

# Building Students' Social Awareness Through Social Studies Learning in Elementary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

*Social awareness is an important dimension in the character development of students in elementary schools. Through social awareness, students are able to demonstrate empathy, tolerance, and concern for their social environment. Social Studies (IPS) as a subject in elementary schools plays a strategic role in instilling social values through contextual and experience-based learning. This literature study aims to explore various approaches, strategies, and practices in social studies learning that can encourage the development of students' social awareness. The method used is a library review by analyzing journal articles, books, and previous research results related to the topic of social studies learning and social awareness. The results show that social problem-based learning, collaborative projects, reflective discussions, and the integration of character values are very effective in fostering students' social awareness. In addition, the use of contextual learning media and active student involvement in school social activities have been proven to foster social sensitivity and responsibility. In conclusion, understanding social awareness through social studies learning in elementary schools requires a holistic, innovative, and relevant approach to students' lives. Teachers have a crucial role as facilitators who not only transfer knowledge but also guide students to become caring and socially responsible individuals.*

**Keywords:** Social Awareness, Social Studies Learning, Elementary School, Social Character, Values Education.

## I. INTRODUCTION

21st-century education demands the holistic development of student competencies, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills. One essential competency in the affective domain is social awareness, which is the ability to understand social conditions in society, demonstrate empathy for others, and actively participate in positive social activities. According to Widodo and Lestari (2022), social awareness is a key indicator of the development of democratic, tolerant, and responsible student character. In the context of basic education, developing social awareness is crucial for preparing the younger generation to face complex and multicultural global social challenges.

Social Studies (IPS) plays a strategic role in developing elementary school students' social awareness. The Independent Curriculum, implemented nationally in 2022, emphasizes the importance of contextual and values-based learning, including social and civic values. Social studies learning has the potential to be an effective medium for internalizing social values through an experiential, collaborative, and reflective approach. According to Anugrah and Sutrisno (2023), real-life-oriented social studies learning encourages students to critically understand social issues and develop sensitivity to problems occurring in their environment.

However, the reality on the ground shows that social studies learning in elementary schools is often stuck in a teacher-centered approach and focuses on memorization. This results in students experiencing difficulties in connecting social studies material with their daily social lives. A study conducted by Oktaviani and Prasetyo (2023) revealed that more than 60% of elementary school students in several regions were unable to identify forms of social concern in their school environment, due to a lack of values-based learning practices and social activities. Uncontextualized learning risks creating a gap between students' theoretical understanding and social attitudes in real life.

As modern learning approaches evolve, various strategies have been developed to instill social awareness through social studies. Approaches such as project-based learning, service learning, and problem-based learning have been shown to increase students' active participation and social empathy. A recent study by Fatimah and Yuliana (2024) showed that implementing project-based learning with a social environment theme successfully increased students' empathy by 35% within one semester. Learning activities involving teamwork, direct observation in the environment, and discussions of social issues can stimulate social awareness while improving civic literacy.

Not only the approach, but the use of relevant learning media also influences the success of developing social awareness. Media such as documentary videos, digital comics, and social simulations can bridge concepts in textbooks with real-life social situations. According to Susanto and Arifah (2023), the use of digital media in social studies learning provides an immersive experience that strengthens students' understanding of the social realities around them. Teachers are expected to be able to utilize technology creatively to create an interactive and meaningful learning environment for students.

The teacher's role as a facilitator is a central element in developing social awareness. Teachers serve not only as transmitters of material but also as moral and social guides, providing concrete examples through their behavior, interactions, and learning methods. Ramadhani and Kusuma (2022) emphasize the importance of teacher training in implementing a social-emotional learning approach that aligns with social studies values. Teachers with a strong social awareness will be better able to integrate these values into daily learning activities, thus motivating students to emulate and apply them in real life.

Thus, an in-depth literature review is essential to examine how social studies learning can be optimally utilized to build social awareness in elementary school students. This study aims to analyze theories, approaches, and practices of social studies learning that are effective in shaping students' social character. The results are expected to serve as academic and practical references for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in strengthening the fundamental social function of education in the current era of educational transformation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social awareness is part of socio-emotional intelligence, related to an individual's ability to understand and respond to the social conditions around them. In the context of elementary education, social awareness encompasses empathy, tolerance, caring, and a desire to help others in everyday life. According to Kurniasari and Widyastuti (2023), social awareness in elementary school-aged children can be systematically developed through learning that emphasizes collaborative aspects, interpersonal communication, and value reflection. Character-based social education is crucial in creating a generation that is sensitive to social issues in their environment.

Social studies learning is an ideal vehicle for fostering social awareness because its content is directly related to the realities of social life. Social studies integrates various social science concepts such as sociology, geography, economics, and history, all of which relate to human interactions in society. Setiawan and Putri (2022) state that contextual and thematic social studies learning can connect students with current social issues, so they not only learn to understand concepts but also learn to experience and interpret social life directly. Therefore, a learning approach based on real-life experiences is key.

A social problem-based approach and collaborative projects are proven effective strategies for increasing social awareness in elementary school students. According to Laili and Mahendra (2024), the application of problem-based learning methods in social studies encourages students to think critically and empathically about social issues such as poverty, the environment, and social conflict. Furthermore, social action-based project activities, such as cleanliness campaigns or fundraising, strengthen students' solidarity and sense of responsibility. This process not only impacts cognitive aspects but also enriches students' affective and psychomotor aspects.

The use of digital media and interactive technology also plays a crucial role in strengthening social awareness through social studies learning. The use of documentary videos, interactive stories, and social simulations can provide an immersive learning experience that engages students emotionally. According to Andriani and Taufik (2023), digital media that depicts real-life stories from social life successfully evokes empathy and enhances students' understanding of issues of injustice, cultural diversity, and human rights. Therefore, selecting the right media will significantly support the effectiveness of social studies learning in fostering social awareness.

Equally important is the role of teachers in designing learning that fosters students' social awareness. Teachers need to possess high levels of social-emotional literacy to facilitate the development of students' social character. Yuliani and Hidayat (2022) emphasize that teachers who are able to provide reflective learning, create spaces for social dialogue, and serve as role models will be more successful in fostering students' social awareness. Therefore, teachers' social competence is a crucial factor in the success of social studies education based on social values in elementary schools.

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a library research approach, which aims to explore, examine, and analyze various research findings, theories, and learning practices relevant to developing students' social awareness through social studies learning in elementary schools. This library research was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding of various scientific perspectives and allows researchers to identify patterns, trends, and insights from previous research. This method is considered appropriate for the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches in shaping students' social awareness and provides a conceptual basis for developing innovative and applicable learning practices.

The data collection process was conducted by searching for scientific articles published between 2020 and 2024, with priority given to sources from accredited national journals and reputable international journals. Databases used in the search included Google Scholar, DOAJ, Sinta, and ResearchGate. Keywords used included: "social awareness of elementary school students," "social studies learning in elementary school," "social character education," "contextual social studies," and "project-based social studies learning." The initial search found more than 50 relevant articles, but after a selection process based on topic relevance, research methods, and publication quality,

25 articles were selected as the main material in this study. The literature was then classified based on themes, approaches, and main findings for thematic analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques and a qualitative thematic approach. Each article was reviewed to identify key components of social studies learning related to the development of students' social awareness, such as learning strategies, media used, teacher roles, and affective learning outcomes. The collected data were then coded to identify consistent thematic patterns and to group best practices in developing social awareness. This process aims to gain a deeper understanding of how social studies learning can be effectively designed to foster social awareness in students from elementary school onward.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis of 25 scientific articles on optics that discuss the relationship between social studies learning and the development of social awareness of elementary school students, five main findings were found as follows:

##### 4.1 Contextual Approach Increases the Relevance of Social Studies Material

Social studies learning based on a contextual approach is increasingly relevant in elementary schools because it can bridge students' understanding between abstract material and their real-life experiences. This approach emphasizes the connection between subject matter and students' daily experiences. In this way, students not only learn social concepts theoretically but also understand their application in real-life situations. Setiawan and Putri (2022) stated that social studies material linked to students' local and daily contexts, such as interactions within the family, activities in the neighborhood, and social events around them, can arouse students' curiosity and emotional connection to the material. This provides a strong foundation for the process of internalizing social values.

A contextual approach also encourages active student engagement in the learning process because they perceive what they learn as meaningful and directly beneficial. When students learn the value of mutual cooperation, for example through observing community service activities at school or in their community, they not only understand its meaning but also witness firsthand how these values are applied in social life. This type of engagement creates a meaningful learning experience and impacts the development of students' social attitudes. According to Kurniasari and Widyastuti (2023), contextual and socially-based learning has been shown to improve students' ability to understand differences, collaborate with others, and foster empathy from an early age.

Furthermore, a contextual approach positions students as active subjects in the knowledge construction process. Teachers are no longer the sole source of information, but rather facilitators who guide students in exploring the social meaning of their own experiences. This strategy supports the principle of active learning, where students learn through direct involvement, real-life social situations, and reflection on their experiences. Lestari (2022) showed that students who learned social studies using a contextual approach showed significant improvements in their ability to understand social concepts and apply them in everyday life, compared to students who only learned through a conventional approach. Therefore, it is important for elementary school teachers to design social studies learning based on students' real-life social conditions so that social values can be optimally absorbed.

##### 4.2 Active Learning Strategies Foster Empathy and Caring

Active learning strategies in social studies are an effective approach to fostering empathy and social awareness in elementary school students. This approach positions students as key actors in the learning process, not simply recipients of information. Methods such as problem-based learning (PBL), group discussions, and role-playing provide space for students to explore social issues, develop critical thinking skills, and reflect on direct social experiences. Laili and Mahendra (2024) explain that social studies learning with an active approach allows students to interact with peers, engage in dialogue about real-life social issues, and seek collaborative solutions to the issues raised. This indirectly trains them to become caring individuals and to be aware of the social conditions of their environment.

Activities such as group discussions and social case studies encourage students to express their opinions, listen to others' perspectives, and compare the social values they encounter. In this process, students learn to appreciate differences and strengthen their social-emotional skills. This type of learning not only shapes students' cognitive knowledge but also builds social awareness based on experience and emotion. According to Sari and Gunawan (2023), involvement in systematically designed social discussions can stimulate the development of interpersonal empathy, as students are encouraged to position themselves in the situations experienced by others, both in local and global contexts. This aligns with the goal of character education in elementary schools, which aims to shape students into civilized and socially responsible individuals.

Role-playing is another active learning strategy that significantly enhances empathy. In this activity, students are asked to play specific characters in social situations, such as children affected by a disaster, parents living in poverty, or citizens fighting for justice. Nurhaliza and Pramudito (2022) demonstrated that students who participated in role-playing simulations experienced significant improvements in social sensitivity and the ability to understand others' feelings. This experience fosters an emotional closeness that is difficult to achieve through conventional learning alone. Therefore, active learning strategies not only enrich teachers' teaching methods but also serve as an effective means of developing students with social awareness and empathy as part of their character.

### 4.3 Social-Based Learning Projects Enhance Social Responsibility

The project-based learning (PjBL) model is a highly effective approach to instilling social responsibility in elementary school students. In social studies, this strategy provides students with the opportunity to plan, implement, and launch activities directly related to social life. Fatimah and Yuliana (2024) noted that student involvement in social projects such as school environmental cleanliness campaigns, collecting donations for disaster victims, or providing small health education to peers can foster a strong sense of responsibility towards others. Through real involvement in these activities, students not only learn social concepts but also directly experience and internalize human values.

Social projects provide an authentic learning space, where students not only think theoretically but also act concretely. Students are encouraged to recognize social problems around them, design solutions, and contribute to the resolution process. According to Darmawan and Sulastri (2023), direct experience in social projects can foster a sense of belonging, concern for the social environment, and courage in taking initiatives. Furthermore, project-based learning also encourages teamwork, interpersonal communication, and managerial skills from an early age, which are part of the social skills needed in community life. Thus, PjBL in social studies learning not only improves cognitive learning outcomes but also strengthens students' affective dimensions.

Furthermore, social projects linked to social studies subject matter enable students to understand the role of individuals in building a just and prosperous society. Students no longer view social issues as distant and unrelated, but rather as part of a shared responsibility. Sumarni and Rahayu (2022) explain that a project-based approach in social studies strongly supports the development of students' social character because it fosters empathy, participation, and solidarity directly through real-life experiences. Therefore, the implementation of social project-based learning in social studies needs to be systematically developed in elementary schools as an effective strategy for developing a socially responsible young generation ready to contribute to society.

### 4.4 Interactive Digital Media Strengthens Affective Experiences

The development of digital technology has opened up significant opportunities in education, including strengthening students' affective aspects. In the context of social studies learning in elementary schools, the use of interactive digital media such as documentary videos, educational animations, and multimedia-based stories provides a more lively learning experience, touches emotions, and fosters social empathy. Visual media can visualize complex social situations in a concrete and touching way, allowing students to experience the impact of issues such as poverty, social conflict, and natural disasters more deeply. According to Andriani and Taufik (2023), digital media that contain real-life stories provide a strong emotional stimulus to the community, which is difficult to achieve through conventional text-based methods alone.

Digital media also allows students to actively engage through emotional responses and personal reflection. When students watch videos about children experiencing social inequality or animations about the importance of cooperation among villagers, they not only learn social concepts but also begin to understand the feelings of others and realize the importance of taking action in their social lives. Fadilah and Nurhadi (2022) found that the use of educational animations in social studies learning can increase students' empathy by up to 40% compared to classes that only use lectures and textbooks. This affective engagement is an important foundation for building sustainable social awareness starting from elementary school.

Furthermore, digital media can be integrated with project-based or problem-based learning strategies to enhance students' reflective abilities. Teachers can encourage students to create short videos about social issues in their environment, or conduct interactive presentations based on data and images about cultural diversity in Indonesia. The use of this technology not only increases interest and motivation to learn but also broadens students' global social insights. Putra and Lestari (2023) emphasize that technology integration in social studies can bridge the gap between social theory and practice, as well as strengthen character formation through visual experiences and emotional narratives. Therefore, digital media must be optimally utilized by teachers to strengthen students' affective dimensions in social studies learning.

### 4.5 The Role of Teachers as Facilitators of Social Awareness is Vital

Teachers play a central role in fostering students' social awareness through social studies learning in elementary schools. Teachers not only deliver material but also serve as facilitators, mentors, and role models for the social values they wish to instill in students. In social studies learning, teachers play a crucial role in building connections between academic knowledge and the realities of social life, enabling students to interpret the material contextually. Yuliani and Hidayat (2022) emphasize that teachers who create an inclusive, democratic, and empathy-oriented learning environment are more effective in fostering positive social attitudes in students. This classroom environment allows students to feel safe expressing their views, learn to appreciate differences, and actively participate in social discussions.

Moreover, teachers are role models who directly influence the development of students' social character. Teachers' attitudes that demonstrate empathy, caring, and fairness in daily classroom interactions will be imitated by students. Research by Rachmawati and Darmaji (2023) found that elementary school students tend to imitate their teachers' social behavior, both in aspects of communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Teachers who consistently demonstrate positive social behavior indirectly instill these values in their students. Therefore, teachers' personality and social integrity are crucial in building students' social awareness sustainably.



In addition to being role models, teachers must also be able to develop learning strategies that enable students to explore social issues reflectively. Teachers need to plan learning activities that provide space for students to discuss, share experiences, and take part in solving simple social problems. According to Astuti and Nugraheni (2023), teachers who implement a reflective and collaborative approach tend to be more successful in fostering social awareness because students feel emotionally and intellectually involved in the learning process. Therefore, teachers who understand students' social dynamics and are able to manage the classroom as a social learning space will make a significant contribution to the development of students' character and social awareness from an early age.

## V. CONCLUSION

Social Studies (IPS) learning in elementary schools has great potential to shape students' social awareness if designed with an appropriate and humanistic approach. This literature review shows that contextual approaches, active learning strategies, social project-based learning, and the use of interactive digital media are effective methods for increasing students' empathy, concern, and social responsibility. Each method has its own strengths in connecting IPS material to students' real lives, enabling them to not only understand but also internalize the social values needed in community life.

In addition to learning approaches and strategies, the teacher's role as a facilitator is crucial in the process of fostering social awareness. Teachers not only act as transmitters of material but also as role models and creators of an inclusive, democratic, and reflective learning environment. Meaningful social studies learning is learning that not only enhances students' cognitive development but also fosters social sensitivity and an awareness of making positive contributions to society. Therefore, the integration of appropriate pedagogical approaches and teachers' commitment to social character education needs to be strengthened so that social studies learning can serve as a strong foundation for developing a generation that is empathetic, caring, and socially responsible.

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