



IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION TO BOOST CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN UPPER ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Chairunnisa Amelia

Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan. Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara

Email: chairunnisaamelia@umsu.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History Receive: 18-04-2026 Revision: 15-05-2026 Accept: 30-06-2026	Social Studies education plays an important role in helping students understand various social issues while also developing critical thinking skills. However, Social Studies learning still faces challenges, such as teacher-centered learning processes and a lack of student involvement in analyzing problems. This study aims to describe the implementation of Social Studies education in improving the critical thinking skills of upper elementary school students. The study uses a literature review method with a qualitative descriptive approach. Data was obtained from various journal articles relevant to Social Studies learning, critical thinking skills, and upper elementary school students. The data was analyzed through stages of identification, review, comparison, and conclusion based on previous research results. The review shows that the implementation of Social Studies education can support the development of critical thinking skills through active, contextual learning, and directly involve students. Activities like discussions, Q&A sessions, problem analysis, problem-solving, and using suitable teaching methods and media can help students understand information, analyze problems, give reasons, and draw conclusions. In this way, properly designed social studies lessons can become a way to develop critical thinking skills for upper elementary school students.
Keywords	Social Studies education, critical thinking, upper-grade students, elementary school

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the important aspects in shaping the abilities and character of students so they can face various challenges in life. Education doesn't just involve teaching certain skills or expertise, but also includes a deeper process, namely the provision of knowledge, judgment, and wisdom (Pristiwanti dkk., 2022).

One of the areas of study that plays a role in developing these skills is Social Studies (IPS). Social Studies education in elementary school not only aims to provide knowledge about social life but also helps students understand various events, social relationships, the environment, and issues that occur in daily life. Meaningful IPS learning can help students connect the learning

material with their experiences and surroundings. In upper elementary grades, IPS learning can be a means to develop students' critical thinking skills. IPS learning is not only focused on mastering knowledge but also encourages students to think, analyze information, understand problems, and make decisions. Critical thinking skills are important developed since elementary school because students need to be able to understand information, analyze a problem, give reasons, and draw conclusions. Research (Al-Kansa dkk., 2022) shows that learning social studies has an effect on elementary students' critical thinking skills.

However, in practice, social studies learning still faces various obstacles, such as teacher-centered learning and a lack of student involvement in analyzing problems. This condition shows that social studies learning still faces various challenges, especially when the learning process is more centered on the teacher and gives students little chance to participate actively. Using the right learning media can be one way to help make learning more interesting and engaging for students (Wulandari dkk., 2023).

Therefore, social studies learning needs to be carried out actively and meaningfully through activities that give students the chance to discuss, express opinions, analyze information, and solve problems. Besides learning media, the use of appropriate strategies, methods, and learning models is also needed to develop critical thinking skills. (Wiguna, 2023) shows that efforts to improve students' critical thinking in social studies learning can be done by giving students problems to solve and using appropriate strategies, methods, models, and learning media. These activities give students the chance to get involved in problem-solving and develop critical thinking skills.

The right implementation of social studies learning can create a more active learning process and provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Teachers can connect social studies

material to everyday life and use various learning activities that encourage students to ask questions, discuss, gather information, and share opinions. Through this process, students not only gain an understanding of social studies material but also have the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills when facing various social issues in their surroundings (Fauziyati and Sriyanto, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a literature review method with a qualitative descriptive approach. The research data were obtained through searching and reviewing various literature sources, such as journal articles relevant to Social Studies Education, teaching in upper elementary classes, and students' critical thinking skills. The sources used were selected based on their relevance to the research topic and the year of publication. The data obtained were then analyzed by identifying, reviewing, comparing, and drawing conclusions from various research findings related to the implementation of Social Studies Education in developing students' critical thinking skills.

3. RESULT

Based on the results of the literature review, the implementation of Social Studies education for upper-grade elementary school students can be done through learning that actively involves students. Learning isn't just focused on the teacher delivering the material, but also gives students the chance to understand social issues related to everyday life. Activities like discussions, Q&A, problem analysis, information searching, and sharing opinions can be used to increase student engagement in the learning process. (Anggraeni dkk., 2022) showing that social studies learning in upper grades can be used to develop students' critical thinking skills through learning activities that involve thinking and analysis processes. This indicates that social

studies learning has quite a lot of room to develop students' thinking abilities if the learning process is designed actively and according to the characteristics of upper-grade students. Critical thinking development can be done through learning that presents real problems to students. When students are faced with a problem, Students can be trained to identify problems, look for relevant information, consider various possibilities, and decide on solutions. This process makes students more active in learning and gives them experience in using their thinking skills.

4. DISCUSSION

Research (Mustofiyah and Muhibbin, 2024) It shows that applying problem-based learning can help improve the critical thinking skills of elementary school students through activities that involve them in solving problems. Besides problem-based learning, student involvement in learning activities is also an important factor in developing critical thinking skills. Students need to be given opportunities to discuss and work together with friends to understand a problem. Through discussions, students can express their opinions, compare them with the information they've gathered, and provide reasons for the answers they give. (Assyifa dkk., 2023) explaining that learning activities that directly involve students can provide opportunities to develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities.

Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills through Social Studies Education. Based on literature review results, the improvement in critical thinking skills in social studies learning can be seen through changes in students' abilities before and after receiving actively designed learning.

This increase shows that learning social studies not only provides knowledge about social life, but can also be used to train students to analyze, evaluate, reason, solve problems, and

draw conclusions. One study conducted by (Mariyam dkk., 2024) Regarding the implementation of the Somatic, Auditory, Visualization, Intellectual (SAVI) model in social studies learning, it shows an increase in students' critical thinking skills..

The study used a One-Group Pretest-Posttest design with a sample of 28 sixth-grade students from SDN 6 Nageri. The results showed that the students' average score went up from 55 in the pretest to 75 in the posttest. So, there was a 20-point jump after using the SAVI approach in social studies lessons. This boost shows that social studies learning that gets students actively involved can really improve critical thinking skills. Students don't just get the material from the teacher—they also get a chance to use their thinking through visual, auditory, movement, discussion activities, and problem-solving in the lessons.

Similar results were also found in the research (Fauziyati and Sriyanto, 2023) regarding the use of gamified Wordwall Labelled Diagram learning media based on STEM in social studies learning. The study was conducted on 21 fifth-grade elementary school students using a One-Group Pretest-Posttest design. The results showed that the average percentage of students' critical thinking skills on the pretest was 58.7%, while it increased to 81.2% on the posttest. Thus, there was an increase of 22.5 percentage points. The paired sample t-test results also showed a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that the use of this learning media had an effect on students' critical thinking skills.

If the results of both studies are compared, it can be seen that social studies learning that uses strategies and learning media that actively involve students can improve critical thinking skills. Research (Mariyam dkk., 2024) showing an increase of 20 points, while the research (Fauziyati and Sriyanto, 2023) showed an increase of 22.5 percentage points. These results reinforce

that implementing social studies learning that is active, innovative, and student-activity-oriented can support the improvement of critical thinking skills. These results are also in line with (Anggraeni dkk., 2022) It explains that critical thinking skills in social studies for upper-grade students can be developed through activities like discussions, sharing opinions, analysis, and drawing conclusions. In social studies, students are encouraged not just to take in information, but also to process it and use it to solve problems. Based on those studies, it can be understood that elementary school students' critical thinking skills can be developed through social studies learning that actively involves students. The use of the SAVI learning model and STEM-based Wordwall Labelled Diagram gamification media shows changes in critical thinking skills after being given treatment. This highlights the importance of applying social studies learning that gives students the chance to participate, analyze information, express opinions, and solve problems during the learning process.

The Role of Social Studies Education in Improving Critical Thinking Skills

Social Studies learning is closely linked to critical thinking skills because the material studied is related to various social phenomena and problems. Students can be guided to understand information, analyze the causes of a problem, give opinions, and draw conclusions based on the information they get. These activities can help students develop deeper thinking skills.

Research results (Al-Kansa dkk., 2022) shows that social studies learning has an effect on the critical thinking skills of elementary school students. The findings indicate that social studies learning not only serves as a means to convey social knowledge but can also be a way to train students to analyze and respond to a problem.

The use of learning media can also support the process of developing critical thinking skills. (Wulandari dkk., 2023) Explaining that using the right learning media in social studies lessons can help create more engaging learning and support students' critical thinking skills. Learning media can be used to present information or problems that are then analyzed by students, so they are not just passively receiving information.

Besides learning materials, teachers also play an important role in creating social studies lessons that can develop critical thinking skills. Teachers can ask questions that encourage students to think, give opportunities for discussion, and guide students to provide reasons for the opinions they express. This way, students get learning experiences that gradually train their critical thinking skills.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The implementation of social studies education that focuses on developing critical thinking is influenced by several factors. Supporting factors include the use of appropriate teaching methods, the use of learning media, active student involvement, and the teacher's ability to manage the learning process. Lessons that connect material to everyday life can also make it easier for students to understand the material and engage in learning.

On the other hand, one of the obstacles that can be found is that learning is still teacher-centered. Students who mostly receive information without having the chance to discuss and analyze problems will have less room to develop their critical thinking skills. That's why learning approaches that give students the opportunity to actively engage in the learning process are needed.

Overall, the study results show that implementing Social Studies education in upper elementary grades can support the improvement of students' critical thinking skills. Active, contextual learning that involves students in analyzing various social issues can provide a more meaningful learning experience. Teachers play an important role in choosing the right methods, media, and learning activities so that students not only

understand Social Studies material but also are able to think critically when facing various problems in their surroundings.

5. CONCLUSION

Research (Mustofiyah and Muhibbin, 2024) shows that applying problem-based learning can help improve elementary school students' critical thinking skills through activities that involve students in solving problems. In addition to problem-based learning, student involvement in learning activities is also an important factor in developing critical thinking skills. Students need to be given opportunities to discuss and collaborate with their peers in understanding a problem. Through discussion, students can share opinions, compare their ideas with the information they have gathered, and provide reasons for the answers they give. (Assyifa dkk., 2023) explains that learning involving students' direct activities can provide opportunities to develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities.

Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills through Social Studies Education. Based on literature reviews, improvements in critical thinking skills in social studies learning can be seen through changes in students' abilities before and after receiving actively designed lessons. This improvement shows that social studies learning not only provides knowledge about social life but can also help train students to analyze, evaluate, reason, solve problems, and draw conclusions..

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express immense gratitude to the Managers of the EJoES Journal House at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara for their assistance, guidance, and facilities provided during the submission process until this article could be published. Our highest appreciation goes to the editorial team of the Journal Board within Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara; I look forward to valuable feedback and constructive evaluations for the perfection of this article.."

REFERENCES

- Al-Kansa, B. B., Agustini, S., & Rustini, T. (2022). Pengaruh pembelajaran IPS terhadap keterampilan berpikir kritis siswa kelas 6 di SD. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*. 4:12911–12917.
- Anggraeni, N., Rustini, T., & Wahyuningsih, Y. (2022). Keterampilan Berpikir Kritis Siswa Sekolah Dasar Pada Mata Pelajaran Ips Di Kelas Tinggi. 8(1):84–90.
- Assyifa, H, S., dkk. (2023). Analisis Kemampuan Kerjasama Dalam Metode Diskusi Pada Mata Pelajaran IPS Siswa Kelas IV SDN 37 Cakranegara Tahun Ajaran 2022 / 2023. 8:1577–1582.
- Fauziyati, K. A., and Sriyanto. (2023). STEM-Based Wordwall Labeled Diagram Gamification Learning Media for Elementary Students' Critical Thinking in Social Studies Learning. 91–98.
- Mariyam, S., dkk. (2024). Pengaruh Model Pembelajaran Somatic , Auditory , Visualization , Intellectual Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Kemampuan. 7(2):212–221.
- Mustofiyah, L., and Muhibbin, A. (2024). Pembelajaran Berbasis Masalah Pada Pelajaran Ips Untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Berpikir Kritis Dan Memecahkan Masalah Di Sekolah Dasar: 09.
- Pristiwanti, D., Badariah, B., Hidayat, S., Dewi, S, R. (2022). *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*. 4:7911–7915.
- Wiguna, C, A. (2023). Upaya Meningkatkan Berpikir Kritis Siswa Sekolah Dasar Dalam Pembelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial. 6(1):62–70.
- Wulandari, P, A., Annisa., Rustini, T.,

Wahyuningsih, Y. (2023). Penggunaan Media Pembelajaran Terhadap Keterampilan Berpikir Kritis IPS Siswa Sekolah Dasar. 05(02):2848–2856.