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Literature Study: Analysis of Social Studies Learning in Developing Students' Character at the Elementary School Level

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and examine Social Studies learning in developing students' character at the elementary school level. The research employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach. The findings from the literature review indicate that Social Studies learning tends to contribute to the development of elementary school students' character, particularly when implemented through contextual, participatory, and student-centered learning approaches. Various studies emphasize that IPS content not only provides knowledge about social, cultural, economic, and historical aspects but also encompasses moral and humanitarian values that can be internalized through appropriate teaching strategies. This study is expected to offer a theoretical contribution in the form of a systematic literature synthesis and a practical contribution as a reference for teachers and curriculum developers to optimize the role of IPS as a vehicle for character education in elementary schools.

Keywords: literature review, social studies, character

Studi Literatur: Analisis Pembelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial Dalam Membangun Karakter Siswa di Tingkat Sekolah Dasar

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan mengkaji pembelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS) dalam membangun karakter siswa di tingkat sekolah dasar. Dalam penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi literatur (*literature review*). Hasil kajian literatur menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS) memiliki kecenderungan berkontribusi terhadap pembentukan karakter siswa sekolah dasar, terutama ketika diimplementasikan melalui pendekatan pembelajaran yang kontekstual, partisipatif, dan berpusat pada siswa. Berbagai penelitian menegaskan bahwa materi IPS tidak hanya memuat pengetahuan tentang aspek sosial, budaya, ekonomi, dan sejarah, tetapi juga mengandung nilai-nilai moral dan kemanusiaan yang dapat diinternalisasikan melalui strategi pembelajaran yang tepat. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi teoretis berupa sintesis literatur yang sistematis serta kontribusi praktis sebagai rujukan bagi guru dan pengembang kurikulum dalam mengoptimalkan peran IPS sebagai wadah pendidikan karakter di sekolah dasar.

Kata kunci: studi literatur, ips, karakter

INTRODUCTION

Character education is an educational process aimed at shaping students' personalities, encompassing attitudes, behaviors, traits, and habits that reflect a well-ordered and virtuous individual. According to Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017, Article 3, concerning the Strengthening of Character Education, character education is reinforced through the implementation of Pancasila values. These values include aspects of religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, love of the homeland, appreciation of achievement, communication skills, love of peace, reading habits, concern for the environment and social issues, as well as responsibility (Sutarti, 2018). Furthermore, Suarti et al. (2023) explain that education serves as the primary foundation in shaping future generations who are not only intellectually capable but also strong in moral and social values. At the elementary school level, education plays a strategic role as it represents the initial phase of character formation in children. One subject with significant potential to instill character values is Social Studies. Through topics such as community life, social norms, cultural diversity, and national history, IPS can serve as an important medium in developing students into individuals who are tolerant, caring, honest, and responsible.

However, in practice, Social Studies (IPS) learning at the elementary school level is often understood merely as the delivery of factual information and rote memorization. This obscures the essence of IPS as a medium for character education. Therefore, a deeper analysis is needed to examine how IPS learning is currently implemented, the extent of its contribution to character development, and the challenges and opportunities that educators can leverage in this context. Education plays a crucial role in shaping the character of young generations, particularly in facing complex social, cultural, and global challenges. One subject that significantly contributes to the process of developing students' character is Social Studies. IPS, which encompasses various branches such as history, geography, economics, and sociology, not only provides an understanding of social concepts but also serves as a means to instill essential life values for individual character development. The character in question includes attitudes, behaviors, and moral values that emerge from interactions with society and the surrounding environment. Through IPS learning, students are guided not only to understand the dynamics of social life but also to internalize values such as empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and awareness of diversity. This process forms the foundation for shaping a well-rounded personality, creating individuals who are not only academically competent but also emotionally and socially mature. Therefore, the role of IPS education in shaping students' character is a highly relevant issue to be examined further, particularly within the context of the Indonesian education system, which is currently focused on strengthening character values in the curriculum. (Hasibuan et al., 2024).

Social Studies learning in elementary schools is an integral part of the curriculum designed to introduce students to various aspects of social, cultural, economic, and geographical life. At this level, IPS aims to equip students with fundamental knowledge about society and their environment, as well as to cultivate awareness of the individual's role within the community (Lusiana & Fatonah, 2022). The material taught includes themes such as family, the surrounding environment, local history, cultural diversity, and even basic economic activities. Pangestuti et al. (2024) explain the Social Studies learning process in elementary schools generally employs an integrated thematic approach, allowing students to connect various concepts with real-life experiences. In addition, the use of diverse learning media and interactive methods such as discussions, observations, and mapping also helps enhance students' understanding of abstract material. With an approach aligned with the cognitive development stage of elementary-aged children, IPS learning is expected to build a strong foundation of social knowledge to prepare students for the next level of education.

Social Studies learning at the elementary school level (SD/MI) holds great potential in shaping children's character through an integrated, creative, and inclusive approach. Through topics such as geography and the environment, students can be taught the importance of maintaining cleanliness as a form of responsibility toward their surroundings. The use of technology-based learning media, such as videos or animations, can also help instill values of honesty and integrity in an engaging and interactive way. Furthermore, by introducing the cultural diversity and traditions of various ethnic groups in Indonesia, students learn to respect differences and develop a sense of tolerance. Active student involvement in discussions, debates, or problem-based projects also fosters critical thinking skills and a sense of responsibility in their social lives (Salsabila et al., 2024).

However, in practice, Social Studies (IPS) learning in elementary schools is still often narrowly understood as a subject that emphasizes memorization of concepts and facts, meaning that its function as

a medium for character education has not been fully optimized. This condition highlights a gap between the ideal objectives of IPS learning and its implementation in the field, particularly in integrating character values into a meaningful and contextual learning process.

Several previous studies highlight the strategic role of Social Studies (IPS) learning in shaping elementary school students' character. Research by [Oktaviani, et al. \(2022\)](#) in the article "Character Education through Elementary School IPS Learning" emphasizes that students' character can be instilled contextually through IPS learning that integrates social and cultural values. Similarly, [Salsabila et al. \(2024\)](#) in the article "IPS Learning in Character Education for Elementary School Students" concluded that IPS serves as an effective medium for introducing moral and social values, particularly through project-based learning and participatory discussion methods. Meanwhile, [Sahira et al. \(2022\)](#) in the field study "Implementation of IPS Learning in Developing Students' Character at Elementary Schools" highlighted the need for varied teaching strategies to ensure optimal and engaging character development. Furthermore, [Lusiana & Fatonah \(2022\)](#) in the article "Character Education through IPS Learning at the Elementary School Level" underscored the importance of curriculum and teacher roles in holistically developing students' character through IPS. The common thread among these four studies is the recognition of IPS as a strategic tool for character development. Their differences lie in approach and data sources, with some employing literature-based methods and others using field research. The innovation of the present study lies in thematically analyzing the literature and providing a comparative synthesis of various approaches to present a comprehensive picture of how IPS learning is designed and implemented to shape elementary school students' character within the context of Indonesia's current curriculum. Nonetheless, most of these studies are still presented partially, either focusing on specific methods or particular school contexts, and do not offer a comprehensive synthesis across research findings.

Based on these conditions, there are still limitations in the existing literature that systematically synthesizes the relationship between Social Studies learning strategies, the character values being developed, and their implications for instructional practice, particularly within the context of Indonesia's current curriculum. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its thematic and comparative literature analysis, which maps various IPS learning approaches to the character values of elementary school students, thereby producing a more comprehensive and structured overview.

This study aims to analyze and examine Social Studies learning in developing students' character at the elementary school level. The primary focus of this review is to analyze how the IPS learning strategies employed by teachers are able to integrate character values into classroom learning processes. The discussion concentrates on the learning approaches used, as well as the extent to which IPS instructional materials incorporate character values such as responsibility, tolerance, honesty, and empathy. The findings of this study are expected to provide a theoretical contribution in the form of a systematic synthesis of the literature and a practical contribution as a reference for teachers and curriculum developers in optimizing the role of IPS as a medium for character education in elementary schools.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design. According [Abdussamad \(2021\)](#), qualitative research is used to investigate phenomena in their natural settings without manipulation. In this process, the researcher acts directly as the primary instrument for data collection. Data are gathered through various complementary techniques (triangulation), and the analysis is conducted inductively, moving from specific data toward general conclusions. The results of qualitative research focus more on understanding meaning and context rather than making broad generalizations. Qualitative research methods aim to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena by exploring the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals or groups within their natural contexts. The primary focus is not on numbers or statistical analysis, but on a holistic understanding of processes, interactions, and the meanings underlying events or behaviors.

This research adopts a literature review approach as the basis for examining and analyzing various relevant sources related to the analysis of Social Studies learning in developing elementary school students' character. [Mgdalena et al. \(2021\)](#) explain a literature review is a research method conducted by collecting, examining, and analyzing various written sources such as books, journals, articles, and other documents relevant to the research topic. Its purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of theories, concepts, and findings from previous studies related to the issue under investigation. The data collection process is carried out by searching for scholarly articles in several databases, namely Google Scholar and nationally accredited journal portals indexed in the Science and Technology Index (SINTA) levels 4–5. The

articles reviewed are limited to publications from 2019 to 2024 to ensure the currency and relevance of the research findings. Through this literature review, the researcher aims to explore and synthesize relevant concepts, theories, and prior research findings, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of how Social Studies learning can effectively contribute to the development of students' character.

The inclusion criteria in this literature review consist of: (1) national and international journal articles discussing Social Studies (IPS) learning or studies related to social studies education at the elementary school level; (2) articles that explicitly examine character education or students' character values; and (3) articles published in either Indonesian or English. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include articles that are not relevant to the elementary school context, non-journal scholarly works such as theses or unpublished reports, and articles that focus solely on cognitive aspects without any connection to character development. Based on this selection process, approximately twelve articles that met the inclusion criteria were analyzed further. Data analysis was conducted thematically by grouping research findings according to IPS learning strategies, the character values developed, and their implications for instructional practices in elementary schools. This analytical approach aims to produce a comparative synthesis across studies, thereby providing a more systematic overview of the role of IPS learning in developing students' character.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the results of the literature review based on a thematic and comparative analysis of previous studies on Social Studies (IPS) learning and character development at the elementary school level. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns related to learning strategies, character values developed, and key findings reported across selected studies.

Tabel 1. Hasil Kajian Literatur

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	IPS Learning Strategies / Approaches	Character Values Developed	Key Findings
Sambas (2020)	IPS learning and social ethics	Contextual learning, case discussion, value reflection	Empathy, social awareness, ethics	IPS provides opportunities to develop social sensitivity and ethical awareness through contextual activities.
Rusmiati et al. (2023)	IPS content and character education	Integration of moral and social values in IPS materials	Tolerance, responsibility, honesty, cooperation	IPS materials contain moral and humanitarian values that support character development.
Novianti et al. (2023)	IPS learning development in elementary schools	Discussion, role playing, project-based learning	Cooperation, responsibility, empathy	Active and participatory learning supports meaningful character formation.
Iyan et al. (2022)	Character education through IPS	Group discussion and role playing	Responsibility, courage, empathy, justice	Role playing enables students to internalize character values through experiential learning.
Hasibuan et al. (2024)	IPS learning and character building	Role playing and democratic discussion	Cooperation, communication, conflict resolution	IPS learning enhances democratic attitudes and social skills.
Wijayanti et al. (2022)	Character education in IPS learning	Contextual and participatory learning	Social responsibility, empathy, cooperation	Emotionally engaging strategies effectively link IPS content with character values.
Oktaviani et al. (2022)	Character education through IPS at elementary level	Contextual and reflective IPS learning	Tolerance, nationalism, honesty, social care	Reflective learning strengthens students' understanding of social and moral values.

Sudirman & Purnayasa (2024)	Character development in IPS learning	Integrated IPS learning, discussion, environmental projects	Responsibility, environmental care, discipline	IPS learning integrates character education across social and environmental topics.
Purba et al. (2024)	IPAS implementation in the Merdeka Curriculum	Project-based learning, case studies, value reflection	Independence, cooperation, integrity, global diversity	IPAS learning strengthens the Pancasila Student Profile through meaningful learning experiences.

Discussion

Social Studies learning has great potential to support the development of students' character at the elementary school level. This view is in line with the opinion that [Rusmiati et al. \(2023\)](#) explain that Social Studies (IPS) materials do not merely present facts and concepts about social, cultural, economic, and historical life, but are also rich in moral and humanitarian values that are relevant to students' daily lives. Through IPS learning, students are introduced to the importance of tolerance, responsibility, mutual cooperation, honesty, as well as awareness of rights and obligations as citizens. [Sambas \(2020\)](#) adds that IPS learning provides space for students to develop social sensitivity and ethical awareness through discussions of real-life cases, value reflection, and contextual learning activities that foster empathy and concern for others. With appropriate approaches and support from teachers who are able to integrate character values into the learning process, IPS can become an effective medium for shaping students' character holistically from an early age.

Social Studies learning in elementary schools has great potential for students' character development when it is supported by the implementation of appropriate teaching methods and learning strategies. [Novianti et al. \(2023\)](#) explain that through active, participatory, and contextual approaches—such as group discussions, role playing, case studies, or project-based learning—students not only learn to understand social concepts but are also directly involved in the process of shaping attitudes and values. These learning strategies enable students to practice cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and respect for differing opinions. In other words, character is not taught merely in a theoretical manner but is developed through meaningful learning experiences that are relevant to their real lives. Therefore, the success of Social Studies learning in character development largely depends on how teachers design learning processes that emphasize emotional engagement, social interaction, and value reflection.

One method that plays an important role in Social Studies (IPS) learning in fostering character education is the group discussion method. This method allows students to assume certain roles or social situations related to the learning material, such as portraying national heroes, community officials, or family members. Through these activities, students not only understand the social roles being studied but also emotionally experience the values embedded in them, such as responsibility, courage, empathy, and justice. This learning experience becomes more meaningful because students are actively involved both cognitively and affectively ([Iyan et al., 2022](#)).

In addition to relevant methods, the role-playing strategy helps students develop social skills such as cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution. For example, when enacting situations of community deliberation, students learn to respect others' opinions, behave democratically, and seek solutions collectively. These values are essential components of character education needed in social life. Thus, the role-playing method not only delivers Social Studies content in an engaging way but also shapes students' character through direct, contextual experiences that engage their emotional aspects ([Hasibuan et al., 2024](#)).

The implementation of discussion methods and strategies such as role playing in Social Studies learning has a tangible impact on the character development of elementary school students, particularly within the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. The findings of the literature review indicate that students who are actively involved in role-based learning demonstrate improvements in aspects such as social responsibility, empathy, and collaboration skills. The novelty of this study lies in its thematic literature analysis and comparative synthesis of various approaches, enabling a more comprehensive mapping of how IPS learning strategies are designed and contextually implemented in the classroom. This synthesis shows that methods which activate students' emotional engagement and social interaction are able to functionally and applicatively bridge IPS content

with character values, aligning with the current demands of character education within the Indonesian curriculum (Wijayanti et al., 2022).

In Social Studies (IPS) learning, character education can be holistically integrated into every relevant topic, thereby supporting the natural and contextual development of character values among elementary school students. This is consistent with the findings of Oktaviani et al. (2022) which indicate that Social Studies (IPS) materials at the elementary school level are closely related to the strengthening of character education, as they contain themes relevant to social life and humanitarian values. Topics such as cultural diversity, the history of national struggles, the role of individuals in society, citizens' rights and obligations, and the importance of environmental preservation provide opportunities for students to understand values such as tolerance, responsibility, patriotism, honesty, and social awareness. Through contextual and reflective learning approaches, these materials not only enrich students' knowledge of social life but also instill attitudes and behaviors that reflect positive character in everyday life. Furthermore, Sudirman & Purnayasa (2024) explain that Social Studies learning offers opportunities for teachers to embed character values in every topic taught. For example, when discussing ecosystem-related material, teachers can cultivate awareness of the importance of environmental conservation, which is associated with the development of responsibility and care for nature. The cultivation of these character values can be carried out through various learning methods, such as discussions, case study analysis, and environmental projects that encourage students' active and direct involvement.

In the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the subject known as Science and Social Studies (IPAS) integrates Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Studies (IPS). Nevertheless, this integration still positions character education as one of the main focal points through the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile. This curriculum promotes learning that is more contextual, exploratory, and student-centered, enabling character values such as mutual cooperation, integrity, independence, and global diversity to be developed authentically through the learning process. Within the context of IPS, character education can be effectively implemented through project-based learning, case studies, and value reflection directly connected to social topics in students' surrounding environments. Through these approaches, students not only understand social concepts theoretically but are also encouraged to internalize and practice character values in their daily lives, in line with the spirit of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes meaningful and transformative learning (Purba et al., 2024).

Social Studies (IPS) learning emphasizes the importance of character education through the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, which includes values such as mutual cooperation, integrity, independence, critical thinking, global diversity, and faith in and devotion to God Almighty. These values can be cultivated through IPS content that discusses cultural diversity in Indonesia, the roles of national figures, systems of government, community life, and citizens' rights and obligations. For example, through the topic of Social and Cultural Diversity, students can learn to respect differences and develop tolerance, while in lessons on Heroes' Struggles, values such as patriotism, responsibility, and leadership can be emphasized. To convey these values meaningfully, teachers can employ active learning methods such as project-based learning, role playing, and group discussions, supported by inquiry-based learning strategies and value reflection. This approach allows students to be directly involved in the processes of thinking, acting, and reflecting on attitudes that align with the expected character traits, ensuring that learning is not only cognitive in nature but also addresses affective and social aspects holistically. Thus, IPS learning within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* not only strengthens students' understanding of social life but also shapes them into individuals with strong character who are responsible toward their social environment (Purba et al., 2024). This is consistent with the findings of Sudirman & Purnayasa (2024), who explain that several factors influence the development of students' character in Social Studies (IPS) learning. First, the family environment plays an important role, as students who grow up in families that uphold moral values tend to demonstrate stronger character. Second, the role of teachers is crucial; teachers who are able to serve as role models and consistently provide moral guidance can reinforce the process of character formation in students. Third, the learning methods employed also have a significant influence, as interactive approaches and those based on real-life environmental experiences have been shown to contribute to the development of positive attitudes and character in students.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Social Studies learning in elementary schools plays a strategic role in developing students' character through the integration of moral, social, and humanitarian values that are relevant to everyday life. IPS content not only presents concepts related to social, cultural, economic, and historical life but also instills attitudes such as tolerance, responsibility, mutual cooperation, honesty, empathy, and awareness of rights and obligations as citizens. The success of

character development through IPS learning largely depends on the implementation of active, participatory, and contextual learning methods and strategies, such as group discussions, role playing, case studies, and project-based learning, which allow students to engage cognitively, affectively, and socially. These methods help students develop social skills, communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution abilities, while also enabling them to experience character values emotionally through direct learning experiences. This learning approach, which emphasizes emotional engagement and value reflection, aligns with the objectives of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which focuses on strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, including mutual cooperation, integrity, independence, critical thinking, global diversity, and faith. Furthermore, the integration of character education within IPS can be achieved through various topics such as cultural diversity, national struggles, citizens' rights and obligations, and environmental conservation, all of which provide opportunities for students to understand and internalize character values in a contextual and meaningful way. Key supporting factors include the role of teachers as role models and facilitators who are able to integrate character values into the learning process, a supportive family environment, and learning methods that stimulate real-life experiences and social interaction. Thus, IPS learning not only enriches students' knowledge but also shapes them into individuals with strong character who are ready to contribute positively to society.

CONCLUSION

The results of the literature review indicate that Social Studies (IPS) learning tends to contribute to the development of elementary school students' character, particularly when it is implemented through contextual, participatory, and student-centered learning approaches. Various studies emphasize that IPS content not only provides knowledge of social, cultural, economic, and historical aspects, but also contains moral and humanitarian values that can be internalized through appropriate learning strategies. Through the application of interactive and contextual learning methods such as group discussions, role playing, case studies, and project-based learning, students not only understand concepts cognitively but also experience a comprehensive process of attitude and character value formation. This approach enables students to develop tolerance, responsibility, mutual cooperation, empathy, honesty, and awareness of rights and obligations as citizens. In addition, the success of IPS learning in shaping character is strongly influenced by the role of teachers as role models and facilitators, a supportive family environment, and learning strategies that encourage students' emotional engagement and social interaction. Thus, IPS has proven to be an important medium in holistically shaping students' character in ways that are relevant to real-life contexts, in line with the objectives of character education within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that elementary school teachers need to design IPS learning that is not only oriented toward cognitive achievement but also consciously integrates character values into learning objectives, materials, methods, and assessments. Teachers are encouraged to utilize active and contextual learning models that allow students to directly experience social situations relevant to their lives. For curriculum developers, the results of this review highlight the importance of designing IPS materials that explicitly strengthen character values and align with the Pancasila Student Profile, so that IPS learning can function optimally as a vehicle for character education in elementary schools.

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