

# Ideology and curriculum in social studies education: The case of Cuba

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## ABSTRACT

Political ideologies play a decisive role in shaping national education curricula, as governments' ideological orientations directly influence educational policies and curricular frameworks. In this sense, social studies curricula cannot be understood merely as neutral technical instructional plans; rather, they function as ideological texts constructed in accordance with political power relations, societal priorities, and dominant ideological discourses. Accordingly, this study examines the official secondary-level curricula for Geography, History, and Citizenship Education in the Republic of Cuba, where these subjects serve as equivalents of social studies within a socialist ideological context. The data sources consist of official curriculum documents published by the Cuban Ministry of Education and retrieved from its official website (2020–2021 curriculum documents). Using document analysis as a qualitative research method, the study conducts a close reading of the curriculum texts, focusing on the objectives, thematic content, and value orientations presented in these curricula. The analysis explores how socialist ideological orientations are reflected in the curricula through themes such as citizenship values, anti-imperialist discourse, collective responsibility, and national identity. In Cuba, the education system operates as a key mechanism for the reproduction and consolidation of socialist identity and state ideology. The curricula aim to cultivate values such as collective responsibility, solidarity, peaceful conflict resolution, and socialist citizenship, thereby contributing to the formation of ideologically aligned subjectivities. From this perspective, the curricula seek not only to enhance students' cognitive knowledge but also to construct a holistic conception of citizenship grounded in socialist values. The curricula also emphasize educating students to be productive, conscious individuals capable of critically engaging with both national and global realities and contributing to processes of social transformation. In conclusion, school curricula are important carriers of ideological messages. Therefore, social studies constitute a critical field of inquiry in which not only what should be taught but also why, how, and for whom it should be taught must be systematically examined.

**KEYWORDS:** Social studies education; Citizenship education; Ideology and education; Curriculum analysis; Republic of Cuba

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## 1. Introduction

Social studies is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive school subjects. Stanley and Nelson (1994, p. 266), for instance, conceptualise social studies education as “the study of all human

activities in time and space.” Determining what should be included in the social studies curriculum necessitates engagement with fundamental questions about how social knowledge, skills, and values should be organised across subject areas and disciplines (e.g., history, geography, anthropology), as well as the diverse subjectivities of teachers and students. In this respect, it is unsurprising that intellectual debates concerning the purposes, content, and pedagogical orientations of social studies have persisted since its emergence as a school subject in the early twentieth century (Castro & Knowles, 2015; Ross, 2024).

Although there is a broad, superficial consensus in the literature that the purpose of social studies is to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, and values required for active participation in society, substantial disagreements among social studies educators persist over curriculum content and the meaning of “good citizenship.” In debates on what it means to be a “good citizen,” scholars have advanced competing arguments concerning how students can develop citizenship competencies. These perspectives suggest that students may acquire citizenship not only through the study of history—long privileged within the field—but also through engagement with contemporary social issues, public policies, social roles and taboos, critical examination of their own societies, and participation in pedagogical and political struggles for social and racial justice (Ross, 2024). Consequently, the content and pedagogical orientations of social studies education are profoundly shaped by broader social and political agendas.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the principal professional organisation for social studies educators in the United States, revised its definition of social studies in 2023 as a field of study that examines individuals, communities, and systems, and their interactions across time and space, with the goal of preparing students for local, national, and global civic life. Within this framework, social studies is conceptualised as an inquiry-based field that enables students to examine human experiences through questioning, gathering and analysing evidence from reliable sources, considering multiple perspectives, and applying disciplinary tools and methods. It is further emphasised that social studies prepare students for lifelong civic discourse and participation by engaging them with the past, enabling critical engagement with the present, and empowering them to shape the future. Moreover, the field is positioned as centring on human rights knowledge and multi-level responsibilities, thereby equipping students to contribute collaboratively to creating a more just world.

Conceptualising social studies as a field aimed at equipping students with knowledge of human rights and multi-scalar civic responsibilities inevitably raises broader theoretical discussions about the nature of the curriculum. In general terms, curriculum can be defined as a dynamic framework encompassing all learning experiences planned and guided by schools to achieve educational goals. Taba (1974, cited in Soto, 2015) characterises curriculum as a “learning plan,” conceptualising it as a holistic design rather than a mere list of content topics. However, curriculum is not limited to the transmission of facts and generalisations derived from the social sciences. At this point, the concept of curriculum ideologies becomes analytically central. Ideology can be understood as a constellation of beliefs, attitudes, and understandings shared within a society—a system of assumptions regarding what is considered valuable, correct, desirable, normal, or natural. Ideologies not only explain educational goals and policy decisions but also legitimise and normalise practices and power relations. Dominant or hegemonic ideologies often become “invisible,” constructing understandings of how the world is and ought to be as natural and unquestionable (Ross, 2024).

School curricula are among the most significant carriers of ideological messages. Political ideologies exert a decisive influence on the development of national education curricula; governments’

ideological orientations directly shape educational policies, curriculum frameworks, and resource allocation, often leading to curriculum reforms and restructuring (Soto, 2015). Accordingly, social studies curricula cannot be understood merely as technical instructional plans; rather, they are shaped by ideological preferences, societal goals, and the orientations of political power. From this perspective, analysing curricula across different national contexts is crucial for revealing divergent conceptualisations of the nature, philosophical and theoretical foundations, purposes, and pedagogical implementations of social studies.

Grounded in this theoretical framework, the present study examines the curricula for Geography, History, and Citizenship Education taught at the secondary level in the Republic of Cuba, which serve as equivalents of social studies. Cuba was considered a valuable case for analysis due to both the absence of prior studies examining social studies–equivalent curricula at the secondary level in the Cuban context and the country’s explicitly socialist ideological orientation. Following the 1959 Revolution, the Cuban education system was reorganized in accordance with socialist ideology, adopting a centralized and state-controlled structure, and education was defined as a constitutional right and made free at all levels. In Cuba, the primary objective of educational policy is not only to enhance academic achievement but also to strengthen social equality and cultivate individuals with a strong sense of collective responsibility (Carnoy, Gove, & Marshall, 2007; Baldan, 2017). Accordingly, the system is built upon the principles of equal opportunity and public responsibility and is supported by policies aimed at reducing educational disparities between rural and urban areas (Gasparini, 2011). Moreover, international comparative studies indicate that Cuban students demonstrate relatively high levels of academic achievement, particularly in mathematics and reading, compared with many other countries in Latin America (Carnoy et al., 2007; UNESCO, 2015). Within this broader educational context, the present study investigates how socialist ideology is reflected in the curricula of Geography, History, and Citizenship Education and how these ideological orientations are concretized through curricular objectives, content structures, and pedagogical approaches. In doing so, the study critically interrogates the curriculum not merely as a pedagogical text but also as an ideological text and a site of discourse production within the field of social studies education. Accordingly, the study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) How are the objectives and thematic content of the Geography, History, and Citizenship Education curricula at the basic secondary level in Cuba structured? (2) How is socialist ideological orientation reflected in the objectives, content, and value dimensions of these curricula? (3) What type of citizenship understanding is constructed through these curricula, and which values and themes underpin this construction?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design and employs document analysis as the primary research method. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and interpreting written documents to gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge about a specific phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In this study, document analysis was used to examine how ideological orientations are embedded in official curriculum documents. The study focuses on the basic secondary-level curricula for Geography, History, and Citizenship Education in the Republic of Cuba, where these subjects serve as equivalents of social studies within the national education system. The analysis aims to identify how socialist ideological orientations are reflected in the objectives, content structures, and value dimensions of these curricula.

The data corpus consists of official curriculum documents published by the Cuban Ministry of Education (ME). Specifically, the study analyses curriculum documents prepared for the 2020–2021 academic year under the framework of Curriculum Adaptations for the 2020–2021 Academic Year: Basic Secondary Education. The following curriculum documents were included in the dataset: Geography curriculum (Grade 8); Geography of Cuba curriculum (Grade 9); Ancient and Medieval History curriculum (Grade 7); Modern and Contemporary History curriculum (Grade 8); History of Cuba curriculum (Grade 9); Citizenship Education / Civic Education curricula (Grades 7–9). These documents were selected because they represent the core subjects in the basic secondary education level that correspond to the domain of social studies education. All documents were retrieved from the official website of the Cuban Ministry of Education. The original language of the curriculum documents analysed in this study is Spanish. To facilitate the analysis, the researchers translated the texts into English using three AI-assisted translation tools. The resulting translations were examined comparatively and cross-checked to ensure semantic consistency and terminological accuracy. In addition, key terms were revisited in the original Spanish texts to prevent conceptual shifts in meaning and maintain terminological consistency throughout the analysis.

## 2.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was conducted using a descriptive and interpretive document analysis approach. The curriculum documents were examined through close reading in line with the research questions. In the analytical process, the primary units of analysis consisted of the curriculum objectives, thematic content, and value orientations related to citizenship presented in the curriculum documents. The curriculum texts were read multiple times to identify the curriculum's structural characteristics and ideological orientations. These elements were then interpreted in relation to the research questions. The analysis particularly focused on themes reflected in the curriculum documents, such as citizenship values, anti-imperialist discourse, collective responsibility, and national identity.

To enhance the study's trustworthiness, several methodological strategies were employed. First, the curriculum documents were examined independently by two researchers, and their interpretations were compared. Any discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached, contributing to inter-researcher consistency. In addition, direct excerpts from the curriculum documents were included in the analysis to demonstrate the alignment between the interpretations and the original data. These excerpts allow readers to evaluate the findings directly in relation to the source texts. Furthermore, the analytical decisions and interpretation processes were systematically documented to establish an audit trail. Finally, because the original documents were written in Spanish, the translations were cross-checked against the originals to ensure terminological consistency. These procedures were implemented to strengthen the transparency and trustworthiness of the research process.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Geography Curriculum

#### 3.1.1. General Objectives of the Geography Curriculum

The general objectives of the geography curriculum are expressed in the curriculum as follows (ME, 2020, pp. 104–106): (1) To establish a scientific world view through the study of geographical objects, events and processes in the continental areas of our planet. (2) To explain various physical and economic geography objects, events, and processes to understand the functioning of human-earth relations in geographical space. (3) To create awareness among students about the rational use of

natural resources and the protection of the natural environment for future generations by giving examples of the importance of natural resources. (4) To evaluate the use of natural resources on a global and Cuban scale, based on the current level of scientific and technical development and socio-economic conditions. (5) To explain the fundamental factors involved in material production. (6) To define the industrial processes and commercialisation of some of the most widely used natural resources in the world and in Cuba, considering the fundamental characteristics that characterise agricultural and industrial production, and to identify the connections between them as an expression of the material reproduction developed by human society to sustain its existence. (7) To illustrate the different branches and sectors of the economy and determine the role of contemporary industrial production in achieving high levels of economic development. (8) To contribute to understanding the role of multinational corporations as tools used by countries with advanced economies to plunder the wealth of Third World nations. (9) To explain the fundamental characteristics of transport and communication tools. (10) To understand how international economic relations have developed and to highlight the differences between economic blocs that go beyond being mere commercial/financial coordination mechanisms and operate based on justice and equality, taking into account the economic and social asymmetries of each nation, as in the case of ALBA. (11) To contribute to the development of labour, vocational, and career orientation so that students can take advantage of the opportunities offered by different areas of the economy and pursue a profession or job that is necessary for the country. (12) To strengthen the guiding role of the course in environmental education and to ensure that educational objectives in this area can be achieved at the classroom level. (13) To internalise the necessity of protecting nature and using its elements and forces wisely, thereby strengthening feelings of love for nature. (14) To develop aesthetic appreciation by appreciating the beauty of nature and the aesthetic aspects of socio-economic transformations resulting from human activities. (15) To deepen patriotism and internationalism by understanding the different socio-economic conditions that exist on our planet, particularly the conditions in Third World countries and Cuba's stance on this issue. (16) To develop teaching skills and habits such as using textbooks, geography atlases, and other resources; organising and analysing data; problem solving; independent work; self-monitoring of actions and critical evaluation of results; collective work based on honesty, respect, solidarity, and cooperation. (17) To strengthen behaviour consistent with a socialist society by demonstrating the inequality of scientific and technical development through practical activities that enable the study of different branches of the economy, continents, geographical regions, and selected countries.

When examining the general objectives of the geography curriculum, the overarching aim is to enable students to develop a scientific worldview through the study of geographical objects, phenomena, and processes across the planet's continental spaces. The curriculum emphasises explaining human–environment relationships, understanding physical and economic geographical processes, and highlighting the significance of natural resources through diverse spatial and temporal examples. From the perspective of ideological reflection in the curriculum, Articles 8, 10, 15, and 16 are particularly salient. In the curriculum, multinational corporations are presented not as neutral actors of the global economy but as instruments that reproduce the economic dominance of developed capitalist countries over the Third World. In this context, students are encouraged to critically evaluate global economic inequalities within the historical framework of colonialism and neo-colonial relations. At the same time, Cuba's post-revolutionary policies of nationalization, state control, and national sovereignty are presented as an alternative model that protects national resources and defends collective interests, with the aim of fostering an anti-imperialist sense of patriotism among students. The curriculum also addresses international economic relations as

structures reflecting different development paradigms and value systems; in particular, the example of ALBA highlights alternative forms of cooperation based on solidarity, equality, and independent development. Furthermore, by examining the socioeconomic conditions in Third World countries, the curriculum highlights the structural causes of global inequalities and seeks to cultivate a sense of internationalist solidarity among students. Finally, while the curriculum incorporates contemporary approaches to geography education aimed at developing cognitive skills such as data analysis, problem-solving, and critical evaluation, it also situates pedagogical objectives within a specific ideological framework by promoting solidarity, collective responsibility, and behaviours aligned with socialist values. In this respect, the curriculum can be understood as extending beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge to foster an ideologically and value-oriented conception of citizenship.

In conclusion, the Cuban geography curriculum appears to pursue a dual objective: strengthening students' national identities while constructing subjects who perceive themselves as morally and politically responsible for global inequalities. While the curriculum demonstrates a robust pedagogical structure that integrates contemporary learning skills with values education, at the ideological level, it positions geography teaching as an instrument for legitimising and reproducing a socialist worldview. This clearly illustrates that the curriculum is not merely a scientific or pedagogical text, but also an ideological construct in which objectives, content, and pedagogical methods are deeply intertwined with political and ideological goals.

### 3.1.2. Geography Curriculum Content

Geography is not offered as a separate subject in Grade 7 in Cuba. Geography instruction is formally introduced at the basic secondary level in Grades 8 and 9. Table 1 presents the main thematic areas and allocated instructional hours for the geography curriculum at these grade levels (ME, 2020, pp. 104–111).

**Table 1 Geography curriculum content**

Grades	Themes	Lesson Hours
Year 8	Geography Natural Resources Material Production Study of selected continents, regions and countries of the planet	62 hours
9th Grade	Geography of Cuba Cuban Archipelago Cuba's (Physical) Geographical Appearance Economic Profile Social Profile Environmental Profile Cuba's Regions, Provinces and Counties	62 hours

The Grade 8 geography curriculum is designed to enable students to analyse natural, economic, and social processes at the global scale through a holistic perspective. The curriculum aims to foster environmental awareness by addressing fundamental concepts related to the classification, spatial distribution, and sustainable use of natural resources. In addition, by examining the spatial organisation of production activities such as agriculture, industry, and services, as well as economic relations and interregional development disparities, students are encouraged to develop an understanding of global economic and political dynamics. By relating the natural environment to

human activities through the analysis of geomorphological, climatic, and hydrological characteristics of continents, the curriculum introduces themes such as global inequality, regional integration, and sustainable development through comparative analyses of the geographical, demographic, and socio-economic characteristics of different countries. In this respect, the curriculum seeks to cultivate environmentally conscious students who can comprehend the interrelationships between economic and social processes and develop informed forms of global citizenship. Furthermore, the curriculum incorporates practical application activities across learning domains, reflecting an inquiry-based and participatory pedagogical orientation that emphasises not only cognitive outcomes but also attitudes, values, and behavioural dimensions (ME, 2020, pp. 106–108).

The Grade 9 geography curriculum in Cuba is thematically structured to enable students to analyse the country's natural, economic, and social structures from a multidimensional perspective. The curriculum initially focuses on the fundamental characteristics of the natural environment by detailing Cuba's physical geography, including geological structure, landforms, climate patterns, hydrographic features, and biogeographical elements. Building upon this natural foundation, the curriculum examines population structure, settlement patterns, economic activities, regional development disparities, and production–distribution relationships, thereby supporting students' understanding of the interactions between geographical processes and socio-economic dynamics. The curriculum further encourages students to critically evaluate agriculture, mining, energy, and industrial sectors in relation to environmental sustainability, resource management, and national development priorities. Topics such as regional integration, external economic relations, and Cuba's geopolitical positioning in the Caribbean and Latin America are also addressed, enabling students to understand the country's strategic significance in global and regional contexts. Through these thematic orientations, the curriculum contributes to the development of national geographical awareness while simultaneously fostering analytical thinking skills that allow students to assess Cuba's socio-economic structures within a global framework (ME, 2020, pp. 108–111).

In addition to disciplinary content, the curriculum places explicit emphasis on values such as patriotism, diligence, the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, research skills, orderly and hygienic work habits, respect for and protection of social property, peer solidarity, national identity consciousness, and the development of independent working habits. These objectives indicate that geography education is framed not only as a scientific discipline but also as a vehicle for civic and moral formation. Overall, the content of the Cuban geography curriculum is embedded within an ideological framework that extends beyond the teaching of physical and human geography concepts, aiming to construct a socialist, anti-imperialist, collectivist, and internationalist civic identity. Students are encouraged to engage in collective work practices and to internalise values such as honesty, respect, solidarity, and cooperation as part of their integration into socialist society. Thus, the curriculum's underlying objective is to cultivate a civic identity that reinforces the ideological foundations of the socialist state. From this perspective, geography education functions not merely as a disciplinary field but as an ideological instrument through which spatial and economic dimensions of socialist identity formation are systematically constructed.

## **3.2. History Curriculum**

### *3.2.1. General Objectives of the History Curriculum*

The general objectives of the history curriculum are expressed in the curriculum as follows (ME, 2020, pp. 58–59): (1) To ensure that students defend their national identity with admiration and respect for heroes, martyrs, revolutionary leaders, and national symbols. In this context, students develop informed judgements about universal history, Cuban history, and regional events and developments;

they exhibit patriotic, revolutionary, pro-Latin American, and anti-imperialist attitudes in line with the humanistic values of socialism. (2) Students are expected to adhere to the rules, norms, and objectives established in the family environment, school group, institution, and society in a self-disciplined manner; to reject all forms of discrimination, violence, and corruption by examining the historical, legal, cultural, and civic potential of universal history and the history of Cuba and the local area. (3) Students are expected to develop a scientific worldview through the systematic and comprehensive learning of information, historical connections, and contradictions related to universal and Cuban history; thus, preparing themselves to solve problems in their lives, interpret their current situation, and carry out transformative, responsible, and voluntary actions by understanding time-space relationships. (4) Students are expected to adopt a healthy lifestyle; have a responsible sexuality based on gender equality; show love, compassion, respect, and responsibility in their relationships; reject any form of discrimination and dependency based on race, ethnic minorities, or gender; and understand the role of women in historical processes, their lifestyles, and consumption habits. (5) Students are encouraged to demonstrate emotion, sensitivity, creativity and originality in their interactions with their environment; to enjoy art and other cultural manifestations in various fields of local, national, Caribbean, Latin American and universal culture; appreciate the beauty of the attitudes, feelings, words and actions of masses and historical personalities; develop traditions and identity; care for universal and national cultural heritage; and in this process, form the basis of their social behaviour in line with the values of society and their individual characteristics. (6) Based on the role that labour has played throughout history as the primary source of human material and spiritual existence, students are expected to develop moral qualities such as responsibility, diligence, honesty, and solidarity; and to embrace the culture of work, technology, and economics by actively relating their learning processes to work. (7) Students are expected to demonstrate a holistic sense of responsibility and critical thinking regarding the protection of nature, the sustainability of life and the environment, and the preservation of natural and historical heritage. In this process, they are expected to comply with legal rules, understand the interdependencies among the economic, social, and ecological dimensions of sustainable development at the local, national, and global levels, within the framework of history and historical awareness, and act consciously in line with this understanding. (8) Students are expected to develop their ability to use various communication languages (verbal, physical, visual-auditory and algorithmic); to develop skills that will enable them to interact in different socio-cultural contexts by working on different types of historical sources and historical knowledge; and to use this process as a means of expressing their values, feelings, preferences, motivations, and interests.

The general objectives of the curriculum are oriented toward cultivating a comprehensive conception of citizenship grounded in national identity, revolutionary consciousness, and socialist values. Within this framework, students are expected to respect national heroes, revolutionary leaders, and state symbols; to demonstrate patriotic, anti-imperialist, and pro-Latin American attitudes; and to develop informed judgments about historical and contemporary events. The curriculum also seeks to regulate individual behaviour in accordance with social norms and collective goals, promote the rejection of discrimination, violence, and corruption, and foster the internalisation of egalitarian value systems. Core objectives include the development of a scientific worldview, an understanding of the historical and social role of labour, the internalisation of moral qualities such as responsibility, solidarity, and diligence, and the integration of learning with productive activities. In addition, the curriculum emphasises healthy living, gender equality, environmental sustainability, respect for cultural heritage, and the development of multi-communication competencies as essential dimensions of civic and personal development. Overall, the curriculum can be interpreted as aiming to educate

students as socially responsible and transformative citizens endowed with collective consciousness and critical thinking skills, while simultaneously positioning them within the ideological parameters of socialist citizenship. Thus, although the curriculum incorporates elements associated with critical inquiry and social transformation, these elements are embedded within a prescriptive ideological framework that delineates the boundaries of acceptable civic subjectivity and political agency.

### 3.2.2. History Curriculum Content

In Cuba, history is taught at the basic secondary education level in Years 7, 8, and 9. The history curriculum is organised chronologically during the first two years, whereas the final year is devoted exclusively to Cuban history (ME, 2020, pp. 60–80). Table 2 presents the distribution of content and instructional hours.

**Table 2 History curriculum content**

Grade Level	Contents	Lesson Hours
Year 7	Ancient and Medieval History	62 hours
Year 8	Modern and Contemporary History	93 hours
Year 9	Cuban History	155 hours

The Seventh Grade Ancient and Medieval History curriculum is designed to enable students to interpret selected historical events and processes within their causal, spatial, and temporal contexts and to comprehend the role of labour in human and societal development. Through the examination of historical trajectories, students are expected to conceptualise societal evolution, articulate historical developments, and cultivate affective dispositions of admiration and solidarity toward individuals and groups who resisted injustice and rejected oppression and exploitation. The curriculum also aims to develop students' understanding of cultural developments and their contributions to global cultural heritage, to critically evaluate the roles of social actors and historical-cultural figures, and to compare the structural characteristics of different societies. Within this framework, political and moral values such as unity, sovereignty, patriotism, solidarity, self-sacrifice, and resistance to injustice are explicitly embedded as curricular outcomes. José Martí's *La Edad de Oro* and other normative historical texts are positioned as epistemic and moral reference points, indicating the integration of disciplinary knowledge with the transmission of ideological values (ME, 2020, pp. 60–64).

The Eighth Grade Modern and Contemporary History curriculum aims to foster students' understanding of selected events, phenomena, and processes of the Modern and Contemporary periods within causal, temporal, and spatial analytical frameworks, with a particular emphasis on American history. The curriculum aims to develop students' understanding of the Modern and Contemporary periods and to evaluate the historical impacts of capitalist development, particularly the socio-economic contradictions between the working class and the bourgeoisie, between metropolises and colonies, and among capitalist states. Students are encouraged to critically examine capitalism's systemic limitations in addressing global socio-economic inequalities and to analyse the deepening disparities between developed and developing countries. Moreover, the curriculum explicitly promotes the continued relevance of Marxist-Leninist theoretical perspectives in interpreting historical transformations and in articulating visions of a just society. Histories of Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia are prioritised, with a strong emphasis on anti-colonial struggles, revolutionary movements, and social transformations. Revolutionary figures such as José

Martí, Ernesto Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro are incorporated as ideological and historical anchors, reflecting the curriculum's normative and directive ideological orientation (ME, 2020, pp. 65–73).

The Ninth Grade Cuban History curriculum aims to develop students' comprehensive historical understanding of Cuba's political, economic, social, and cultural development while explicitly supporting their political and ideological formation. The curriculum seeks to strengthen students' loyalty to the Revolution and its leaders, cultivate resistance to capitalism and imperialism, and reinforce commitments to national sovereignty and independence. Moral and civic dispositions such as humility, honesty, diligence, perseverance, critical thinking, and self-sacrifice are articulated as curricular objectives, aligning individual moral development with collective socialist ideals. Students are expected to engage with historical, political, legal, literary, geographical, and artistic sources; analyse Cuban literary texts; and develop aesthetic appreciation through engagement with cultural artefacts, including music, visual arts, architecture, and cinema. The curriculum further emphasises contextualising historical events within spatial and temporal frameworks, linking national and local histories, and engaging with the ideological and intellectual legacies of José Martí and Fidel Castro. Overall, the curriculum reflects a strongly normative and ideologically embedded approach in which disciplinary knowledge, values education, and political socialisation are systematically intertwined (ME, 2020, pp. 73–80).

When the content of the seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade history curricula is examined collectively, it becomes evident that the curriculum structures historical knowledge within an integrated ideological, moral, and cultural framework. In the Ancient and Medieval History curriculum, themes such as the evolution of human societies, the role of labour, struggles for justice, and resistance to oppression are emphasised, thereby constructing a value-oriented historical narrative through cultural heritage, collective actors, and historical figures. In the Modern and Contemporary History curriculum, critiques of capitalism, class struggle, anti-imperialism, the independence processes of Third World countries, and the historical legitimacy of socialist thought constitute a central axis of content. These thematic emphases position history education as a space for interpreting global socio-economic inequalities and power relations, while simultaneously embedding socialist perspectives within the curriculum framework. The Cuban History curriculum aims to foster students' commitment to the Revolution and its leadership by integrating national historical narratives with themes of revolutionary struggle, sovereignty, independence, and anti-imperialism. Historical figures such as Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara, José Martí, Camilo Cienfuegos, Vilma Espín, and Celia Sánchez are presented not only as sources of historical knowledge but also as moral and political role models, and students are encouraged to internalise these figures as reference points for their own attitudes and behaviours.

Within this context, history is utilised as a moral and ideological educational instrument, with values such as justice, solidarity, sacrifice, dedication, and revolutionary commitment positioned at the core of the curriculum. Moreover, the curriculum links historical knowledge to a sense of civic and political responsibility that supports the continuity of the socialist state and the revolutionary project. Students are expected to develop an ideological identity that situates them as carriers and sustainers of the Revolution by connecting historical examples of struggle and heroism with contemporary social duties and responsibilities. From a curriculum theory perspective, the curriculum content is designed not merely as a descriptive transmission of historical facts but as a normative curriculum that constructs a particular value system, collective identity, and political consciousness aligned with socialist ideology.

### 3.3. Citizenship Education Curriculum

#### 3.3.1. General Objectives of the Citizenship Education Curriculum

The general objectives of the citizenship education curriculum are expressed in the curriculum as follows (ME, 2020, pp. 139–140): (1) To show admiration and respect for revolutionary heroes, martyrs, leaders, and prominent figures; national symbols and qualities. (2) To comply with the rules and objectives established in the context of family, school, and society by self-regulating; to reject all forms of discrimination and violence, to know and defend constitutional rights and duties, the Cuban legal system and its relations, and to take pride in the human ideals and values it upholds. (3) To demonstrate responsible and value-oriented behaviour based on moral, political, and legal content; use different sources of information, textbooks, and information and communication technologies as learning tools to develop general culture. (4) To understand basic information about the Cuban political system and its democratic character, evaluating global issues and the development challenges of Cuban society in relation to current events. (5) To explain the importance of adolescents adopting a healthy, happy, and balanced lifestyle; embracing sexuality based on gender equality, avoiding harmful substances, and adopting regular sports activities that will develop basic physical and sporting skills. (6) To express feelings, sensitivity, and emotions in the relationship between nature and humans; to enrich general culture by drawing on the most distinctive identity values of universal, national, and local culture; to value the preservation of heritage and aesthetic-artistic activities (literature, music, painting, architecture); to understand lifestyles in different periods and social strata. (7) To understand the importance of knowing and applying legal, moral, and etiquette rules, complying with these rules in relations with nature and society as a responsible citizen, supporting sustainable development in line with social and current needs in Cuba. (8) To demonstrate effective and emotional communication skills in daily life; use listening, speaking, reading, and writing creatively; show interest in reading different types of texts and develop aesthetic taste. (9) To show love, interest, dedication, and responsibility for the work they do; to evaluate the importance of the work in terms of its functioning in society, their own future life project, and the problems of today's world.

The Citizenship Education curriculum is designed to cultivate students' capacity to conceptualise social issues as matters of personal and collective concern and to enable them to participate effectively in addressing these issues with an awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Within this framework, the education system positions citizenship education as a foundational curriculum area that guides civic participation and shapes students' understandings of citizenship and civic agency. The curriculum functions as a normative framework grounded in moral and legal principles that regulate social coexistence and collective life. The curriculum's explicit emphasis on admiration and respect for revolutionary heroes, political leaders, and national symbols suggests that historical memory and national identity are constructed through a revolutionary narrative, and that civic consciousness is defined within this ideological framework. Students are expected to interpret national identity through historical struggles and shared collective values. Anchored in socialist moral principles, collective interests, social solidarity, and egalitarianism, the curriculum aims to position students as socially responsible subjects who recognize their accountability for the welfare and transformation of society as a whole.

#### 3.3.2. Content of the Citizenship Education Curriculum

The Citizenship Education Course is taught in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades of secondary level. There are two learning areas at each grade level (ME, 2020, pp. 140–146). Table 3 presents the distribution of content and instructional hours.

**Table 3 Content of the Citizenship Education Course Curriculum**

Grade Level	Themes	Lesson Hours
7th Grade	Civic Education: Historical background and the formation of civic consciousness. Important Periods in the History of the Cuban Constitution: The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Cuba.	46 hours
Year 8	Human Rights and Socialist Law Family and Society: The participation of Cuban youth in the construction of today's Cuban society.	46 hours
9th Grade	The Cuban Political System and Citizen Participation Cuban Youth's Responsibilities for the Future	31 hours

The Year 7 Citizenship Education curriculum is structured to cultivate students' civic consciousness through historical, ethical, and legal foundations. The curriculum initially traces the historical development of citizenship education in Cuba, introducing core concepts such as citizen, citizenship, and identity, and presenting the revolutionary conception of citizenship alongside the model of the ideal citizen in contemporary Cuban society. Ethical and moral values are conveyed through the exemplary moral qualities attributed to historical and revolutionary figures such as Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos, Antonio Maceo, Celia Sánchez, and Vilma Espín, as well as through the writings of José Martí. The curriculum also addresses behavioural norms expected in social and school life, the meaning of national symbols, and respect for public property, thereby linking civic identity with everyday social practices. A substantial component of the curriculum is devoted to the Cuban Constitution, including its historical evolution, fundamental rights and freedoms, the principle of equality, provisions concerning education, science, and culture, and civic duties. Through these thematic strands, the curriculum seeks to strengthen students' ethical dispositions, civic awareness, and participatory orientation by reinforcing both individual and collective responsibility within the socialist social order (ME, 2020, pp. 141–142).

The Year 8 Citizenship Education curriculum adopts a holistic framework to enable students to understand human rights, the socialist legal system, family structures, and their social positioning in society. The curriculum begins with an examination of the historical development and contemporary significance of human rights, highlighting international human rights instruments, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It further explains how human rights are institutionalised within Cuba's socialist legal framework, including legal mechanisms that protect children and adolescents, as well as the roles of judicial institutions and prosecutors in safeguarding legality and justice. Within this context, the relationship between ideological struggle, the right to peace, and human rights is explicitly presented for critical reflection. A second thematic strand focuses on family and society. The family is conceptualised as the fundamental unit of society, and its characteristics and legal protection are examined. Adolescents' roles and responsibilities within the family, preparation for future family life, and challenges in family relationships are addressed. Topics such as love, friendship, respect, and sexuality are discussed within a pedagogical framework, with particular emphasis on the risks associated with early marriage and early motherhood. Finally, the curriculum emphasises adolescents' participation in social life, including their roles within neighbourhood and school contexts and their contributions to societal development. Overall, the curriculum aims to cultivate students as conscious civic subjects who are aware of their rights and responsibilities and

positioned as active participants in the reproduction and transformation of socialist society (ME, 2020, pp. 143–144).

The Year 9 Citizenship Education curriculum provides a comprehensive framework designed to enhance students' understanding of Cuba's political system, civic participation mechanisms, and contemporary global issues affecting young people. The curriculum begins with a review of prior knowledge and then focuses on the Cuban political system. In this context, the structure, functioning, and components of the political system—framed as one of the Revolution's fundamental achievements—are introduced. The curriculum explicates the role of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) as the leading force in society, the functions of political, social, and mass organisations, and the socialist configuration of the state. It further addresses the concept of socialist democracy, Cuba's electoral system (Law 127), mechanisms for popular participation in decision-making processes, and adolescents' social roles in key domains such as education, labour, and national defence. The second thematic strand emphasises adolescents' individual responsibilities for the future and their awareness of contemporary global challenges. Topics such as responsible behaviour in everyday life, global inequalities in the twenty-first century, poverty, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the significance of access to education and culture for development are examined. Environmental issues—including pollution, resource depletion, and their consequences for humanity—are discussed, with environmental consciousness framed within Cuba's National Curriculum for Adaptation to Climate Change (Tarea Vida). Finally, the curriculum addresses social risks faced by youth in capitalist societies, including racism, gender discrimination, xenophobia, child abuse, drug addiction, and violence, and explores potential solutions and alternative approaches. Overall, the curriculum aims to cultivate students as conscious and responsible civic actors who are critically aware of global issues and prepared to participate actively in their societies (ME, 2020, pp. 144–146).

An examination of the Citizenship Education curriculum reveals a fundamental ideological orientation toward constructing a model citizen committed to the Revolution and loyal to socialist values. The Ethical Code of the Revolution (El Código ético de la Revolución) and the presentation of figures such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Antonio Maceo, and Vilma Espín as exemplary role models are intended to facilitate the internalisation of this historical and ideological trajectory among students. These individuals are positioned not merely as historical leaders but as moral exemplars embodying revolutionary virtues. Consequently, students are encouraged to adopt revolutionary ethics and to integrate values such as sacrifice, courage, solidarity, anti-imperialism, and collective responsibility into their everyday practices. Throughout the curriculum, the achievements of the Revolution and the legitimacy and preservation of the socialist system are consistently framed as civic duties. Citizenship is conceptualised as a collective identity aligned with the defence of the state, society, and the revolutionary order, rather than as a liberal framework centred on individual rights. Socialist citizenship is associated with prioritising the public good over individual interests, respecting social property, being productive, and perceiving work and learning as responsibilities undertaken in the service of the Revolution.

#### 4. Discussion

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The findings of this study indicate that the Geography, History, and Citizenship Education curricula in Cuba are not merely pedagogical texts focused on cognitive learning outcomes but rather provide a framework for systematically constructing a conception of citizenship aligned with socialist ideology. When the goals, content, and pedagogical orientations of these curricula are considered collectively, it becomes evident that they seek not only to equip students with historical knowledge, geographical

awareness, and citizenship competencies but also to foster a national identity grounded in patriotism, anti-imperialist consciousness, and socialist values. In this respect, the curricula of subjects equivalent to social studies in Cuba align with Safran's (2015) assertion that social studies serve not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate values, attitudes, and social consciousness.

When interpreted through Ross's (2024) framework of curriculum ideologies, Cuban curricula can be understood as functioning to legitimize and reproduce a particular ideological worldview. According to Ross, curricula are not neutral systems of knowledge; rather, they carry explicit or implicit ideological assumptions regarding what knowledge is valued, what type of citizenship is considered "ideal," and which social order is deemed legitimate. In the Cuban context, these assumptions materialize in revolutionary historical narratives, collective responsibility, labour-centred values, and anti-imperialism. Within this framework, historical and social content functions less as a site of critical pluralism and more as an instrument for constructing consciousness within the ideological parameters of socialism.

A second major finding concerns the way citizenship education is embedded within subject curricula rather than treated as a separate civic domain. The Geography and History curricula integrate values such as solidarity, collective responsibility, and international cooperation alongside disciplinary knowledge. In this sense, citizenship education appears not only as a formal subject but also as a broader pedagogical orientation across the curriculum. Similar patterns have been identified in other national contexts where citizenship education is closely linked to national political traditions and historical experiences (Arthur & Davies, 2017; Hahn, 2017). However, the Cuban curriculum differs from many Western models in that the ideological dimension of citizenship formation is articulated more explicitly in curriculum objectives and thematic content. Comparative education literature further demonstrates that citizenship education curricula are closely intertwined with political regimes, historical trajectories, and dominant ideological orientations (Arthur, Davies, & Hahn, 2017; Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2007).

For instance, in socialist regimes, curricula tend to be structured to reinforce collectivism, class consciousness, and state-centred conceptions of citizenship, whereas in democratic regimes, pluralism, critical thinking, and human rights discourses are prioritized. In Scandinavian countries, social studies curricula are organized around deliberative democracy, participatory citizenship, and social justice, with pedagogical approaches designed to encourage students' critical and active engagement in political decision-making processes (Børhaug, 2017). In contrast, in liberal democratic countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, curricula emphasize individual freedoms, constitutional order, and market-oriented conceptions of citizenship, while simultaneously reproducing certain hegemonic narratives through national history discourses (Arthur & Davies, 2017; Hahn, 2017; Apple, 2019; Yiğit, 2023). In Germany, social studies curricula are structured around confronting the totalitarian past and fostering commitment to constitutional democracy, with the concept of defensive democracy (*wehrhafte Demokratie*) occupying a central position (Arthur et al., 2017; Kaya, 2023). In France, secularism, republicanism, and a unitary national identity constitute the primary reference framework for citizenship education, with citizenship defined within a universalist, assimilationist republican paradigm (Arthur et al., 2017; Önal, 2023). In Japan, social studies curricula are shaped by emphases on national identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity, with modernization processes legitimized through national narratives (Tunç-Şahin, 2023). In Canada and Australia, social studies curricula have been restructured to highlight multiculturalism, reconciliation, and the historical experiences of Indigenous peoples, reflecting the

influence of postcolonial critical perspectives on curriculum reform (Arthur et al., 2017; Öztürk & Deveci, 2021).

By contrast, in China, citizenship education is structured around socialist ideology, collectivism, and party loyalty; critical pluralism remains limited, and education is positioned as a strategic instrument for constructing socialist citizen identity (Kennedy, 2017). Tanrısevdi and Kırıl (2018) similarly note that the Chinese education system aims to cultivate individuals in accordance with Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought, seeking to produce ideologically informed citizens committed to collective values. Likewise, Saklan (2016) emphasizes that the Vietnamese education system is structured within an ideological framework grounded in Marxist-Leninist and Ho Chi Minh thought, with education conceptualized as part of a broader project to build an egalitarian social order. In theocratic or religiously oriented regimes, curriculum frameworks are closely intertwined with religious ideology. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, social studies and history curricula are structured around Islamic values, revolutionary ideology, and loyalty to religious authority, with citizenship defined along a religious-national axis (Mehrmoammadi, 2014). Similarly, in Saudi Arabia and some Gulf countries, social studies and moral education curricula are organized around Sharia-based values, religious obedience, and collective identity formation, prioritizing the transmission of values over critical pluralism (Doumato & Starrett, 2007).

Another important finding relates to how global economic relations are interpreted within the curriculum. The geography curriculum presents multinational corporations as actors that contribute to the reproduction of economic inequalities between developed capitalist countries and Third World nations. This framing reflects a critical interpretation of globalisation that differs from the more neutral or market-oriented perspectives commonly found in many contemporary geography curricula. Similar observations have been made in studies examining curriculum ideologies, which suggest that curricular narratives about global economic processes often reflect broader political and economic perspectives embedded within national education systems (Apple, 2019).

Finally, the distribution of instructional time across grade levels also reveals important ideological priorities within the curriculum. The analysis indicates that greater emphasis is placed on modern and contemporary historical processes, particularly those related to the development of capitalism, revolutionary movements, and international political conflicts. This distribution suggests that the curriculum seeks to provide students with a historical framework for understanding contemporary global inequalities and political struggles. In this respect, the Cuban curriculum reflects a broader educational approach in which historical knowledge is closely linked to the formation of political consciousness and civic identity.

Taken together, these comparative findings indicate that social studies curricula function not merely as pedagogical texts but as political and cultural instruments that institutionalize regime-specific conceptions of citizenship and social ideals. In this regard, Cuban curricula should not be understood as ideologically neutral pedagogical texts, but rather as mechanisms through which a particular social project and political worldview are reproduced through education. As Ross (2024) argues, dominant ideology profoundly shapes what is considered the purpose of education, the role of schools in society, the meaning of being a good teacher or student, assumptions about the nature of knowledge, and ways of interpreting the world. From a critical perspective, every ideological framework contains explicit and implicit beliefs, values, and virtues; legitimizes certain educational practices while marginalizing others; carries political potential; assigns differentiated roles to teachers and students; defines the nature and scope of access to knowledge; shapes the educational

climate; and determines what is considered “appropriate” content or process. In the Cuban case, this framework can be interpreted as functioning to legitimize and sustain socialist ideology.

In conclusion, the primary aim of social studies is to prepare young people with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in society. However, what constitutes the “necessary” knowledge, skills, and values, and how effective citizenship is defined, varies across societies and even within the same society over time. In this respect, social studies curricula may reflect the characteristics of democratic, totalitarian, or socialist systems, depending on a country's political regime (Safran, 2015). Moreover, as Hahn (1998) notes, there is no single form of democracy and no single way to teach democracy. Political ideologies play a decisive role in shaping national curricula, as governments’ ideological perspectives directly influence educational policies, curriculum design, and resource allocation, leading to curricular changes and reforms. Furthermore, an educational model developed by one government may be considered of limited value or even irrelevant by subsequent governments with different political orientations (Soto, 2015). Accordingly, social studies curricula are not merely technical instructional plans; rather, they are shaped by ideological preferences, societal goals, and political power relations. Therefore, social studies constitute a critical field in which questions of not only “what to teach,” but also “why, how, and for whom to teach” must be systematically interrogated.

## 5. Conclusion

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In Cuba, the curricula of Geography, History, and Citizenship Education are designed not merely to transmit disciplinary knowledge but to cultivate individuals who are grounded in socialist values, possess a sense of collective responsibility, and internalize an anti-imperialist and revolutionary conception of citizenship. This orientation should not be interpreted as an exceptional characteristic of socialist regimes; rather, it underscores that social studies, as a field, is not ideologically neutral globally. Instead, it inevitably reflects the dominant political, cultural, and socio-historical ideologies embedded within specific national contexts. From this perspective, the present study argues that social studies curricula should be conceptualized not only as pedagogical documents but also as ideological texts and sites of political discourse production.

As Noffke (2000) argues, the purpose of social studies education should not be to uncritically reproduce existing meaning-making structures that are grounded in cultural and economic inequalities and designed to sustain the status quo. Rather, social studies should contribute to the construction of alternative social orders grounded in democracy and economic justice. Such a social order should not be conceptualized as a fixed or final endpoint but as a dynamic, ongoing process continually negotiated and reconstructed through social practices. This perspective positions social studies not merely as an instrument for legitimizing existing social arrangements but as a potential space for critical citizenship education and transformative social change.

## 6. Declarations

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### 6.1. Author Contributions (CRediT)

Study conception and design: Fisun Bozkurt; analysis and interpretation of results: Fisun Bozkurt; draft manuscript preparation: Beyza Kaygısız. The author(s) reviewed the results and approved the final version of the article.

### 6.2. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no financial, commercial, or personal conflicts of interest related to this study.

### 6.3. Funding Statement

The author declares that the study received no funding.

#### 6.4. Data Availability Statement

The curriculum documents analysed in this study are publicly available on the official website of the Cuban Ministry of Education.

#### 6.5. Ethics Approval

This study is based entirely on document analysis and does not involve human participants, personal data collection, or any experimental intervention. Therefore, ethics committee approval was not required for this research.

#### 6.6. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

In this study, GPT-4 (OpenAI) was employed only for language correction, writing support, and formatting. All data collection, analysis, and interpretation were conducted and validated entirely by the author(s). Any AI-generated content was reviewed for scientific accuracy, ethical compliance, and source reliability by the author(s), who assume full responsibility.

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