



**International Journal of Education, Social Studies,
And Management (IJESSM)**

e-ISSN : 2775-4154

Volume 5, Issue 3, October 2025

The International Journal of Education, Social Studies, and Management (IJESSM) is published 3 times a year (**February, June, October**).

Focus : Education, Social, Economy, Management, and Culture.

LINK : <http://lppipublishing.com/index.php/ijessm>

Bold Basics of Social Studies in Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

Social Studies in elementary schools plays an important role in shaping students' character, knowledge, and social skills from an early age. This article examines the philosophical, sociological, pedagogical, and psychological foundations underlying the development of social studies in elementary schools through a literature review. The research was conducted by reviewing 20 recent academic sources (2020–2025) relevant to elementary school social studies education. The results show that the philosophical foundation determines the scope and objectives through ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects. The sociological foundation highlights the relationship between the social studies curriculum and social dynamics and community needs. The pedagogical foundation focuses on learning strategies that are appropriate to the developmental characteristics of students. The psychological foundation ensures that learning is in line with children's cognitive, affective, and socio-emotional development. These findings emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach based on the four foundations of education to realize contextual and meaningful social studies learning that supports the achievement of national education goals.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

26 August 2025

Revised

15 September 2025

Accepted

20 October 2025

Keywords

Character Education, Elementary School, Pedagogical Foundations, Philosophical Foundations, Psychological Foundations, Social Sciences, Sociological Foundations

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INTRODUCTION

Social Studies at the elementary school level plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and social understanding. As an integrated subject, social studies simplifies various branches of social sciences (such as sociology, history, geography, and economics) to suit the world of children, while instilling moral values, social attitudes, and critical thinking skills. Thus, social studies is not only about imparting knowledge, but also equipping students to become active, tolerant, and responsible citizens. The achievement of these objectives is always based on a number of educational foundations. In the

context of elementary school social studies, these foundations include philosophical, sociological, pedagogical, and psychological aspects.

In addition, the existence of social studies in elementary schools cannot be separated from efforts to prepare the next generation to understand the noble values of Indonesian culture while being open to global developments. Social studies material helps students become familiar with their family, school, community, and country. Thus, social studies learning serves as a means to internalize the values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and social responsibility that are needed in community life. This is important considering that elementary school students are in the early stages of character formation, so the social values instilled through social studies will become the foundation of their behavior in the future.

Social studies learning based on philosophical, sociological, pedagogical, and psychological foundations will create a learning process that is more contextual and relevant to students' real lives. Teachers can relate social studies material to students' daily experiences so that they can understand social concepts not only theoretically but also practically. With this approach, social studies not only prepares students to become academically intelligent individuals, but also equips them with social sensitivity, national awareness, and 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. Thus, social studies learning will increasingly serve as a foundation for achieving national educational goals while shaping a generation that is adaptive to the changing times.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a literature review method with a narrative review approach to examine the philosophical, sociological, pedagogical, and psychological foundations in the development of Social Sciences (IPS) in elementary schools. The literature search was conducted systematically through various academic databases with inclusion criteria for publications from 2020–2025 relevant to social studies in elementary schools in Indonesia. From 45 initial sources, 20 main literature were obtained and analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify concepts, categories, and themes in accordance with the four educational foundations.

The synthesis results show that basic social studies theory, learning practices, and curriculum recommendations can be linked to the Indonesian educational context, especially the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. Validity was maintained through source triangulation, peer discussion, and research trace audits. Thus, this study produced a comprehensive theoretical

framework relevant to the development of basic social studies curriculum and learning practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Social Studies (IPS)

Social Studies (IPS) is a subject developed from various social science disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, history, economics, geography, politics, and social psychology, which are then simplified to suit the needs of school education. According to Ahmadi (2011), IPS is a selection of social sciences that have been sorted and adapted for teaching purposes, thus differing from social sciences that are theoretical and academic in nature. IPS emphasizes its educational function, which is to equip students with knowledge, skills, and social attitudes that can be applied in everyday life. According to Marwan & Aramudin (2025), social studies in elementary school should be a vehicle for character building through real social experiences.

Sapriya (2017) also emphasizes that social studies is not only intended to provide an understanding of social phenomena, but also to instill social, moral, and national values. Therefore, social studies is a strategic subject in elementary school because it can be a means of character building for the younger generation from an early age. In this context, social studies serves as a learning vehicle that connects social science concepts with children's concrete experiences, so that what they learn in class can be directly found in real life.

The History of the Birth of Social Sciences

Historically, social studies was born out of the need to provide more integrated social education. In England, social sciences were first introduced in the 19th century, about half a century after the Industrial Revolution, to emphasize the importance of social understanding in facing social change (Gunawan & Rudi, 2013). In the United States, social studies were introduced into the elementary school curriculum in the late 19th century, especially after the Civil War. The main objective was to strengthen national unity, which had been divided by racial, social, and economic differences.

In Indonesia, IPS began to be used as an official term in the 1975 Curriculum. Previously, social subjects were taught separately, such as history, geography, and earth science. This integration arose from the awareness that social learning in elementary schools should be simpler, more applicable, and shape the character of the nation. According to Ahmadi (2011), this integration was also influenced by Indonesia's political and social conditions after the G30S/PKI incident, which emphasized the importance of education as a means to foster the Pancasila ideology and strengthen national identity. Fauziah et al.

(2022) emphasize that IPS in Indonesia serves to strengthen the Pancasila ideology. To date, social studies continues to be developed through the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum with a thematic orientation and character building (Pangestuti et al., 2023).

Social Sciences in Social Studies Education

Social studies in elementary school integrates branches of social sciences: sociology, anthropology, economics, geography, politics, history, and social psychology. This integration provides a comprehensive overview of social phenomena without having to study each discipline separately (Meldina et al., 2020). Nisa & Anshori (2023) emphasize that social studies in lower grades focuses on the immediate environment (family, school), while upper grades focus on national issues. According to Gunawan & Rudi (2013), social studies at the elementary level consists of the following branches of social science:

a. Sociology

Sociology is a branch of science that specifically studies human social life, social structures, and patterns of interaction between individuals and groups. In the context of social studies, sociology makes an important contribution to helping students understand how social relationships are formed and maintained in everyday life. For example, in elementary school, students can learn about cooperation in groups, family structures, or social norms that apply in their environment. Through learning based on a sociological perspective, students are expected to develop an awareness that they are part of a society that has certain roles, rights, and obligations.

b. Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of human culture, including values, traditions, language, and ways of life that are passed down from generation to generation. In social studies, anthropology is very relevant because it helps students recognize and appreciate cultural diversity in Indonesia, ranging from differences in customs, regional dances, traditional clothing, to community belief systems. By studying anthropology, students not only learn about the uniqueness of their own culture, but also respect other cultures. This is important for building tolerance and strengthening the unity of a diverse nation.

c. Economics

Economics is a branch of social science that studies how humans fulfill their needs through the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Complex economic concepts are simplified in social studies lessons to suit the developmental level of elementary school

students. For example, teachers can teach students about managing pocket money, buying and selling at the market, or the importance of saving from an early age. Through economics material, students are trained to understand resource limitations and the importance of managing needs wisely. In addition, economics learning in social studies also equips students with basic entrepreneurial skills and a thrifty attitude that are useful in everyday life.

d. Geography

Geography examines the relationship between humans and space and the environment, both natural and social. In social studies, geography is taught through simple themes such as getting to know the home environment, school, village maps, to broader concepts such as provinces and countries. Through a geographical approach, students learn to recognize natural conditions, resource utilization, and the impact of human interaction with the environment. For example, students can be encouraged to understand the importance of preserving the environment, flood control, or wise land use. Thus, geography in social studies equips students with ecological awareness and the ability to read spatial phenomena around them.

e. Political Science

Political science studies the phenomena of power, government, and political systems that apply in a society. In social studies in elementary school, political material is not taught in a complicated manner, such as constitutional theory, but is introduced through simple practices. Examples include electing a class president, deliberating to make joint decisions, or introducing state symbols such as the Garuda Pancasila emblem and the 1945 Constitution. By studying political aspects in social studies, students are trained to understand the meaning of democracy, the importance of participation, and respect for rules and laws. These values are expected to form the basis for the development of responsible citizens with political awareness from an early age.

f. History

History is a branch of social science that studies past events to learn lessons for the present and future. In social studies learning in elementary school, history is usually taught through stories of national heroes, the struggle for independence, and the origins of a region. History helps students develop a sense of nationalism, appreciate the services of their predecessors, and learn from historical experiences so as not to repeat the same mistakes. In addition, history lessons also instill exemplary values

such as courage, honesty, and a fighting spirit. Thus, students not only learn historical facts but also gain wisdom and internalize the noble values of the nation.

g. Social Psychology

Social psychology is a branch of science that studies individual behavior in the context of groups and how social interactions influence attitudes, motivations, and actions. In social studies, social psychology is important to help students understand their role in a group, such as how to be a good friend, how to lead and be led, and how to build empathy and solidarity. Through social psychology-based learning, teachers can train students to control their emotions, respect other people's opinions, and develop a more mature personality in social interactions.

Foundations of Social Studies Education

a. Philosophical Foundations

The philosophical foundations consist of fundamental ideas that determine the objects of study and the objectives of social studies education. Basic social sciences are a simplification of various social science disciplines to make them meaningful to students (also known as an interdisciplinary approach). At the philosophical level, social studies refers to three aspects: ontology (what is studied), epistemology (how knowledge is acquired), and axiology (emphasizing goals and values). The ontology of social studies determines the scope of material according to students' cognitive development—for example, choosing social environment themes that are familiar to them, such as family and school, so that they are easy for children to understand. Epistemology emphasizes simple scientific methods (observation, discussion, exploration) that are appropriate for elementary school age. Axiology emphasizes the goal of forming social and moral values. For example, in elementary social studies, teachers are expected not only to teach facts but also to instill values of social awareness and responsibility in students. Thus, the philosophical foundation guides the elementary social studies curriculum and methods to strike a balance between mastery of social concepts and character building.

b. Sociological Foundation

The sociological foundation views social studies education as a social phenomenon influenced by social conditions. In general, this foundation highlights the role of education in meeting the needs, ideals, and aspirations of society through social interaction. In the context of elementary school, this means that social studies learning must reflect the

social dynamics in the students' environment (family, community, local culture) and prepare them to participate in social life. For example, basic social studies content is linked to Pancasila values and local social norms so that students learn to manage social interactions constructively. Susanto (2022) emphasizes that the sociological foundation provides “a sociological basis for educational institutions and organizations in the process of social change.” This means that the basic social studies curriculum is designed to address real social issues: fostering cooperation, tolerance, and understanding of diversity. For example, social studies teachers can use group activities and discussions to train students to interact socially, in accordance with basic sociological principles.

c. Pedagogical Foundation

The pedagogical foundation refers to the ways and methods of educating elementary school students in social studies learning. Etymologically, pedagogy comes from the Greek word *paidagogos* (child leader), so it is closely related to the principles of child education. In elementary school, this foundation emphasizes that learning must be planned and implemented based on the developmental characteristics of children (ages 7–12). Sinaga et al. (2025) define the pedagogical foundation as “the basic foundation and direction of education to develop students in relation to the teaching system.” In other words, the pedagogical foundation involves the entire learning process: planning (developing a syllabus and interesting lesson plans), implementation (scientific methods, use of interactive media), and appropriate evaluation. For example, elementary school social studies teachers must use local contexts and active learning approaches (such as projects and games) to make social studies material meaningful to children. This is in line with the Merdeka curriculum, which emphasizes contextual and child-centered learning. Thus, the pedagogical foundation ensures that the way social studies is taught adapts to the developmental profiles and learning needs of elementary school students.

d. Psychological Foundations

Psychological foundations relate to the learning and development processes of elementary school social studies students from a developmental psychology perspective. The goal is for teachers to understand how students think, motivate themselves, and behave so that social studies learning becomes effective. Susanto (2022) states that psychological foundations “provide a fundamental system of ideas for determining how social studies builds a structure... of knowledge... based

on [students'] psychological capacities and experiences." This means that the elementary school social studies curriculum and methods must adapt to children's cognitive and emotional styles. For example, the use of local stories or students' real experiences (such as visits to the village office) takes into account the stages of children's thinking abilities (concrete operations according to Piaget). In addition, psychological aspects also emphasize moral and socio-emotional development: social studies teachers need to help students internalize the values of honesty, mutual cooperation, and empathy through learning materials. In practice, the psychological foundation encourages the selection of learning models that consider individual needs (e.g., task differentiation) and utilize children's intrinsic motivation. Thus, the psychological foundation ensures that social studies learning is responsive to the mindset and psychology of elementary school children, making the learning process enjoyable and meaningful.

CONCLUSION

Social studies education in Indonesian elementary schools needs to be built on four main foundations. The philosophical foundation guides the scope and objectives of social studies values (ontology, epistemology, axiology) so that the material is relevant to children's lives. The sociological foundation connects social studies to the social context and needs of society, emphasizing the role of education in constructive social change. The pedagogical foundation ensures that the social studies learning process is tailored to the developmental characteristics of elementary school children through appropriate planning and methods. The psychological foundation emphasizes understanding students' mindsets and motivations so that social studies learning is effective cognitively and affectively. The combination of these four foundations forms a comprehensive basis for the development of the elementary school social studies curriculum and learning practices. With a strong foundation, it is hoped that students will acquire social studies knowledge while developing social sensitivity and positive character, in line with national education goals.

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