



Social Studies in the Era of GenAI

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10.46303/ressat.2026.11

Article Info

Received: October 10, 2025

Accepted: June 14, 2026

Published: July 5, 2026

How to cite

Russell, W. B., Waters, S., & Hensley, M.
(2026). Social Studies in the Era of
GenAI. *Research in Social Sciences and
Technology*, 11(2), i-ii.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2026.11>

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EDITORIAL

As GenAI continues to reshape how we access information, communicate, and understand the world, social studies education must adapt to prepare learners for civic life in an increasingly automated and algorithm-driven society. From AI-generated content and multi-media to predictive policing and algorithmic bias, today's students face unprecedented ethical, historical, and civic questions that demand thoughtful exploration.

As the guest editors of this special issue of *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* (RESSAT), we aimed to tackle the topic as thoroughly as possible. We held an open call for papers and received many great manuscripts to review. In the end, five great articles were selected from the highly competitive blind peer review process to be part of this special issue. These contributions collectively examine the era AI. These 5 articles all explore various aspects and roles AI has in social studies education.

The first article, by Hensley, Waters, & Russell, examines social studies classrooms as “laboratories of democracy” and “contends that social studies teachers may leverage character education to help their students articulate and reflect on their roles as responsible and conscientious digital citizens who must navigate the presence and influence of GenAI in 21st-century life.” Furthermore, the article accomplishes three goals. 1) provides teachers with a basic understanding of GenAI and rationale for integrating this technology; (2) shares relevant pedagogical applications of GenAI; 3) addresses practical considerations associated with using GenAI in K-12 classrooms.

KEYWORDS

AI; civic engagement; GenAI; social studies education.

In line with Hensley, Waters, & Russells' article, Lintner and Reeves' article examines how the next generation can effectively utilize AI in the classroom. The authors specifically examine "how AI-supported learning was integrated in, scenario-based learning was strategically integrated into a secondary social studies methods course." This paper explores the theoretical and practical aspects of preparing futures teachers for the AI world.

Following Lintner and Reeves' article, Eric Junco delves into the disciplinary literacy in social studies and how AI chatbots can be utilized. Specifically, the article explores how a chatbot was utilized to assist multilingual learners (MLLs) as they practiced historical thinking. The article offers insight into how teachers can foster grade-appropriate engagement in historical thinking through AI chatbots.

The fourth article in the special issue is by Clabough, Bickford, and Russell. The article presents a research study that aimed to explore four research questions. 1) How do the students articulate the significance of the Freedom to Vote Act?; 2) How do the students wrestle with competing beliefs about the Freedom to Vote Act?; 3) When on Zoom among experts and peers, how did students express their understandings about the Freedom to Vote Act?; 4) How did students if at all justify their conclusions about the merits of the Freedom to Vote Act? The authors draw conclusions and recommendations are made.

The final paper of this special issue builds on the multilingual learners study but goes in a different direction. Brown, Waters, & Russell, focus on English Learners (ELs) writing in social studies classroom. The study explores how a specific discussion-based pedagogical approach called Structured Academic Controversy (SAC), can help bridge the gap between ELs' language needs and the demands of high school social studies curricula. What is interesting about this article is despite all the AI available for English Learner instruction, this study reminds us that impactful education for English Learners can still occur without the world of AI.