

MAPPING IDEA & LITERATURE FORMAT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Social Science to Build Social Awareness Among Elementary School Students

M. Marsini¹

¹ Department of Education Science, Universitas Doktor Nugroho, Magetan, Indonesia. Email: marsini@udn.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how social science learning in elementary schools could play a role in building children's social intelligence. By conducting a qualitative approach and literature review, this study examined various concepts, theories, and practices in social science learning that could improve students' social skills. Data was collected by reviewing articles, journals, and relevant books discussing the relationship between social education and children's social intelligence development. The study results indicated that theoretically, social science materials focused on social values, culture, and interactions between individuals in society, and students could gain a deep understanding of the importance of empathy, tolerance, and cooperation in social life. In addition, social science learning could also provide direct experiences that enable students to apply social concepts in their daily lives. This study recommended that the social science curriculum in elementary schools should more fully integrate an approach based on the development of social intelligence to shape students' characters until they are prepared to face future social challenges.

Keywords: Social Intelligence, Social Science Learning, Elementary School, Social Education, Children's Character.

I. Introduction

Education aims to develop cognitive aspects and shape morally, socially, and emotionally well-rounded individuals. In the view of progressive educational philosophy, as proposed by John Dewey, education was the process of life itself—a means of shaping individuals capable of living meaningful lives in society. According to Syafril, & Zen, Z. (2017), the term education originated in Greek, namely the word *paedagogie*, which comes from the word typed "pais", meaning child, and again, meaning to guide. Thus, pedagogy could be interpreted as the process of guiding children. In English, the word "education" is used to describe education. This term originated from the Greek word "educare," which means to bring out the hidden potential within a child and then guide them to grow and develop optimally. According to Matz, J., Brown, P., & Brody, J. G. (2016), academics in the social sciences were necessary to encourage the growth of the number of scientists in the social sciences. One important aspect of social life is social intelligence, which is the ability to understand, adapt, and build harmonious relationships with others. In this context, basic education played a strategic role as the foundational stage in developing children's social skills from a preschool age.

Social science, which focuses on humans in their social context, is important in developing students' social intelligence. Social science provides an understanding of human relationships and instills social values that encourage caring, cooperation, and responsibility in community life. Brandmayr, F. (2021) said their practitioners viewed social sciences as a critical endeavor that should provide input to criticize institutions,

beliefs, and harmful practices. By learning social science, students were guided to become familiar with their social and natural environment and understand its dynamics. According to Hasyim (2015), social science was taught at the elementary and junior high school levels and was also one of the study programs at the university level. In the 2013 Curriculum, the elementary and junior high school social science was positioned as an integrative subject (integrative social studies), not a separate academic discipline. This approach aimed to provide practical education, foster critical thinking skills, enhance curiosity, and cultivate a sense of care and responsibility toward the social environment and nature. In the reform of social sciences, critical social science issues from a theoretical framework needed to be discussed (Tissaw, M, 2003). Social science conveys historical, geographical, economic, and sociological facts and teaches values, norms, and social skills highly relevant to everyday life. According to Simangunsong, M. P., & Abidin, Z. (1987), social science plays an important role in human life because it discusses the relationship between individuals and society and the social interactions that occur within it. Social science is the study of humans and various aspects of their lives in the context of society. This subject was taught in schools to prepare students to become good members of society through the values and social norms that apply in communal life. When the children learned about cultural diversity, the importance of tolerance, cooperation in groups, and the dynamics of community life, they were learning to become socially intelligent and ethical citizens. Thus, social science learning could serve as a bridge toward developing empathetic, tolerant, and socially responsible individuals.

The parallel development of communication and visualization technologies has opened up opportunities to study and visualize human behavior with a broader scope and a much higher accuracy. (Foucault Welles, B., & Meirelles, I., 2014). Although Social science has great potential for developing children's social intelligence, in practice, this strategic role has not yet been fully realized in elementary school classrooms and according to Savage, T. M., & Armstrong, D. G. (1996), Social science (SS) resulted from integrating various social sciences and humanities disciplines to shape individuals into responsible citizens. In an educational context, social science was structured as a coordinated study encompassing anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology. In addition, social science also involves content related to the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The main objective of social science learning is to equip students with critical thinking and wise decision-making skills for the benefit of society and to foster awareness as active citizens in a multicultural and globally interdependent democratic society. Many teachers and policymakers still view social science narrowly as a subject focused on memorization, emphasizing the transfer of factual information about history, geography, or economics, rather than as a process of learning values and life skills. As a result, the social and humanistic dimensions at the core of social science were often marginalized. However, at a philosophical level, education should function as a process of humanization—as emphasized by Paulo Freire, who stated that education was the path to liberation from social unconsciousness.

Social science teaching has significantly benefited from psychology, as it is applied to teaching through teacher training (Pagès, J, 1993). On the other hand, today's social reality shows a crisis of empathy and social skills among school-age children. According to Nurdin & Mohamad (2012), social science is an integrative subject that combines various social sciences to examine life themes comprehensively and contextually. The social science learning emphasized active student engagement through an inquiry-based approach to develop critical and analytical thinking skills. The Social science program was designed to be relevant to real life, human values, and students' needs and interests in facing the ever-changing social dynamics. Social science studies in the early stages of research were largely unrelated across disciplines (David, L., 2012). Essentially, education is a process of maturing students through reciprocal interaction between teachers and students. This interactive relationship was known as the teaching-learning process, where learning activities refer to the active role of students in acquiring knowledge. In contrast, teaching activities reflect the role of teachers in facilitating that learning. Thus, teaching-learning was at the core of educational activities (Sapriya, S., Mulyana, E., & Nugraha, A., 2007). Phenomena such as bullying, social inequality in social interactions, and intolerance toward differences were increasingly common, even at a young age. This indicated that aspects of social intelligence, such as communicating healthily, understanding others' feelings,

and working in teams, had not yet developed sufficiently. When the education failed to serve as a dialogic space that connected children with their social reality, schools lost their function as a miniature democratic society. Social science learning, which should be a space for social reflection, was instead trapped in the rigid and textual routines of the curriculum.

The social science teaching method in many elementary schools still tends to be teacher- and material-oriented, rather than focused on students' social experiences. According to Hamalik, O. (2010), one of the main problems in the learning process was the inability to directly observe the learning activity itself and the difficulty in determining whether the behavioral changes occurring were truly the result of the learning process. Children were rarely encouraged to explore their social environment, discuss societal issues, or reflect on the values they experience daily. As a result, learning loses meaning and fails to impact students' social character development. Educational philosophers like Nel Noddings emphasized the importance of an ethics of care approach in education, which focused on human relationships that form the basis of morality and social intelligence. This aspect had not been optimally integrated into our social science learning.

Therefore, there needed to be an in-depth and reflective study that revealed the root cause of these problems and offered a path to transformation. Social science learning should not be positioned solely as an instrument for teaching concepts, but must be revitalized as a social learning space that encourages interaction, empathy, and caring. The failure of the education system to design humanistic learning meant a failure to prepare a generation ready to live in a diverse and challenging society. Therefore, exploring how social science learning in elementary schools could be directed more systematically and meaningfully to build children's social intelligence was important. In the social constructivist perspective pioneered by Vygotsky, learning occurs through social and cultural interaction. Children developed understanding through dialogue, collaboration, and active participation in their social environment. In the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model, according to Nurhadi (2002), teachers connect lesson material with the real-life contexts of students. This approach also encouraged students to link their knowledge with their experiences and their application in daily life, both within the family and community environments. This was highly aligned with the essence of social science learning, which emphasized the importance of social experiences as the primary source of learning. Social science teachers could create a learning environment that sharpened cognitive skills and strengthened students' interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies by involving students in group discussions, role-playing simulations, case studies, and collaborative projects.

Unfortunately, in educational practice, social science learning was often narrowly understood as memorizing concepts or factual knowledge alone. Purwanto (2009) stated that evaluation of learning outcomes was critical to assess the extent to which learning objectives had been achieved and to review the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in supporting the achievement of these outcomes. This approach tended to overlook the transformative potential of social science in shaping children's character and social intelligence. An overly dense curriculum, insufficient teacher training in contextual approaches, and limited access to creative learning materials pose challenges in making social science a meaningful vehicle for social learning. As a result, students did not gain learning experiences encouraging them to interact healthily with peers or understand the social diversity around them.

This study aimed to revive the social dimension of social science learning in elementary schools. According to Baihaqi (2008), tests were used as one of the primary measurement tools to assess student learning outcomes because they identify the level of competency achieved by students during the learning process. By exploring key concepts, pedagogical approaches, and learning strategies in-depth, this study aimed to reveal how social science could be designed and implemented to develop children's social intelligence systematically. A qualitative approach and literature review were chosen so that this study could trace the philosophical, pedagogical, and practical roots of the relationship between social science learning and children's social intelligence.

Social intelligence was an important component in child development, including understanding other people's emotions, cooperating, avoiding conflict, and adapting to various social situations. In his theory of Multiple Intelligences, Gardner places interpersonal intelligence as one of the main types of intelligence

that must be developed in education. In today's increasingly diverse and complex world, children need to be equipped with adequate social skills to live harmoniously alongside various social groups with different backgrounds. Thus, the urgency of this research was not only academic, but also practical and moral. Amidst a crisis of empathy, rampant bullying, and challenges of intolerance in education, social science learning that was designed to be reflective and participatory could be a strategic medium for instilling humanistic social values. Socially intelligent children would adapt more easily to the school environment and grow into responsible, caring, and humanitarian citizens. By discussing this study, it was hoped that a comprehensive picture of how the design and implementation of social science learning could be developed to shape intellectually intelligent and socially wise children. This study was not merely an academic contribution to the development of social science learning, but also an ethical call to restore the spirit of education as a liberating process of humanization that shaped strong social character from a preschool age.

II. Research Method

This study used a literature review method (library research) to analyze and summarize various relevant scientific sources related to the role of Social science learning in shaping the social awareness of elementary school students. This literature study collected, reviewed, and analyzed references from accredited national journals, scientific articles, educational textbooks, conference proceedings, and basic education curriculum documents published within the last 10 years (2014–2024). The study procedure was carried out in several stages, namely:

1. Identify topics and keywords: Researchers determine keywords such as "social science learning," "social awareness," "elementary school students," and "social character education."
2. Search and select sources: Literature was searched through online databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, and university digital libraries. Selected articles were directly relevant to the research theme and had undergone peer review.
3. Content analysis: Each document was analyzed to identify how social science learning was designed and implemented to foster social awareness values such as empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and social responsibility in elementary school students.
4. Thematic synthesis: Findings from various literature were classified into main themes that showed the relationship between social science learning strategies and student social awareness development.

III. Results and Discussion

The results of this study revealed that Social science learning had great potential in shaping students' social awareness from a preschool age. Social science learning materials that theoretically covered social values, culture, and the dynamics of interpersonal interactions in society were not only cognitive, but also touched on students' affective and moral domains. By approaching the social science on cultural diversity, social structures, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens, students were gradually guided to understand the complexity of the social lives they lead. In this understanding, a transformative process enabled students to recognize differences and value them as realities of life that must be faced wisely.

There were microsimulations in social science (Nigel Gilbert, G., & Troitzsch, K. G., 1997). Social science learning in elementary schools was not merely a means of conveying factual information about society but a process of forming a well-rounded social personality. The topics studied in SSE, such as social values, culture, and the dynamics of interpersonal interactions, contain profound philosophical dimensions. They addressed students' cognitive aspects and penetrated their affective and moral domains. In a reflective learning environment, students were encouraged to know and understand, feel, and evaluate social phenomena around them with conscience and wisdom. The social science learning transcended its academic function to

enter the realm of fostering human consciousness. By discussing an introduction to cultural diversity, social structures, and the rights and obligations of citizens, students were given the space to develop their understanding of society gradually. According to Papadopoulos (2009), critical social science was justified by its capacity to transform social science and related social and political fields. Students were taught to recognize differences and internalize their meaning as part of a complementary mosaic of life. This process was a form of education that humanizes people, where students were not molded into uniform individuals but guided to become individuals capable of living in dynamic social harmony. In this context, social science learning becomes a philosophical arena that brings together the dimensions of "being" and "becoming" in social life: students were not only part of society but were also prepared to become conscious and responsible agents of social change.

As a key element in social science, culture was an object of learning and reflected the noble values that shape collective identity. When students studied local and national cultures, they were invited to engage in a dialogue about the historical roots and identity of the nation. Moreover, they learned to cultivate an open attitude toward differences and understand that every cultural expression resulted from a long and meaningful social dynamic. In this process, social science learning served as a vehicle for fostering historical and multicultural awareness. Such awareness was an important foundation for building social solidarity in a constantly changing world fraught with identity challenges.

Social science studies do not have specific problems (Dupré, J, 2016). Effective social science learning requires teachers to act as facilitators of values and guides of meaning. Teachers were not merely conveyors of material, but also the interpreters of complex social realities. In every learning interaction, teachers created a dialectical space that encouraged students to ask questions, doubt, and find answers critically. By investigating with a humanistic and contextual approach, social science learning becomes an existential experience that touches the deepest aspects of students' humanity. Here lies the strength of educational philosophy: that learning is not merely about memorizing concepts, but about experiencing meaning, discovering values, and weaving a life of dignity.

Social science learning for elementary schools had the noble mission of shaping an intellectually intelligent, wise, and morally resilient generation. In facing the complex realities of society, full of friction and differences, students needed to be equipped with a deep social awareness, which stems from a philosophical understanding of social science values. According to Wallerstein (1996), social science had developed based on social and scientific optimism and as an intellectual pendant of liberal ideology that sought to manage changes and claims to be able to eliminate the sources of social unhappiness. Therefore, social science learning must continue to be enriched with a transformative approach that teaches about society and shapes citizens capable of contributing to civilization. This was the essence of education as an enlightenment effort—not merely to understand the world but to transform it meaningfully and civilly.

Social science learning did not stop at imparting knowledge but also brings human values such as empathy, tolerance, and social justice to life. According to Waizbort, R. (2004) in *Hermeneutic Dialogue and Social Science*, the aim of the study presented a record of the debate on objectivity in social science, emphasizing political and epistemological responsibility. In this context, social science learning could be seen as a process of forming a complete human being who thinks, feels, and acts with high social awareness. When students were encouraged to reflect on the experiences of others, identify social inequalities, and cultivate a caring attitude toward others, they were essentially being trained to become humane and cultured individuals. This learning process served as a vehicle for refining character and strengthening the ethical foundation that was extremely crucial in social life.

Social science learning also provided opportunities for real-life experiences that enabled students to internalize social values through hands-on practice. Learning activities such as group work, role-playing, case studies, and social projects in the school environment serve as a bridge between the world of knowledge and the real world. Here, students learned not only to know but also to experience; not merely to understand but also to internalize. Education was not merely about filling students with information but cultivating awareness

of social responsibility as part of communal life. In this context, the social science learning essentially played the role of a civilizing tool that shaped the younger generation to live together harmoniously in diversity.

The educational philosophy that informs social science learning places humans as social beings with a moral responsibility towards their environment. Therefore, the approach used in social science learning needs to emphasize the development of social intelligence as an integral part of 21st-century competencies. This social intelligence included communicating empathetically, collaborating effectively, and critically understanding social dynamics. In facing the era of disruption and global challenges, students must be equipped with knowledge and social wisdom to guide them in making fair and responsible decisions. Thus, social science learning must continue to evolve into a reflective space that shapes students' social personalities holistically. Within this framework, the approach to social science learning should not be reductionist or merely oriented toward academic achievement. Social science education should foster social intelligence as essential to 21st-century human competence. Social intelligence included empathizing, building healthy interpersonal relationships, working together in diversity, and critically understanding social dynamics and conflicts. In an increasingly pluralistic and complex world, these abilities were complementary and formed an important foundation for shaping resilient, fair, and responsible global citizens. Therefore, social science learning must be dialogical and contextual, so that students not only study society but also experience it in the reality of their own lives.

Global challenges in the form of environmental crises, identity conflicts, social inequality, and disruptive technological developments demand individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also socially wise. This was where social wisdom comes into play—the ability to weigh actions with moral, empathetic, and just considerations. Social science played a strategic role in developing this dimension because it directly addresses the roots of human social life. By exploring historical events, understanding societal structures, and delving into cultural values, students were equipped to assess and respond to social realities reflectively and constructively. In the process, social science learning must be continuously evaluated and refined so that it does not become a meaningless activity far removed from students' real lives. The classroom should be a space for social dialectics where the values of democracy, tolerance, and justice are practiced, not just taught. Teachers act as facilitators who ignite awareness, not merely as conveyors of information. By identifying the social projects, case studies, critical discussions, and direct engagement with the environment, social science learning could transform into a space for the holistic development of social character. Here, the educational process became a spiritual and ethical journey guiding humanity toward living in society more humanely.

The evolution of social science learning must be directed toward creating learning spaces that reflect education's grand ideals: shaping knowledgeable, compassionate individuals who act for the common good. In a world of uncertainty, social education served as a beacon guiding students toward socially and morally mature personalities. Therefore, our task was not merely to educate students to know, but to enable them to live together in civility, become critical and caring citizens, and individuals with a strong sense of social consciousness deeply rooted in their conscience and actions. With its humanistic philosophy, social science learning served as a bridge between knowledge and wisdom, individuality and collective well-being. As a recommendation, the social science curriculum at the elementary school level needed to be more intensively directed toward a holistic and humanistic approach, which integrated cognitive, affective, and social aspects in a unified manner. Strongly integrating social values and contextual learning strategies was necessary to encourage students to think critically and act empathetically in their daily lives. By introducing a curriculum strengthened by social awareness development, elementary schools were not only places for transferring knowledge but also became fertile ground for cultivating robust social character. This was proper education that humanizes humanity and makes citizens aware of their social responsibilities in building a just and civilized society.

IV. Conclusions

This study concluded that social science learning for elementary schools played a strategic role in shaping and developing children's social intelligence. Students acquired cognitive knowledge by identifying a thematic approach emphasizing social and cultural values and interpersonal interactions, and developed empathy, tolerance, and cooperation skills. The social science learning designed with a contextual approach and hands-on experiences could effectively build a strong social character. Therefore, it was recommended that the social science curriculum at the elementary school level explicitly integrate learning strategies focused on strengthening social intelligence to prepare a generation capable of adapting and contributing positively to community life in the future.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that teachers, curriculum developers, and education policymakers optimize social science learning in elementary schools as a vehicle for developing students' social intelligence. Teachers must adopt interactive and contextual learning methods to encourage students to participate in meaningful social activities actively. Curriculum developers should integrate material emphasizing social, cultural, and character values into each social science theme. Additionally, schools and the government should provide ongoing training for teachers to enable them to design holistic and character-building learning experiences. Further empirical research in the field was also needed to strengthen evidence regarding the effectiveness of social science learning in enhancing children's social intelligence.

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