leads to cosmetic change, and pedagogy with curriculum reform results in mere isolated innovation that cannot be institutionalized (Cole 2007).

Research Body of Knowledge

Justice-sensitive Pedagogy (JSP) in the Deep South of Thailand is implemented primarily through three interconnected practices: indirect teaching, multi-perspectivity, and critical reflection. Teachers use indirect teaching strategies to create safer classroom environments for discussing sensitive historical issues, while multi-perspectival approaches encourage students to examine historical events from different viewpoints and sources. Critical reflection further enables students to consider issues of power, justice, and inequality within historical and contemporary contexts.

JSP cannot depend solely on individual teachers' moral commitment, but requires systematic support to be sustainable and effective. Therefore, curriculum reform, teacher preparation, and policy protection are identified as essential conditions for strengthening JSP implementation, particularly in conflict-affected educational contexts.

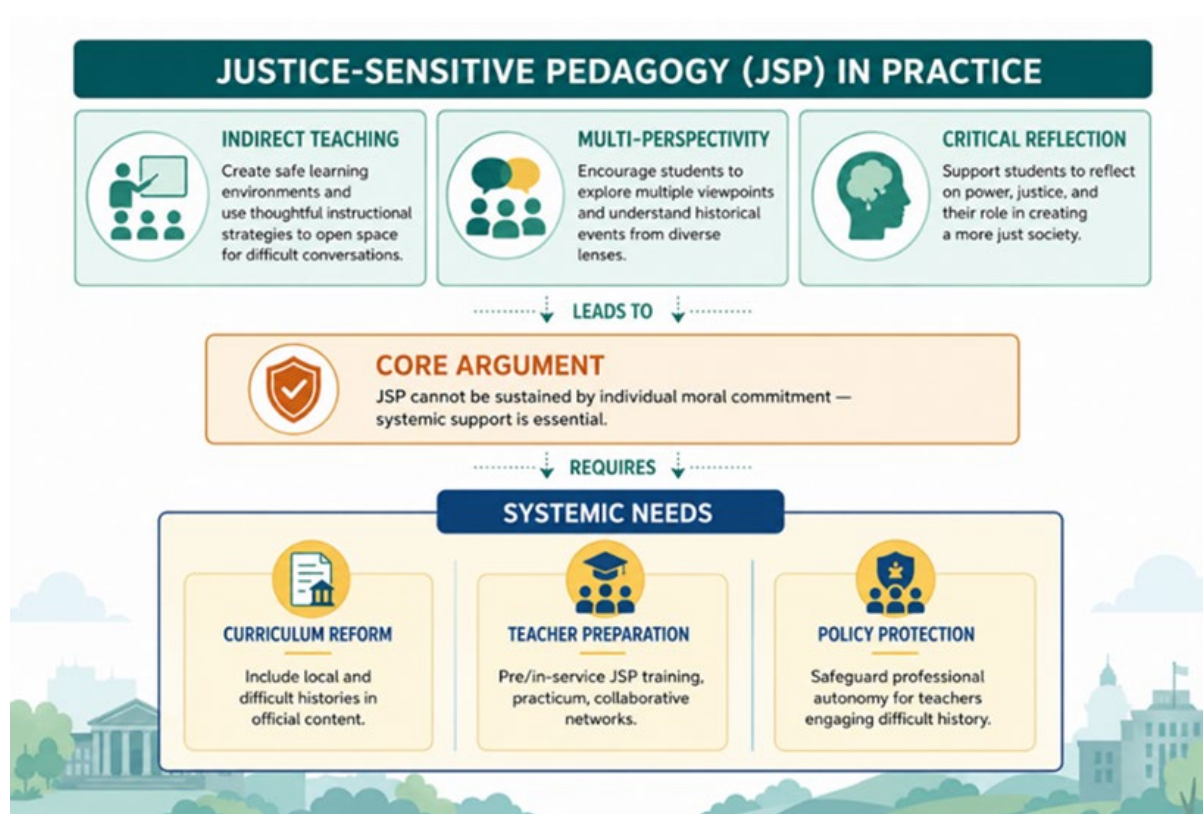


Figure 1 Research Body of Knowledge

Research Suggestions

1. Suggestions in Practice

1.1 Curriculum reform should formally recognize local histories and difficult historical topics as legitimate educational content within the national curriculum and assessment process. The development of state-supported teaching materials would help reduce teachers' dependence on individual interpretation and personal risk-taking when addressing sensitive historical issues.

1.2 Teacher education institutions should strengthen both pre-service and in-service training related to Justice-sensitive Pedagogy (JSP). Such training should not only introduce JSP as a teaching methodology, but also develop teachers' understanding of local community contexts, conflict-sensitive education, and strategies for facilitating discussions on controversial historical issues.

1.3 Educational policy frameworks should provide clearer institutional protection and professional autonomy for teachers engaging with difficult or politically sensitive historical content. Sustainable implementation of JSP requires institutional support beyond individual teacher commitment.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

2.1 Future research should examine the impact of JSP on students, particularly in relation to historical thinking, critical reflection, openness to diverse perspectives, and attitudes toward justice and conflict.

2.2 Longitudinal research following students over time could further explain how exposure to JSP shapes identity formation, intercultural understanding, and perspectives on conflict and citizenship.

References

- Alan McCully. (2012). History teaching, conflict and the legacy of the past. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 7(2), 145–159.
- Clara Ramírez-Barat and Roger Duthie. (2017). Education and transitional justice: Opportunities and challenges for peacebuilding. International Center for Transitional Justice.
- Deborah P. Britzman. (2000). If the story cannot end: Deferred action, ambivalence, and difficult knowledge. *Educational Theory*, 50(2), 143–159.
- Elizabeth A. Cole. (2007). Transitional justice and the reform of history education. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(1), 115–137.
- Hasan Madmarn. (1999). The pondok and madrasah in Patani. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press.
- Joseph Chinyong Liow and Don Pathan. (2010). Confronting ghosts: Thailand's shapeless southern insurgency. Lowy Institute for International Policy.
- Julia Paulson. (2015). "Whether and how?" History education about recent and ongoing conflict: A review of research. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 1(1), 14–47.
- Keith Barton and Alan McCully. (2005). History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland: An empirical study of secondary students' ideas and perspectives. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(1), 85–116.
- Lynn Davies. (2017). Justice-sensitive education: The implications of transitional justice mechanisms for teaching and learning. *Comparative Education*, 53(3), 333–350.
- Mario Carretero. (2011). Constructing patriotism: Teaching history and memories in global worlds. Information Age Publishing.
- Mario Novelli, Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo and Alan Smith. (2017). The 4Rs framework: Analyzing education's contribution to sustainable peacebuilding with social justice in conflict-affected contexts. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 3(1), 14–43.
- Michalinos Zembylas. (2014). Theorizing "difficult knowledge" in the aftermath of the affective turn: Implications for curriculum and pedagogy in handling traumatic representations. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(3), 390–412.

- Muhammadafeefee Assalihee, Nachima Bakoh, Yusop Boonsuk and Jaruwat Songmuang. (2024). Transforming Islamic education through Lesson Study (LS): A classroom-based approach to professional development in Southern Thailand. *Education Sciences*, 14(9), 1029.
- Robert E. Stake. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. Guilford Press.
- Robert K. Yin. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. 6th ed. Sage.
- Surasak Visalaporn. (2009). Educational management conditions in southern border provinces [in Thai]. Office of the Secretary of the National Education Council, Ministry of Education.
- Tejendra Pherali. (2021). Social justice, education and peacebuilding: Conflict transformation in Southern Thailand. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 53, 710–727.
- Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.