

Geography Olympiad Learning Spaces in Thai Society Context

Piyabut Thintha^{1,*}, Chetthapoom Wannapaisan¹, Liwa Pardthaisong² & Natthapol Jaengaksorn¹

¹Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

²Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

*Correspondence: Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University, Thailand. E-mail: piyabut_thin@cmu.ac.th

Received: March 2, 2026

Accepted: May 5, 2026

Online Published: May 15, 2026

doi:10.5430/jct.v15n2p297

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v15n2p297>

Abstract

The objectives of this research were: 1) to investigate Geography Olympiad learning spaces in Thai society context, and 2) to propose good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in Thai society context. This study employed a qualitative research methodology. The data sources comprised two primary groups: 1) for the investigation of learning spaces, data were gathered from 45 Geography Olympiad instructors and relevant documents; and 2) for the identification of good practices, data were obtained from 12 key informants, including national team supervisors and teachers from schools with national representatives, along with related documentation, totaling 57 participants. The research instruments included interview schedules, observation forms, and document analysis forms. Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with data validity ensured through triangulation. The findings are presented using descriptive analysis. The results of the study revealed that:

1) The investigate Geography Olympiad learning spaces in Thai society context reveals a transformative trajectory initiated by the royal initiative of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who recognized the discipline's significance and entrusted The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN) with the mandate to advance operations and field national representatives for international competition. This impetus led to the establishment of POSN Geography Centers nationwide, catalyzing the expansion of multifaceted learning environments encompassing physical, virtual, social, and identity-expression spaces. Consequently, Geography Olympiad in Thailand is primarily driven by these centers through iterative enhancements in education management, particularly regarding human capital development, fiscal allocation, and linguistic proficiency for international communication. These developments reflect a burgeoning educational landscape that asserts the visibility of the field and fosters a new paradigm in contemporary geographic education. A comparative analysis of Geography Olympiad education management indicates a global convergence toward expanding learning spaces with the shared objective of cultivating elite student talent, though variations exist in the explicit emphasis on pedagogical innovation and the professional development of geography educators across different nations., 2) The propose good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in Thai society context reveals a comprehensive framework identified as the "Teacher SMILES" model. This framework comprises seven strategic dimensions: 1) Self-reformation toward becoming a professional teacher 2) Support, Sharing, and Network Collaboration 3) Good Management and Operation 4) Learners' Perspective, Interest, and Potential 5) New Paradigms in Curriculum and Learning 6) Integration of English in Operations. and Learning And 7) Creating Surveyors through Field Study.

Keywords: learning spaces, Geography Olympiad, Geography Olympiad teachers, Geographic education, area-based learning

1. Introduction

Geography has long been recognized as a contemporary field of study, as evidenced by the daily reliance on geographic literacy to navigate life's challenges and drive societal development. Given its profound significance, geographic knowledge is continually reproduced and remains dynamic, evolving alongside global transformations. The emergence of the Geography Olympiad further underscores this importance, representing a pinnacle of academic advancement in the discipline, particularly in Thailand where it has become a prominent phenomenon reflecting the flourishing state

of Thai geographic scholarship. In conjunction with the restructuring of learning standards and indicators within the Geography strand of the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (Revised B.E. 2560), the Geography Olympiad serves as both a catalyst and a challenge for expanding modern “learning spaces.” These spaces transcend traditional classroom boundaries and mental maps, encompassing physical environments conducive to learning, virtual spaces facilitated by information media, and social spaces rooted in the interaction between people and society (Ratana-Ubol, 2020; Phan & Le, 2025). Such multidimensional learning spaces offer diverse opportunities to cultivate learner potential and foster a learning society that thrives beyond the classroom (Junsrithong, 2023). In the current Thai society context, the Geography Olympiad learning spaces and the broader discipline of geography have evolved into a form of “Open Education,” dismantling conventional constraints in favor of a flexible, learner-designed approach centered on “place-based learning.” This paradigm integrates physical, virtual, and social dimensions, encouraging critical inquiry into human-environment interactions. By leveraging autonomous access to geoinformation innovations and diverse data sources, this educational landscape creates a sustainable learning ecosystem that ensures equitable development for all as informed global citizens.

The strategic advancement of Geography Olympiad learning spaces within the Thai society context reached a significant milestone in 2017 with the nationwide establishment of Geography Olympiad centers. These centers function as pivotal hubs for selecting Thai youth for international competitions, fostering interest in geographic inquiries among the new generation, and elevating the standards of geographical education management (The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra, 2025). This paradigm shift necessitates a robust adaptation within the Thai educational sector to align with the objectives of the Geography Olympiad and evolving geographical sciences. Such transition is particularly crucial given that a considerable number of geography teachers still encounter challenges regarding profound pedagogical content knowledge, the dynamic nature of the discipline, curricular implementation, and professional self-development. Furthermore, as Geography Olympiad centers and schools employ diverse methodologies in student development, exploring good practices in development and Geography Olympiad education management becomes imperative. This exploration is instrumental in cultivating a creative learning society in Thailand, ultimately ensuring effective student preparation for both competitive excellence in the Geography Olympiad and the broader advancement of geographical education.

Teachers function as pivotal mechanisms in driving Geography Olympiad learning spaces within the Thai society context, aligning with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, particularly through increasing and enhancing teacher competencies via international cooperation and diverse global training strategies (United Nations, 2024). While fostering high-potential, lifelong learning educators is imperative, traditional teacher development in Thailand has often been top-down, fragmented, and characterized by a disconnect where educators must leave classrooms for training (Rukspollmuang et al., 2017; Aiemphaya, 2018). Contemporary professional development frequently lacks a competency-based focus, prioritizing theory over practice and missing the innovative frameworks essential for professional growth; thus, urgent, high-quality development is required, as teacher efficacy directly dictates student outcomes (Mangkhang, Yimsawat, Netti, & Kaewpanya, 2021; Scholten & Doll, 2024). As transformative leaders, teachers serve as the vital core of Geography Olympiad educational reform, mediating the transition of global technical knowledge into accessible classroom practices. Elevating teacher competencies through workshop-based learning and modern instructional innovations not only hones students’ spatial thinking skills but also cultivates a learning ecosystem conducive to creative global problem-solving. When teachers are empowered to keep pace with global geographic dynamics, they can transcend classroom boundaries to drive concrete social progress, ensuring that the Geography Olympiad evolves beyond mere competition into a fundamental instrument for nurturing high-quality citizens for sustainable development.

This research aims to analyze and reflect upon the dynamics of Geography Olympiad learning spaces within the Thai society context, which has undergone significant expansion in recent years. This phenomenon is driven by the integrated collaboration of multi-sectoral networks systematically advancing geography education in educational institutions, resulting in the development of innovative pedagogical approaches and highly effective Good practices. These initiatives have tangibly elevated student potential and standards of achievement in both national and international arenas. Furthermore, this learning process serves as a crucial mechanism for cultivating experiential knowledge and spatial thinking skills, empowering learners to foster a culture of life-long learning—a fundamental cornerstone for driving sustainable social and environmental development amidst the complexities of the modern world.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Form

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on systematic investigation through the analysis of relevant documentary evidence and extensive field data collection. The synthesized data were processed using descriptive analysis to provide a comprehensive narrative of the findings. The research procedure was strategically divided into two distinct phases: Phase 1 involved an in-depth investigation of Geography Olympiad learning spaces within the Thai society context; and Phase 2 focused on the proposal of good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in the Thai society context, the details of which are elaborated as follows.

2.2 Research Area and Participants and Informants

2.2.1 Research Area

Phase 1: The investigate Geography Olympiad learning spaces in Thai society context. The research was conducted across 15 educational institutions serving as POSN Geography Olympiad Centers in Thailand, comprising: Chiang Mai University, Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Silpakorn University, Burapha University, Mahasarakham University, Thaksin University, Triam Udom Suksa School, Suankularb Wittayalai School, Samsen Wittayalai School, Kasetsart University Laboratory School, Mahidol Wittayanusorn School, Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School, Hatyaiwittayalai School, and Princess Chulabhorn Science High School Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Phase 2: The propose good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in Thai society context. The research was carried out at the headquarters of The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN) and selected schools with national representatives—specifically those whose students received awards in international Geography Olympiad competitions during the academic years 2022–2024 (B.E. 2565–2567).

2.2.2 Participants and Informants

Phase 1: The investigate Geography Olympiad learning spaces in Thai society context. The primary informants for this phase comprised 45 participants, including 30 Geography Olympiad center instructors selected through purposive sampling, and 15 educators from award-winning schools identified via snowball sampling across 15 institutions nationwide. The researcher conducted on-site data collection at all 15 Geography Olympiad centers in Thailand, which include Chiang Mai University, Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Silpakorn University, Burapha University, Mahasarakham University, Thaksin University, Triam Udom Suksa School, Suankularb Wittayalai School, Samsen Wittayalai School, Kasetsart University Laboratory School, Mahidol Wittayanusorn School, Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School, Hatyaiwittayalai School, and Princess Chulabhorn Science High School Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Phase 2: The propose good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in Thai society context. The key informants for this phase comprised 12 experts, including 4 team leaders/coaches of the Thai national representatives and 8 teachers from 4 distinguished schools that produced national representatives. These participants were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted by the researcher at The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN) headquarters and at the respective schools of the national representatives that secured international awards between 2022 and 2024 (B.E. 2565–2567).

2.3 The Instruments Used in the Study

Phase 1: The investigate Geography Olympiad learning spaces in Thai society context. The research instruments utilized in this phase consisted of:

- (1) A structured interview form regarding Geography Olympiad learning spaces in the Thai society context.
- (2) An observation record form concerning the context of Geography Olympiad education management.
- (3) A document analysis form.

All instruments were validated by seven experts to ensure quality and subsequently refined. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) ranged from 0.71 to 1.00, indicating that all instruments possessed high content validity and were strictly aligned with the research objectives.

Phase 2: The propose good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in Thai society context. The research instruments employed in this phase consisted of:

- (1) A structured interview form regarding good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in the Thai society context.
- (2) An observation record form for documenting good practices.
- (3) A document analysis form.

To ensure the quality of these instruments, they were evaluated by a panel of seven experts. Following their review, the instruments were refined and revised. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) ranged from 0.71 to 1.00, demonstrating that all instruments possessed high content validity and were aligned with the research objectives.

2.4 Data Collection

Phase 1: The investigate Geography Olympiad learning spaces in Thai society context. The data collection process for this phase is categorized into the following three stages:

- (1) Learning through Interviews and Observations. This stage involves in-depth interviews conducted in tandem with non-participant observations to explore the educational management context and the characteristics of Geography Olympiad learning spaces within Thai society. The researcher adopts the position of “the in-between”—functioning simultaneously as an “insider” by virtue of a background in Geography and an “outsider” as a researcher. This dual perspective is strategically employed to ensure that the “voices of the informants” are most prominently highlighted and articulated.
- (2) Learning through Documentary Analysis. Data are synthesized from relevant official documents and digital archives, including competition result announcements, the Geography Olympiad Thailand Charter, and official organizational websites.
- (3) Learning from global good practices. A comparative analysis of Geography Olympiad education management is conducted between Thailand and six top-performing nations from the 2024–2025 International Geography Olympiad: Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, the United States, Australia, and Indonesia. These nations were selected via purposive sampling, focusing on countries that secured the top three rankings in both individual and team categories (International Academic Competitions, 2024; International Academic Competitions, 2025; The Belarusian State University, 2025; Australian Geography Competition, 2025; Lietuvos neformaliojo švietimo agentūra, 2025; Logayah, Ruhimat, Arrasyid, & Islamy, 2024; Faculty of Geography and Geoinformatics, Belarusian State University, 2025; Podgorski, Uroda, & Gonet, 2025 & Polish Geographical Society, 2025).

Phase 2: The propose good practices for the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in Thai society context. The data collection process for this phase was systematically conducted as follows:

- (1) Exploring good practices from Team Leaders. In-depth interviews were conducted with four team leaders of the Thailand representative teams at the central office of The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN). This was performed in conjunction with direct observations to identify and synthesize exemplary practices in student preparation and management.
- (2) Learning good practices from Globally Successful Schools. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with eight teachers from four leading government and private schools in Bangkok and its vicinity—institutions that have consistently produced national representatives. These interviews were integrated with on-site observations to gain comprehensive insights into their pedagogical and institutional success factors.
- (3) Examining good practices through Documentary Analysis. Relevant data were systematically gathered from a variety of academic and administrative documents, including project reports, institutional curriculum frameworks, and strategic educational plans, to triangulate and validate the findings from the field.

2.5 Data Analysis

In this study, the research instruments were meticulously developed and subsequently validated by experts, with refinements made based on their professional recommendations. The data collection process encompassed interviews, participant and non-participant observations, and document analysis. For the comparative data analysis, the researcher synthesized information from documents, online databases, interviews, and observations following Bereday’s (1964) four-stage approach, which involved establishing objectives for thematic analysis, gathering data from relevant documents and websites, interpreting phenomena, and juxtaposing similarities and differences. Furthermore, content analysis was executed by initially selecting data according to established criteria, structuring the analytical framework, and contemplating the contextual nuances. This was followed by a rigorous six-step thematic analysis to derive good practices. For instance, the development of the seventh good practice, “Creating Surveyors through Field Study,”

followed a systematic process: 1) formulating statements by extracting concise excerpts, such as “surveying communities and landscapes surrounding the school and the Chao Phraya River”; 2) identifying keywords, such as “community area survey and analysis”; 3) assigning codes to represent concise concepts, such as “surveying”; 4) categorizing related codes into themes, such as “field study”; 5) performing interpretation and conceptualization to elevate understanding and establish links, resulting in “community-based spatial learning through exploration and fieldwork”; and 6) developing new paradigms by transforming concepts into innovative frameworks, ultimately yielding the “Creating Surveyors through Field Study” model (Buason, 2015; Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, & Ranfagni, 2023; Wannapaisan, 2025).

Data validity was ensured through a comprehensive triangulation process across four key dimensions: 1) data triangulation, by cross-referencing information obtained from interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis; 2) investigator triangulation, involving multiple researchers to minimize bias and compare findings; 3) theory triangulation, by evaluating the empirical data against established concepts, theoretical frameworks, and relevant literature; and 4) methodological triangulation, utilizing a combination of observations, interviews, and document reviews to ensure a diverse, accurate, and holistic representation of the phenomenon (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018; Phothisita, 2019; Chantavanich, 2022).

3. Results

In this research, researchers divided data derived from the study and presented the results of the research according to the aims. The results are showed as follows:

3.1 *The Investigate Geography Olympiad Learning Spaces in Thai Society Context*

Global social dynamics and paradigm shifts have expanded the frontiers of geographical knowledge, fostering interdisciplinary integration and emerging academic perspectives that have propelled the Geography Olympiad into a significant academic trend. This phenomenon has conceptualized “Geography Olympiad learning spaces,” reflecting the advancement and prosperity of geographical sciences within Thai society. A pivotal moment occurred in 2012 when Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn presided over the International Geography Conference in Germany, where she recognized the significance of the International Geography Olympiad. Consequently, Her Royal Highness initiated a royal directive for The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN) to formalize the selection and preparation of national representatives. Following the success of the first Thai delegation in 2015, a major educational transformation emerged, most notably the revision of the 2017 National Curriculum standards and indicators for Geography within the Social Studies, Religion, and Culture strand. These reforms aim to align basic education with contemporary geographical dynamics and leverage the Geography Olympiad framework to cultivate lifelong learners possessed of profound “psychogeography.”

At present, Geography Olympiad learning spaces within the Thai society context can be categorized into four distinct modalities. First, physical learning spaces encompass geographical education situated in academic institutions—ranging from schools to universities and learning centers—as well as informal settings such as museums, communities, agricultural sites, and tourist attractions; these spaces emphasize the transmission of experiential knowledge integrated with core content to cultivate geographical competencies, including cartographic skills, spatial analysis, higher-order thinking, and geographical communication. Second, virtual learning spaces represent a new imaginative frontier facilitated by creative information media in modern classrooms, catering to the learning styles of digital natives and New Normal educational paradigms through websites, artificial intelligence, and online platforms as essential tools for both on-site and online learning. Third, social learning spaces, though often overlooked, are paramount to the discipline as geography necessitates interactive learning between “space,” “people,” and “society.” This transforms the geography classroom into a spatial practice through fieldwork—a “classroom of life”—deeply interconnected with communities, society, and the concept of “place.” Finally, spaces of identity manifestation highlight the phenomenon where the Geography Olympiad has revitalized the presence of geography in Thai society, dismantling long-standing traditional myths and allowing the discipline to flourish. This shift has empowered geography enthusiasts, talented students, and “geography teachers,” granting them increased recognition and agency in educational and social development. Collectively, these four modalities of learning spaces function as an integrated, holistic ecosystem in the modern geographical learning landscape, as illustrated in Figure 1.

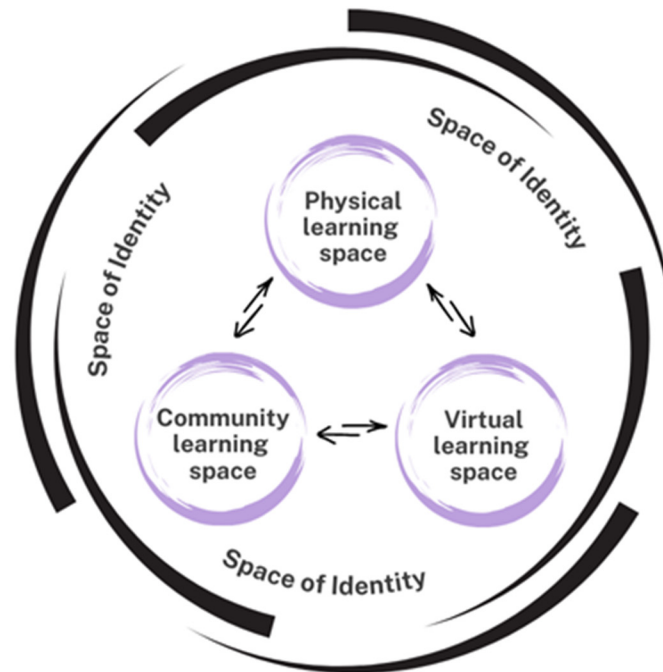


Figure 1. Geography Olympiad Learning Spaces in Thai Society Context

Source: Thinha, Wannapaisan, Pardthaisong, & Jaengaksorn (2026)

The continuous expansion of Geography Olympiad learning spaces within the Thai society context has significantly enhanced the visibility and academic standing of geography as a discipline. This growth transcends mere curriculum reform and pedagogical shifts; it encompasses the acquisition of advanced geographical sciences, the transgression of disciplinary boundaries through interdisciplinary integration, and the establishment of collaborative “area-based learning communities.” By fostering creative learning environments centered on “place-based learning,” the Geography Olympiad facilitates a multidimensional approach to geography that supports professional practice, higher education, local development, and sustainable citizenship. A pivotal milestone occurred in 2017 with the establishment of 15 Geography Olympiad centers nationwide under the aegis of the Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN) to decentralize educational opportunities. Although administrative strategies vary across these centers to reflect local readiness and spatial contexts, they share a unified mandate: to enhance student potential through rigorous academic camps and competitive selection processes for national and international arenas. While these centers have achieved substantial success in elevating geographical education, continuous strategic refinement remains essential to fully realize their long-term educational objectives.

The current state of education management within Geography Olympiad centers reveals significant impediments, encompassing shortages in personnel and budget, temporal constraints, pedagogical challenges, geographical communication barriers, and limited accessibility for schools in peripheral areas. To address these challenges, future strategic directions should prioritize the integration of English-mediated instruction, continuous professional development for educators, academic collaboration, and the expansion of institutional missions to include teacher training, research, and innovative development. While centers currently employ diverse strategies—such as formal training, self-directed learning, expert exchange, and co-learning models—the professional landscape is hindered by a critical scarcity of direct geography graduates in Thai society, as most practitioners hold general social studies degrees. This disparity is exacerbated by the concentration of geography specialists in large-scale urban schools, leading to knowledge inequality across institutions. Furthermore, the administrative burden inherent in the Thai educational system often precludes teachers from actualizing the full potential of Geography Olympiad initiatives. Consequently, there is an urgent call for greater societal recognition of the field, an increase in qualified geography educators, enhanced budgetary support, and dedicated spaces for professional growth. Ultimately, the establishment of geography as an independent academic discipline is perceived as a vital catalyst for fostering deep learning and expanding the horizons of geographic literacy within the Thai societal context. The Geography Olympiad education management for Thailand, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, the United States, Australia, and Indonesia is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Presents a Comparative Analysis of Geography Olympiad Education Management Across Various Nations That Secured Accolades in the International Geography Olympiad (iGeo) during the 2024–2025 Period

Country	Objectives	Educational Content	Educational Management Approaches
Thailand	To promote and develop students' geographical learning to meet international standards.	Physical, human, and field geography, and multimedia.	Managed by The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN). Competitive examinations are held to select students for two academic camps at 15 Geography Olympiad centers nationwide. Subsequently, representatives from each center compete at the national level, where all examinations are conducted in English. The four selected national representatives undergo an intensive academic camp to prepare for the International Geography Olympiad (iGeo).
Belarus	To promote in-depth geographical knowledge, thinking skills, and practical training, and to support high-ability students in geography.	Theory, geographical operations, and multimedia.	Representatives are selected through the Belarus Geography Olympiad across four levels: school, district, regional, and national. At the national level, faculty members from various educational institutions select and train students. Competitive exams include theoretical, practical, and multimedia sections, held either online or on-site. Once selected, representatives undergo intensive training in English, focusing on problem-solving skills and fieldwork.
Lithuania	To elevate the status of geography, support high-ability students, and promote modern geographical learning innovations.	Knowledge, maps, geographical skills, multimedia, and fieldwork.	Representatives are selected through the Lietuvos mokinių geografijos olimpiada. The process is divided into three levels: school level (managed and selected by schools), district level (managed and selected by the Olympic Organizing Committee using paper-based or online exams), and national level to select representatives for the International Geography Olympiad.
Poland	To promote interest, knowledge, skills, and the application of geographical knowledge.	Physical, human, environmental geography, sustainability, fieldwork, and multimedia.	Representatives are selected through the Polish Geography Olympiad, which consists of three competitive levels: local, regional, and national. National-level winners are selected as representatives for the International Geography Olympiad.
USA	To promote geography education and the application of knowledge in real-life contexts.	Physical and human geography, multimedia, calculation, maps, and graphs.	Representatives are selected via the US Geography Championships through on-site or online exams in two stages: 1) The National Geography Bee Regional Tournament, where top-scoring students from each region are invited to the national competition; and 2) The National Championships, where the top four performers are invited to join the national team for the International Geography Olympiad.
Australia	To promote students' interest in geography.	Knowledge, application, and reasoning.	Selection is conducted through the Australian Geography Competition via a nationwide online exam. The highest-scoring students from each state are invited to the annual "Geography's Big Week Out," an activity focusing on fieldwork, geospatial technologies, and analytical skills. At the end of the program, students are selected to represent the country in the International Geography Olympiad.
Indonesia	To promote achievement and enhance the potential of high-ability students in geography.	Physical, human, and field geography, and multimedia.	Representatives are selected through the Olimpiade Sains Nasional at the provincial, regional, and national levels. Top performers at the national level are selected for an academic camp to prepare for the International Geography Olympiad.

Source: Thinha, Wannapaisan, Pardthaisong, & Jaengaksorn (2026)

Table 1 elucidates that various nations are committed to expanding Geography Olympiad learning spaces with the unified objective of developing students for the Geography Olympiad. Distinctions arise where certain countries explicitly articulate goals regarding the development of educational innovation and the professional advancement of geography teachers; however, an in-depth analysis reveals that such objectives are implicitly embedded within the Geography Olympiad education management processes of each nation, even if not explicitly stated. Regarding educational approaches, variations exist based on the specific contexts and pedagogical paradigms of each country. Overall, Geography Olympiad education management across all nations relies on the collaboration between government agencies and domestic organizations to cultivate student potential, drive educational progress, and elevate standards for sustainable education.

3.2 The Propose Good Practices for the Development and Management of Geography Olympiad Education in Thai Society Context

The study of good practices for development and Geography Olympiad education management from 12 information sources identified seven distinct methods, detailed as follows:

1. Self-reformation toward becoming a professional teacher (T): Teachers undergo self-transformation and professional development to acquire expertise through diverse methods aligned with their readiness and potential. This includes continuous upskilling and reskilling through various learning resources, fostering perspectives and inspiration in geography and student development toward the Geography Olympiad, monitoring global social changes, learning good practices from role models and exemplary organizations, and pivoting the teacher's role to that of a coach and mentor.
2. Support, Sharing, and Network Collaboration (S): Obtaining support from educational institutions and various sectors in terms of academics, budget, and operations. This involves the exchange of learning and collaborative action to enhance operational efficiency and academic achievement, establishing academic networks, and disseminating good practices to the public. Particular emphasis is placed on collaborating with teacher education institutions to develop student teachers' capabilities in guiding learners toward the Geography Olympiad.
3. Good Management and Operation (M): Focusing on systematic collaborative processes, ranging from team building and work planning to comprehensive public relations. It emphasizes systematic student selection through various methods and the organization of academic camps featuring diverse and challenging learning activities that meet international standards. This includes creative learning media, the development of assessments comparable to international standards and aligned with global social dynamics, fostering inspiration and achievement motivation, utilizing lessons learned for operational improvement, and employing teachers with direct degrees in geography to ensure precise and full-potential student development.
4. Learners' Perspective, Interest, and Potential (I): Reflecting the importance placed by relevant sectors on learners' readiness, knowledge, ability, and attitudes. There is a conviction that these factors lead to the successful attainment of goals, necessitating continuous reinforcement. This encompasses learners' interest, appreciation, and recognition of the importance of the subject; having a solid foundation in geography and interdisciplinary aptitude; being well-informed and current; and being able to integrate knowledge. It also includes having positive learning habits, access to good role models, and self-development for further education and future employment.
5. New Paradigms in Curriculum and Learning (L): Teachers and relevant sectors study modern geographical sciences and educational trends to collaboratively design Geography Olympiad curricula and learning experiences in the form of academic camps. These utilize diverse strategies tailored to learner characteristics and spatial contexts, such as developing integrated curricula, transferring knowledge from experts and alumni, and implementing various learning activities (e.g., geographical processes, experiential learning, and phenomenon-based learning). It also includes integrating media and technology, field training focused on spatial thinking, exam analysis, and adjusting methods and content to meet learner needs and global dynamics. Content on global perspectives is embedded to keep learners updated, alongside extracurricular activities to correct misconceptions and extend knowledge and experience.
6. Integration of English in Operations (E): Relevant sectors adapt educational management and operations toward internationalization by embedding and linking the English language, as the Geography Olympiad involves international competition and testing in English. This ranges from improving students' English foundations to teaching geography and social studies in English and incorporating technical geographical terminology. Academic camps emphasize training in English, covering communication, learning media, and assessments. Proficiency in English serves as a vital tool and provides a significant advantage for competitive examinations and international success.
7. Creating Surveyors through Field Study (S): Supporting learners through experiential learning via regular field training in various locations, with teachers serving as learning facilitators and coaches. Learners engage in

collaborative learning and integrate knowledge for spatial analysis, practicing with geographical tools and designing community maps. Fieldwork enables learners to develop a multiperspective view of geographical dynamics through praxis (knowledge integrated with practice), fostering true and sustainable lifelong learning based on local spatial capital.

The seven methods of good practices mentioned above are essential in supporting the development and management of Geography Olympiad education in the Thai society context to achieve its goals, ensure efficiency, and reach international standards under the good practice model titled “Teacher SMILES,” as detailed in Figure 2.

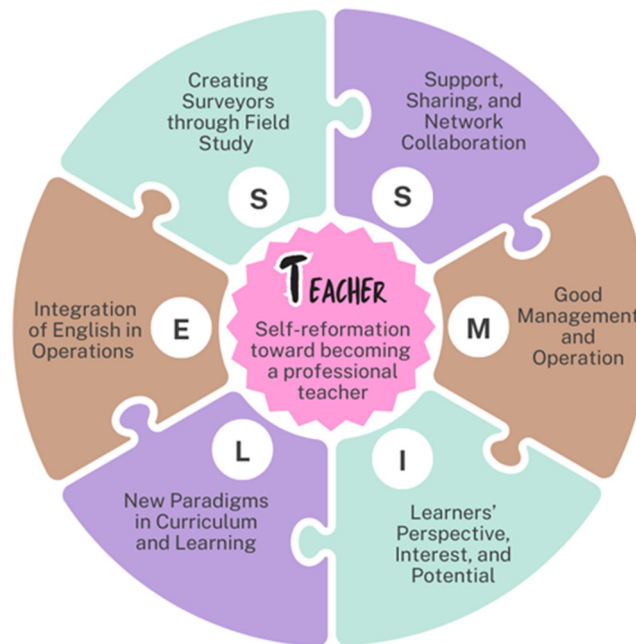


Figure 2. Good Practices for the Development and Education Management of Geography Olympiads

Source: Thinth, Wannapaisan, Pardthaisong, & Jaengaksorn (2026)

The good practices in Geography Olympiad education management identified in this research serve as an exemplary model and inspiration for countries interested in or currently developing students for the Geography Olympiad. These findings can be adapted or further extended to achieve success in Geography Olympiad education, encompassing educational policy reforms, teacher professional development, and the enhancement of national geography curricula and learning frameworks. Ultimately, fostering profound geographical knowledge, skills, and psycho-geography among learners and the general populace will contribute to sustainable social and environmental development.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Investigate Geography Olympiad Learning Spaces in Thai society Context

The investigate Geography Olympiad learning spaces in Thai society context reveals a transformative trajectory initiated by the royal initiative of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who recognized the discipline’s significance and entrusted The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation (POSN) with the mandate to advance operations and field national representatives for international competition. This impetus led to the establishment of POSN Geography Centers nationwide, catalyzing the expansion of multifaceted learning environments encompassing physical, virtual, social, and identity-expression spaces. Consequently, Geography Olympiad in Thailand is primarily driven by these centers through iterative enhancements in education management, particularly regarding human capital development, fiscal allocation, and linguistic proficiency for international communication. These developments reflect a burgeoning educational landscape that asserts the visibility of the field and fosters a new paradigm in contemporary geographic education. A comparative analysis of Geography Olympiad education management indicates a global convergence toward expanding learning spaces with the shared objective of cultivating elite student talent, though variations exist in the explicit emphasis on

pedagogical innovation and the professional development of geography educators across different nations. According to Songnui, Boriboon, & Luecha (2022) and Artvinli & Dönmez (2023), the Geography Olympiad drives schools to comprehensively prepare students and teachers, particularly in developing pedagogical management and educational innovations focused on academic achievement, thereby continuously expanding “Geography Olympiad learning spaces” across physical, virtual, social, and identity-expression dimensions. This aligns with the conceptualizations of Yu & Burke (2021), Lamb, Carvalho, Gallagher, & Knox (2022), and Sapphasuk (2024), who define learning spaces as encompassing physical, virtual, socio-local community, and expressive-inspirational domains tailored to the diverse learning styles of modern learners and lifelong learning. Furthermore, Prachyapruit (2017), Khurana (2022), and Zamiri & Esmacili (2024) posit that these spaces facilitate participatory, learner-centered, and experiential learning through the integration of creative media and personalized pedagogical approaches where teachers transition into learning facilitators. Within the Thai society context, Geography Olympiad education management faces challenges regarding specialized personnel shortages, budgetary constraints, and English proficiency gaps, necessitating diverse professional development strategies such as self-study and expert exchange, consistent with the methods proposed by Cetin & Bayrakci (2019), AbdulRab (2023), and Samundeeswari et al. (2024), including peer observation and advanced study. While the management goals in Thailand, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, the USA, Australia, and Indonesia collectively aim to elevate geographical education to international standards, their representative selection and educational processes vary by national policy and socio-spatial context, as highlighted by Svobodová & Trahorsch (2024) regarding specialized development systems. Consequently, the future trajectory of Geography Olympiad centers in Thailand requires ongoing refinement of educational management to align with learner needs, stakeholder expectations, and advancements in geographical sciences for maximum efficiency.

4.2 The Propose Good Practices for the Development and Management of Geography Olympiad Education in Thai Society Context

reveals a comprehensive framework identified as the “Teacher SMILES” model. This framework comprises seven strategic dimensions: 1) Self-reformation toward becoming a professional teacher 2) Support, Sharing, and Network Collaboration 3) Good Management and Operation 4) Learners’ Perspective, Interest, and Potential 5) New Paradigms in Curriculum and Learning 6) Integration of English in Operations. and Learning And 7) Creating Surveyors through Field Study. Consistent with the findings of Amin & Jamaludin (2024), Cheuk & Lam (2025), and Krause et al. (2025), good practices in geography education encompass diverse approaches, including expertise in modern pedagogy and curriculum, proficiency in media and information technology, teacher professionalism, self-development, effective institutional management, learner engagement, instructional strategies, geographical skills and competencies, effective communication, critical, creative, and interdisciplinary learning, and field study. This aligns with the perspectives of Svobodová & Trahorsch (2024), who identify factors influencing the success of the Geography Olympiad as varying geographical characteristics, sociocultural backgrounds, intelligence, educational systems, and language. Consequently, it is evident that good practices in the development and management of Geography Olympiad education primarily emphasize teachers, learners, curriculum and instruction, and field-based education as core pillars.

5. Conclusion

Geography Olympiad education management in the Thai society context reflects a paradigm shift in education aimed at expanding the frontiers of geographical knowledge through the creation of “Geography Olympiad learning spaces,” which holistically integrate physical, virtual, social, and self-expression dimensions. This phenomenon has led to the reform of the Basic Education Core Curriculum to cultivate psychogeography and spatial analysis competencies to meet international standards. Based on a comparative study of global education management and empirical data, the identified good practice for effective policy implementation is the “Teacher SMILES” model, which encompasses: 1) Self-reformation toward becoming a professional teacher; 2) Support, Sharing, and Network Collaboration; 3) Good Management and Operation; 4) Learners’ Perspective, Interest, and Potential; 5) New Paradigms in Curriculum and Learning; 6) Integration of English in Operations; and 7) Creating Surveyors through Field Study. Consequently, fostering such a spatial learning ecosystem not only prepares Thai representatives for international competitions but also serves as a vital mechanism for strengthening the identity of geography, establishing place-based learning communities, and empowering geography teachers as change agents for sustainable citizenship development in Thai society.

6. Suggestions

6.1 Suggestions for Implementing Research Results

6.1.1 Relevant authorities should implement policies and operational frameworks that facilitate and decentralize opportunities, ensuring that teachers and students have increased and equitable access to Geography Olympiad education, with a particular emphasis on small-scale schools and marginalized areas.

6.1.2 Relevant authorities should advocate for policies that promote the development of innovative, place-based educational innovations designed to cultivate students' potential toward the Geography Olympiad and the development of sustainable citizenship.

6.2 Suggestions for Next Research

6.2.1 Relevant sectors may utilize these findings as a guideline for developing Geography Olympiad education management and modern geography, enabling teachers and students to leverage acquired knowledge and experiences for their future self-development and academic advancement.

6.2.2 Future research should focus on extracting the body of knowledge and lessons learned from Geography Olympiad centers and educational institutions across all dimensions. This aim is to establish unique institutional identities that are practically implementable and capable of expanding the scope of learning spaces.

References

- AbdulRab, H. M. A. (2023). Teacher professional development in the 21st century. *African Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(4), 43-47. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ajep.2237>
- Aiemphaya, K. (2018). *Professional teacher development*. Nonthaburi: 21 Century.
- Amin, N. B. M., & Jamaludin, K. A. B. (2024). 21st-century geography teaching and learning: issues and challenges. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(1), 650-655. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i1/20641>
- Artvinli, E., & Dönmez, L. (2023). What Geographical Skills do the International Geography Olympiad Aim to Measure? A Content Analysis of iGeo Questions. *Osmangazi Journal of Educational Research*, 10(Special Issue), 178-186. <https://doi.org/10.59409/ojer.1213392>
- Australian Geography Competition. (2025). *The Australian Geography Competition*. Australian Geography Competition. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://geographycompetition.org.au/>
- Bereday, G. Z. F. (1964). *Comparative method in education*. NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Buason, R. (2015). *Qualitative research in education* (5th ed.). Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Cetin, C., & Bayrakci, M. (2019). Teacher professional development models for effective teaching and learning in schools. *Journal of Quality in Higher Education*, 6(1), 33-36.
- Chantavanich, S. (2022). *Qualitative research methods* (26th ed.). Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Cheuk, S. H., & Lam, Y. F. (2025). Addressing humanities pre-service and in-service teachers' concerns in integrating stem education-a case study of geography education. *Education Sciences*, 15(4), 13-14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15040446>
- Faculty of Geography and Geoinformatics, Belarusian State University. (2025). *System for preparing students for the geography Olympiad competition " for teachers in general secondary education institutions of the republic of Belarus*. Minsk: Belarusian State University.
- Fusch, P., Fusch, G. E., & Ness L. R. (2018). Denzin's paradigm shift: revisiting triangulation in qualitative. *Journal of Social Change*, 10(1), 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2018.10.1.02>
- International Academic Competitions. (2024). *2024 international geography Olympiad final results*. International Academic Competitions. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://www.iacompetitions.com/international-geography-olympiad/>
- International Academic Competitions. (2025). *2025 international geography Olympiad final results*. the international geography Olympiad. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://www.iacompetitions.com/international-geography-olympiad/>
- International Academic Competitions. (2025). *The us geography championships varsity & junior varsity divisions*

- overview. international academic competitions. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://www.iacompetitions.com/%20vjvugc/>
- Junsrithong, P. (2023). Learning spaces: On the day when the world spins fast. *Rom Yoong Thong Journal*, 1(1), 86-96.
- Khurana, A. (2022). Converting physical spaces into learning spaces: Integrating universal design and universal design for learning. *Frontiers in Education*, 7(2022), 1. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.965818>
- Krause, U., et al. (2025). The barriers and enablers of curriculum thinking and teacher agency in geography education: a multinational study. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 34(8), 220-222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10382046.2025.2466160>
- Lamb, J., Carvalho, L., Gallagher, M., & Knox, J. (2022). The Postdigital Learning Spaces of Higher Education. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 4(5), 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-021-00279-9>
- Lietuvos neformaliojo švietimo agentūra. (2025). *Geografijos olimpiada*. Lietuvos neformaliojo švietimo agentūra. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://www.linesa.lt/geografijos-olimpiada/>
- Logayah, D. S., Ruhimat, M., Arrasyid, R., & Islamy, M. R. F. (2024). Item analysis of National Geography Olympiad multiple-choice questions (MCQs) in Indonesia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2354971>
- Mangkhang, C., Yimsawat, C., Netti, A., & Kaewpanya, N. (2021). Area-Based Learning Approach to the Competency Development of Social Studies Pre-Service Teachers in the Chiangmai Education Sandbox Area, Thailand. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research*, 8(3), 266. <https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.509.2021.83.264.271>
- Ministry of Education. (2017). *The basic education core curriculum B.E. 2551 (Revised edition 2017)*. Bangkok: Agricultural Co-operative Federation of Thailand.
- Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22(2023), 2-5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Phan, A. N. Q., & Le, C. (2025). From coffee shops to online platforms: students' construction of and experiences in multiple higher education learning spaces. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 44(1), 232-233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2429466>
- Phothisita, C. (2019). *The science and art of qualitative research* (8th ed.). Bangkok: Amarin Printing.
- Podgorski, Z., Uroda, J., & Gonet, A. (2025). 50-lat polskiej Olimpiady Geograficznej: idea, realizacja i wpływ na edukację. *Czasopismo Geograficzne*, 96(2), 351-370. <https://doi.org/10.12657/czageo-96-15>
- Polish Geographical Society. (2025). *Polish Geography Olympiad*. Polish Geographical Society. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://ptgeo.org.pl/en/dzialalnosc/olimpiada-geograficzna/>
- Prachyapruit, A. (2017). Learning space design for higher education institutions in the 21st century. *Dusit Thani College Journal*, 11(2), 383-385.
- Ratana-Ubol, A. (2020). *Concepts of promoting lifelong education in Thai society* (2nd ed.). Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Rukspollmuang, C. et al. (2017). The study of state and problems of production, recruitment, and professional development of Thai basic education teachers related to future needs. *Journal of Education Studies, Chulalongkorn University*, 45(3), 17-33. <https://doi.org/10.58837/CHULA.EDUCU.45.3.2>
- Samundeeswari, D., Angayarkanni, R., Raju, S. G., Rana, N., & Sharma, A. (2024). Teacher Professional Development: Effective Strategies and Evaluation Methods. *Educational Administration Theory and Practice journal*, 30(6), 1728-1729. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i6.5578>
- Sapphasuk, W. (2024). A study of local knowledge space construction process of Kwan Phayao fisherfolks community to promote lifelong learning. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Mahasarakham University*, 43(3), 470-483.
- Scholten, N., & Doll, J. (2024). The relevance of preservice teachers' declarative content knowledge and professional role identity for a lesson planning task close to professional demands. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 33(40), 319-333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10382046.2024.2336707>

- Songnui, S., Boriboon, G., & Luecha, R. (2022). Instructional guidelines to enhance geography literacy: lessons learned from Thailand geography Olympiad competitor schools. *Journal of Education Thaksin University*, 22(1), 108-121.
- Svobodová, H., & Trahorsch, P. (2024). Assessment in geography through geography Olympiads: comparison of results of the Czech National and International Geography Olympiads from 2015 to 2022. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 34(3), 141-152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10382046.2024.2352281>
- The Belarusian State University. (2025). *Belarusian Schoolchildren, under the Guidance of BSU Teachers, Became Winners of the Open International Geography Olympiad*. Minsk: The Belarusian State University.
- The Promotion of Academic Olympiad and Development of Science Education Foundation under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra. (2025). *About Geography Olympiad*. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://www.posn.or.th/projects/academic-olympiad/geo/about/>
- United Nations. (2024). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*. NY: United Nations.
- Wannapaisan, C. (2025). *Social studies research: Principles and applications*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Yu, J., Vermunt, J. D., & Burke, C. (2021). Students' learning patterns and learning spaces in higher education: an empirical investigation in China. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(4), 871-872. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1775557>
- Zamiri, M., & Esmacili, A. (2024). Methods and Technologies for Supporting Knowledge Sharing within Learning Communities: A Systematic Literature Review. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(17), 4. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14010017>

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.