IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)
e-ISSN: 2320–7388, p- ISSN: 2320-737x Volume 15, Issue 3 Ser. 2 (May. – June. 2025), 13-18
www.iosrjournals.org

Developing Using Maps In Teaching Theme 3 "Protecting Vietnam's Sovereignty, Rights And Legitimate Interests In The East Sea" (Grade 9) At Lower Secondary School To Develop Students' Thinking Skills

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Abstract
In the context of educational reform and the growing demand to improve the quality of teaching History and Geography at the lower secondary level, the development of students' thinking skills plays a crucial role. It not only enables learners to actively acquire knowledge but also equips them with the capacity to flexibly apply what they learn to real-life situations.
This article proposes three pedagogical measures aimed at fostering historical and geographical thinking skills among Grade 9 students through the teaching of Theme 3: "Protecting Vietnam's Sovereignty, Rights and Legitimate Interests in the East Sea." These measures include: (1) Using historical and geographical maps to develop students' analytical thinking; (2) Integrating source analysis with graphic organizers to enhance students' synthesizing skills; and (3) Organizing creative project-based learning activities with digital maps and real-world data to nurture students' creative thinking abilities.
The research findings indicate that the implementation of these measures not only contributes to innovating teaching approaches aligned with competency-based education but also creates favorable conditions for students to develop higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, civic awareness, and social responsibility. The article further emphasizes the pivotal role of teachers in designing active learning activities, stimulating creativity, and connecting curricular knowledge to current social issues, thereby making History and Geography more accessible, engaging, and practically meaningful in students' lives.

Key Word: *Historical and Geographical Thinking, Thinking Skills, Source Analysis, Graphic Organization, Sovereignty over the East Sea.*

Date of Submission: 06-05-2025 Date of Acceptance: 16-05-2025

I. Introduction

The East Sea is not only a vital living space closely associated with the historical process of national establishment and defense for the Vietnamese people, but also a sacred and inseparable part of the country's sovereign territory. In the context of ongoing and complex developments in the East Sea, it is essential to educate students about Vietnam's sovereignty, rights, and legitimate interests in this maritime region.

Theme 3 of the Grade 9 History and Geography curriculum provides a comprehensive body of knowledge concerning historical evidence, legal foundations, strategic importance, and development potential of Vietnam's seas and islands. However, in order for this content to be meaningfully internalized and translated into student competencies—particularly thinking skills—there is a need for teachers to innovate both instructional methods and teaching tools.

Among these tools, maps serve as an effective visual medium capable of clarifying historical–geographical space, bridging abstract knowledge with practical contexts, and thereby enabling students to analyze, compare, evaluate, synthesize, and critique information. This article proposes a number of pedagogical measures involving the use of maps in teaching Theme 3, with the goal of developing students' thinking skills at the lower secondary level.

II. Material And Methods

Document collection: The authors compiled a range of materials, including administrative maps, ancient maps such as *Toản tập Thiên Nam tứ chí lộ đồ thư* (17th century) and *Đại Nam nhất thống toàn đồ* (1838), maps of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), maps illustrating the current status of territorial disputes, and legal documents at both international and national levels (e.g., UNCLOS, Vietnam's Law of the Sea).

Analytical–synthetic method: The content of Theme 3 was analyzed; the role of maps in developing students' thinking skills was systematized; and the results of both theoretical and practical applications of maps in teaching sovereignty over seas and islands were synthesized.

Sociological survey: Surveys were conducted among teachers and students to assess the current status of map usage and the level of students' thinking skills when learning about Vietnam's maritime sovereignty.

Pedagogical experiment: A teaching experiment was designed and implemented for Theme 3 using maps. The development of students' thinking was assessed through written tests, classroom observations, and student feedback questionnaires.

III. Result

The Concept of "Thinking Skills"

According to the *Vietnamese Dictionary* [1], thinking is a psychological activity that reflects the properties, internal relationships, and essence of objects and phenomena that were previously unknown. Thinking skills are defined as the ability to think independently and solve problems in a way that produces effective results [2].

In our view, thinking skills refer to a person's ability to think critically, analyze, evaluate, and solve problems in a logical and effective manner. Specifically, historical and geographical thinking skills are cognitive abilities that enable learners to approach, analyze, and evaluate events, phenomena, and issues in space and time from historical and geographical perspectives. These skills include the ability to utilize historical evidence and geographical data, identify cause-and-effect relationships, recognize change and continuity over time, examine multiple perspectives and spatial dimensions, conduct systems analysis, and evaluate contextual factors. Collectively, these abilities help learners form grounded, meaningful, and comprehensive understandings of the past, present, and contemporary geo-social issues.

Developing Students' Thinking Skills in History and Geography Education

The development of historical and geographical thinking skills in students involves the structured organization and design of learning tasks that align with multiple levels of cognitive processing. These tasks aim to encourage students to apply higher-order thinking skills—such as analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and critical reflection—in order to extract, process, and connect information from various historical sources and geographical data.

This process enables students to address complex spatio-temporal problems and to construct a deep, integrated, and meaningful understanding of historical and geographical realities. In this study, we adopted the framework of thinking skills in history and geography education as outlined in Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum, as presented in Table 1 [3].

Table 1. Structure of Thinking Skills in History and Geography Education

No.	Component Skill	Indicators of Performance
1	Historical and Geographical Analysis	- Analyze the causes, developments, and consequences of historical events and geographical phenomena. - Examine cause-and-effect relationships within historical, natural, and socio-economic processes. - Analyze the impacts of natural conditions and socio-economic factors on events and phenomena.
2	Historical and Geographical Synthesis	- Synthesize information from multiple sources (texts, maps, charts, images, statistics, etc.) to reconstruct a historical event or geographical phenomenon. - Connect events and phenomena to form a systematic and comprehensive perspective.
3	Historical and Geographical Evaluation	- Formulate personal judgments based on the analysis of historical evidence and geographical data. - Assess the reliability and objectivity of historical and geographical sources. - Compare and contrast different viewpoints to draw well-founded conclusions.
4	Problem Solving in History and Geography	- Apply historical and geographical knowledge to address real-world issues. - Analyze and predict developmental trends based on lessons from the past and current geo-social conditions.
5	Creative Thinking in History and Geography	- Propose hypotheses or new ideas in historical and geographical inquiry based on analyzed data. - Connect learning with real-life contexts and seek creative solutions to current social and environmental issues.

Table 1 illustrates that thinking skills in history and geography education can be developed through the application of specific pedagogical strategies, including: using historical and geographical maps to enhance students' analytical thinking; integrating source analysis with graphic organizers to foster synthesizing skills; and organizing creative project-based learning activities involving digital maps and real-world data to promote creative thinking.

Pedagogical Measures for Developing Thinking Skills in the Teaching of the Theme "Protecting Vietnam's Sovereignty, Rights, and Legitimate Interests in the East Sea"

Using Historical and Geographical Maps to Develop Students' Analytical Thinking

Historical and geographical maps are scaled representations of parts or the entirety of the Earth's surface, illustrating geographical and historical elements such as topography, political boundaries, historical events, and the developmental trajectories of various regions or countries. Constructed based on mathematical principles and standardized symbols, these maps support learners in perceiving space and time visually and accurately.

Analytical thinking is defined as the capacity to deconstruct complex information in order to examine and evaluate various dimensions, thereby identifying relationships among elements to clarify problems and propose solutions. This is a vital cognitive skill that enhances human understanding of the world, informs rational decision-making, and enables effective problem-solving.

The use of historical and geographical maps to develop analytical thinking involves organizing learning activities that encourage students to extract and process information embedded in map-based historical and geographical content. The objective is to train students in identifying, distinguishing, comparing, and evaluating spatial-temporal relationships, thereby fostering logical and systematic thinking aligned with real-world contexts.

The pedagogical application of maps in history and geography teaching offers several notable advantages. Firstly, maps serve as powerful visual tools that help students access and grasp abstract concepts more easily. Secondly, they foster an active learning environment, promoting autonomy and encouraging students to explore knowledge independently. Most importantly, by analyzing, comparing, and correlating spatial and temporal data, students have meaningful opportunities to refine their analytical thinking, assessment capabilities, and problem-solving skills.

To effectively utilize maps for developing analytical thinking, teachers should follow a structured and scientifically grounded process. Initially, teachers select appropriate maps relevant to the lesson content, ensuring clarity, visual effectiveness, and informational accuracy. Students are then guided in how to read maps, interpret symbols, and understand legends. From this foundation, they proceed to analyze spatial and temporal elements, establishing cause-and-effect relationships between historical and geographical phenomena.

This analytical process is deepened through classroom discussions that explore the impact of geographical and historical factors on contemporary realities. Finally, students apply the acquired knowledge to interpret or respond to real-world problems, thereby reinforcing and expanding their analytical thinking skills in a meaningful and practical way.

Example: In teaching the theme *"Protecting Vietnam's Sovereignty, Rights, and Legitimate Interests in the East Sea"* [4], teachers may use historical maps such as *Toản tập Thiên Nam tứ chí lộ đồ thư* (17th century) and *Đại Nam nhất thống toàn đồ* (1838) to enhance students' analytical thinking. Students are guided to read and interpret these maps, identify historical place names such as *Bãi Cát Vàng* and *Vạn lý Hoàng Sa*, and compare them with present-day maps. Based on this comparison, students analyze the spatial-temporal dimensions of Vietnam's process of establishing, exercising, and defending national sovereignty.

Subsequent activities involve group discussions and evaluations of historical evidence from both Vietnamese and Western sources, enabling students to assess the legality, objectivity, and continuity of national sovereignty claims. Finally, students apply the acquired knowledge to interpret or refute misinformation, thereby developing a grounded and logical form of analytical thinking connected to real-life issues.

This example clearly demonstrates that the use of historical and geographical maps not only enhances the visualization of knowledge but also creates conditions for students to analyze spatial-temporal relationships and establish logical causal links among historical events and phenomena. Consequently, students' analytical thinking skills are cultivated in a profound, evidence-based, and contextually relevant manner.

Integrating Source Analysis and Graphic Organizers to Develop Students' Synthesizing Thinking Skills

Source analysis refers to the process of collecting, analyzing, and utilizing information from various resources for the purposes of research, learning, or problem-solving. This process requires the ability to search, evaluate the reliability of, and selectively use information from a wide range of sources.

Graphic organization is a method of representing information, data, or ideas in the form of diagrams, charts, or visual illustrations. It simplifies and systematizes knowledge, making it easier for learners to access and retain information. This approach takes advantage of the brain's visual processing capacity to enhance learning effectiveness [5].

Synthesizing thinking is the cognitive process of combining distinct pieces of information to form a comprehensive understanding of an issue, identifying relationships among elements, and drawing generalized conclusions. This is an essential skill that enables individuals to solve problems creatively and effectively [2]. Developing synthesizing thinking entails fostering the capacity to connect and integrate diverse information to

construct a holistic understanding that can be applied to solve complex problems in both academic and real-life contexts.

The integration of source analysis with graphic organization to develop synthesizing thinking is an educational approach that combines the processes of gathering and analyzing data from various sources with representing that information through visual formats such as diagrams or mind maps. This method helps students identify relationships among key elements, systematize knowledge, and effectively develop their synthesizing thinking skills.

This combined method brings several advantages. Firstly, it helps systematize knowledge, allowing students to structure and present information in a logical and coherent manner. Secondly, the process of analyzing and processing data demands that students evaluate, connect, and integrate related elements, thereby forming a comprehensive perspective on the issue. Additionally, representing knowledge visually enhances memory retention, supports visual thinking, and improves the depth and sustainability of students' understanding.

To apply this method effectively, teachers should follow a structured process aligned with the learning objectives. Initially, teachers identify the core content and the specific synthesizing thinking skills to be developed. Then, relevant source materials are collected, filtered, and evaluated for their appropriateness to the lesson content and student profile. Based on this, students are guided to analyze information and present their understanding through graphic representations, such as conceptual diagrams or mind maps, illustrating the logical relationships among various historical and geographical elements.

This process is followed by classroom discussions, peer feedback, and revision of the visual products. Ultimately, students apply the knowledge gained to address real-world scenarios or engage in interdisciplinary learning tasks, thereby reinforcing and extending their synthesizing thinking skills.

Example: When teaching the lesson *"Historical Evidence and Legal Foundations for Vietnam's Maritime Sovereignty"* under Theme 2 [4], teachers can organize a pedagogical sequence aimed at developing students' synthesizing thinking skills. The objective is to help students understand the historical process of establishing and exercising maritime sovereignty, while also developing the ability to integrate, generalize, and systematize historical–geographical information.

Teachers may provide students with a variety of source materials, such as ancient maps (*Đại Nam Nhất Thống Toàn Đồ*, *Toản Tập Thiên Nam Tứ Chí Lộ Đồ Thư*) (Figure 1), imperial edicts from the Nguyễn Dynasty, legal documents (UNCLOS 1982, Vietnam's Law of the Sea 2012), photographs, and related news articles. Working in groups, students analyze these sources to identify chronological milestones, events, actors, and legal practices throughout Vietnam's historical assertion of sovereignty over its maritime territories.

Figure 1

Students then use this information to create mind maps or conceptual diagrams showing the interconnectedness between historical, legal, and spatial elements. These visual products are presented for class discussion, critique, and refinement under teacher guidance. Finally, students apply their synthesized understanding to write reflections or present personal viewpoints on the role of younger generations in safeguarding national sovereignty over the seas and islands, thereby reinforcing their synthesizing skills and practical engagement.

This example demonstrates that integrating source analysis and graphic organizers in teaching not only supports students in accessing and processing information systematically, but also enables them to connect, generalize, and present knowledge in a logically structured manner. This approach significantly contributes to the development of students' synthesizing thinking through the organization and interconnection of historical and geographical elements into a cohesive whole, grounded in practical and real-world contexts.

Organizing Creative Project-Based Activities with Digital Maps and Real-World Data to Develop Students' Creative Thinking Skills

A creative project is a form of learning in which students actively engage in solving real-world problems by designing and implementing original products under the guidance of their teacher. This learning model fosters independent thinking, problem-solving abilities, and collaborative skills. Digital maps are maps created and presented in digital format, allowing users to interact with spatial information through various applications or software. These tools offer a modern and flexible approach to geographic data.

Organizing creative project-based learning using digital maps and real-world data to develop students' creative thinking is a process in which teachers design and implement learning activities that require students to use digital maps and practical data to address authentic issues. This, in turn, supports the development of creative thinking, analytical reasoning, and problem-solving skills.

This approach offers several pedagogical advantages in fostering students' creative thinking. It allows learners to propose novel and unique solutions to real-world problems, thereby stimulating and cultivating their creative and innovative thinking abilities. Moreover, by analyzing real-world data and using digital mapping tools to interpret and present findings, students enhance their skills in problem identification, analytical thinking, and systematic problem resolution. In addition, the collaborative nature of project-based learning promotes teamwork, communication, and effective idea presentation.

To implement creative projects using digital maps and real-world data effectively, teachers should follow a structured process. First, clearly defined learning objectives should be established, specifying the targeted content knowledge and the creative thinking skills to be developed. Next, an appropriate project topic should be selected—relevant to real-life issues, aligned with students' interests and abilities, and responsive to current events.

Based on the chosen topic, teachers guide students in collecting, evaluating, and selecting practical data sources relevant to the project. Students are then introduced to and practice using digital mapping tools to access, analyze, and visualize spatial information in an engaging and accessible manner.

During the project, students work in groups, coordinating the collection and processing of data, proposing solutions, and developing innovative products. At the end of the process, students present their results to the class, participate in discussion, receive feedback, and reflect on their learning experiences—thereby refining their creative thinking and ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts.

Example: When teaching the theme *"Protecting Vietnam's Sovereignty, Rights, and Legitimate Interests in the East Sea"* [4], teachers can organize a creative project aimed at enhancing students' understanding and stimulating creative thinking. The learning objectives should be clearly defined to help students comprehend historical evidence and legal foundations of Vietnam's maritime sovereignty, while also developing creative thinking through the production of practical and visual learning products.

The project topic should align with the lesson content and student interests—for example: *"Designing an Interactive Digital Map Presenting Historical and Legal Evidence of Vietnam's Sovereignty in the East Sea."* Students are instructed to gather and curate sources from textbooks, imperial documents from the Nguyễn Dynasty, ancient maps, real-life visuals such as images of DK1 rigs, and international legal documents such as UNCLOS 1982, Vietnam's Law of the Sea (2012), and reliable open-source datasets.

Teachers introduce digital mapping tools such as Google My Maps, ArcGIS Online, or Goong, enabling students to create spatial data layers that correspond to the historical and legal content. Students then practice technical skills in mapping and presenting data visually.

The project is carried out collaboratively in groups. Students design interactive digital maps that integrate historical and geographical data points with annotations, images, and explanatory videos—or innovate further by creating narrated segments or self-produced video interpretations.

Finally, student groups present their products to the class. The teacher and peers provide feedback on content accuracy, creativity, and applicability. Students revise their maps accordingly and reflect on lessons learned.

Through this project-based approach, students not only deepen their understanding of Vietnam's maritime sovereignty but also cultivate creative thinking, technological proficiency, and collaborative problem-solving skills in response to real-world challenges.

IV. Conclusion

This article has proposed three practical pedagogical measures aimed at developing historical and geographical thinking skills for Grade 9 students in lower secondary education through the teaching of the theme *"Protecting Vietnam's Sovereignty, Rights, and Legitimate Interests in the East Sea."* These measures include: using historical and geographical maps to foster students' analytical thinking; integrating source analysis with graphic organizers to develop synthesizing thinking; and organizing creative project-based learning using digital maps and real-world data to enhance creative thinking.

The application of these strategies not only contributes to innovating teaching methods in line with competency-based education but also deepens students' understanding of historical and geographical issues related to national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Through active learning activities, students are trained in analytical, synthesizing, and creative thinking skills, while simultaneously developing problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and a sense of civic responsibility concerning contemporary issues—particularly maritime sovereignty in the East Sea.

This study offers not only a systematic set of concrete and feasible pedagogical solutions, but also contributes to a shift in instructional approaches—from the transmission of knowledge to the development of competencies. In doing so, History and Geography become engaging subjects, closely connected to real life and meaningfully relevant to students.

In addition to applying the proposed strategies flexibly, teachers should take the initiative to design experiential learning activities, strengthen real-world connections, and encourage students to actively and creatively engage in the discovery of knowledge. This approach represents a promising pathway for educating today's students to become knowledgeable, resilient, and responsible citizens who are committed to the nation.

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