



The Role of Teachers in Developing the Character of Elementary School Students Through Social Studies Learning (IPS)

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the multidimensional role of teachers in developing the character of elementary school students through Social Studies learning (IPS). The study was conducted using a literature review method on scholarly articles from Google Scholar for the period 2019–2025. The results indicate that teachers play a central role as agents of character transformation, functioning across five main dimensions: (1) as a contextual idol who models positive values in daily interactions; (2) as a value integrator who creatively internalizes moral, social, and citizenship values into IPS materials through systematic lesson planning (RPP), innovative methods (project-based learning, simulations), and character-based media such as digital comics; (3) as a character habituation facilitator through structured routines (such as 3S, religious activities, and flag ceremonies) that create a consistent environment for value internalization; (4) as a facilitator of social skills and care through collaborative learning and real social projects; and (5) as a responsible digital literacy guide in the technological era. However, the effectiveness of this role faces challenges such as an excessive focus on cognitive aspects, limited competency in character-based pedagogy, and external environmental influences. Therefore, systemic support is needed in the form of continuous teacher competency improvement, value-oriented flexible curricula, and strong synergy between schools, families, and communities. In conclusion, IPS learning facilitated by teachers with multidimensional roles and supported by a collaborative ecosystem serves as a strategic vehicle for shaping a future generation that is not only academically intelligent but also strong in character, integrity, and social care.

Keywords: Character Education, Elementary School, Social Studies Learning, Teacher Role, Value Integration.

1. Introduction

In the realm of education, teachers hold a critically important position in the process of shaping students' character, particularly at the Elementary School level (Abdullah et al., 2019). At this stage, students are in a crucial phase of personality development, where they begin to understand and internalize the fundamental values that will shape their attitudes and behavior in the future. Therefore, proper guidance and direction from teachers are key factors in enabling students to grow with a strong, positive, and integrous character, which will serve as the main foundation for facing various life challenges. One of the subjects that plays a significant role in shaping student character is Social Studies (IPS) (Wardani et al., 2024). Social Studies learning is not only oriented towards mastering social concepts but also functions as a means for instilling noble values such as mutual cooperation, honesty, and responsibility. Thus, IPS holds a strategic role in preparing students to grow into individuals of good character and ethics, capable of making positive contributions to societal life.

The Social Studies (IPS) subject does not solely aim to enhance students' academic understanding of social life but also plays a role in instilling values that shape their attitudes and behavior. Through IPS learning, students are introduced

to various important concepts such as cooperation, justice, responsibility, as well as an understanding of rights and obligations as members of society (Iksal et al., 2024). In addition to the cognitive aspect, IPS also contains social, moral, and cultural values that function to shape students' personalities so they grow into individuals of noble character, responsibility, and high social concern. Through the application of appropriate learning strategies, teachers can integrate these values into every learning activity, so that students not only understand concepts theoretically but are also able to implement them in real life. Therefore, the role of teachers in connecting IPS learning with character education becomes essential for shaping a generation with integrity and capable of making positive contributions to society.

IPS learning in Elementary Schools is designed to introduce students to their social environment, whether within the family, community, or nation (Putry, 2020). Through this subject, students are taught about various aspects of social life related to interactions between individuals and groups. Understanding this social environment becomes the foundation for students in developing attitudes that align with the norms and values prevailing in society (Iting et al., 2024). Besides the academic aspect, IPS learning also introduces students to various important values, such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, honesty, and a sense of responsibility (Lestari, 2022). These values play a role in shaping students' character so they become individuals who care for others and possess positive attitudes in daily life. Thus, IPS does not only function as a subject that provides knowledge but also as a means to build good personality in students.

The effectiveness of IPS learning in shaping student character heavily depends on the role of teachers as facilitators, educators, and role models (Lian et al., 2020). Teachers are not only tasked with delivering subject matter theoretically but must also be able to instill character values in every learning process (Ikhwan et al., 2020). By providing real examples, building meaningful discussions, and creating an interactive learning atmosphere, teachers can help students understand and apply social values in their lives. In practice, there are still many challenges found in the implementation of character education through IPS learning in Elementary Schools (Aningsih et al., 2022). One of the main obstacles is the excessive focus on cognitive aspects compared to character formation. Many teachers place more emphasis on academic achievements, such as conceptual understanding and exam scores, so that moral and social aspects receive less optimal attention.

The teaching methods used in IPS instruction are often still conventional and less interactive (Kurnia, 2022). Teachers tend to rely on lecture and rote methods that only focus on delivering material without actively involving students in the learning process. This approach is less effective in instilling social values because students only passively receive information without the opportunity to explore or relate it to real experiences. As a result, students only understand concepts theoretically without truly applying them in daily life. They may be able to memorize definitions of social values, such as mutual cooperation or honesty, but find it difficult to apply them in actual social interactions. This causes IPS learning to become less effective in shaping student character, even though the main goal of this subject is to develop attitudes and behaviors that align with social values in community life.

Another challenging factor is the lack of teachers' understanding of character-based learning strategies (Hidayat & Haryati, 2023). Many teachers do not fully understand how to effectively integrate character values into the learning process. This causes character education to not yet be optimally implemented in the classroom. In addition, not all teachers have adequate knowledge and skills to instill character values in IPS learning. A lack of insight into innovative teaching

methods leads teachers to tend to use traditional approaches that focus more on cognitive aspects. Consequently, social values that should be an important part of IPS learning are not conveyed well to students. To overcome these obstacles, further efforts are needed to improve teachers' competence in implementing character education (Trisno et al., 2024). Continuous training and mentoring are highly necessary so that teachers have a better understanding of character-based learning strategies. With this increase in competence, it is hoped that teachers can be more effective in guiding students, not only in understanding IPS material but also in internalizing character values that will shape their personalities in the future.

The rapid development of technology and information presents its own challenges in shaping student character (Laksana, 2021). Children today can more easily access various information from various sources, both positive and negative. Exposure to unfiltered information can influence their thought patterns and behavior, so proper guidance is needed for students to be able to sort and understand information wisely. In facing this challenge, the role of teachers becomes increasingly important in guiding and directing students. Teachers do not only act as educators in the classroom but also as mentors who help students understand moral values in daily life. With the right approach, teachers can help students develop a critical attitude towards the information they receive and instill positive values that can shape their character. Teachers must be able to become inspiring figures and provide examples for students (Gladstone & Cimpian, 2021). Moral values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social concern are not only taught through theory but must also be exemplified in real actions. The exemplary behavior of teachers in their attitudes and interactions with students will greatly influence their character formation, enabling them to apply these values in daily life.

To increase the effectiveness of teachers' roles in developing student character through IPS learning, a more innovative and social value-based approach is needed. The use of engaging teaching methods, such as Project-Based Learning and educational games (Behnamnia et al., 2020), can be a solution to make students more active and understand the values being taught. In addition, collaboration between schools, families, and the community is also highly necessary to create a conducive learning environment for student character formation. The curriculum must be designed more flexibly so that teachers have the freedom to develop more creative and innovative teaching methods (Niemi, 2021). With this flexibility, teachers can adjust learning approaches according to the needs and characteristics of students, so that learning is not solely focused on academic achievement. Furthermore, a flexible curriculum will allow teachers to focus more on shaping student character, which is an important part of educational goals. Thus, students not only gain knowledge but also internalize values that shape their attitudes and behavior in social life.

The role of teachers in developing student character through IPS learning in Elementary Schools is extremely important and cannot be ignored. Teachers are not only tasked with delivering academic material but also act as mentors who instill social and moral values in students. With the right approach, teachers can become agents of change who shape a young generation with integrity, empathy, and high social awareness. For this, joint efforts from various parties are needed so that character education can be effectively implemented in the school environment. Cooperation between teachers, parents, and the community is key in creating an environment that supports the formation of student character, especially in IPS learning. With solid collaboration, it is hoped that student character can develop well and be ready to face future challenges.

2. Methods

The method used in this research is a literature review (Martín-Páez et al., 2019), which is a type of research that examines a theory by comparing it with several other theories that have been presented in previous studies. This review is conducted by analyzing scholarly articles relevant to this research, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the topic being discussed. This study utilizes articles published in Google Scholar during the period 2019–2025. The selection of articles is based on their relevance to the research title as well as their connection to the theme under investigation. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical development that is the focus of the study.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Findings

Based on the research results obtained from a literature study of ten articles, it can be concluded that the role of teachers in developing the character of Elementary School (SD) students through Social Studies learning is multidimensional and central. Teachers act as agents of character transformation who not only transmit knowledge but also integrate literacy and character values in line with the demands of the 21st century (Dewi & Alam, 2020). In practice, this role can be realized through the utilization of innovative character-based learning media, such as digital comics, which have proven effective in enhancing students' discipline and responsibility while also motivating their learning (Rina et al., 2020). More fundamentally, teachers hold crucial responsibility in forming the moral foundation of students from an early age. Errors in instilling values during the early educational period can have long-term impacts, so teachers must ensure the correct formation of morality through communication and exemplary behavior (Tri W. et al., 2024). This exemplary behavior is realized by teachers becoming contextual idols in schools, figures who possess good character, assertive communication skills, teach with affection, and create a pleasant yet challenging learning environment, so that students idolize their teachers as real-life role models (Santosa & Andrean, 2021).

Specifically within the context of Social Studies learning, teachers act as internalizers of character values such as courtesy, ethics, morality, and morals through lesson materials. Social Studies learning is designed not only to equip students with social knowledge but also to train them to think critically, creatively, and logically in responding to social issues, while fostering a sense of responsibility towards society, nation, and state (Iyan et al., 2022; Sahira et al., 2022). Character values such as social concern are also developed by teachers through real-life examples, integration into subjects (such as Civics Education, Social Studies, and Bahasa Indonesia), and habituation in school culture, such as donation activities, group work, and empathy towards others (Isnaeni & Ningsih, 2021). The implementation of these teacher roles is carried out systematically and in an integrated manner. Teachers integrate character education into Lesson Plans (RPP), teaching-learning activities, and both intra- and extracurricular activities, by providing concrete examples in the material so that students can understand and apply these values in life (Salsabilah et al., 2022). Additionally, teachers develop structured character habituation through school routines such as 3S (*Senyum, Sapa, Salam*/Smile, Greet, Salute), prayer, healthy living, discipline, and responsibility, which are reinforced through Social Studies learning to instill moral, nationalistic, and religious values (Hidayatillah et al., 2022). This entire process is implemented through systematic stages, from planning and execution to learning

evaluation, to ensure the formation of students with character in accordance with national educational goals (Oktaviani et al., 2022).

Thus, this research demonstrates that the role of teachers in character development through Social Studies learning is a complex one, encompassing dimensions of exemplary behavior, pedagogical innovation, curriculum integration, value habituation, and continuous evaluation, all of which aim to shape elementary school students who are not only academically intelligent but also morally upright and socially responsible.

3.2 Discussions

Based on the research results obtained through a literature study of ten scholarly articles, it can be confirmed that the role of teachers in developing the character of elementary school students through Social Studies (IPS) learning is highly central, multidimensional, and transformative. This discussion will integrate the key findings from the research with the arguments that have been developed, to provide a comprehensive and in-depth overview of how teachers operate as character architects within the elementary education ecosystem.

First, the research findings reinforce that teachers are not merely instructors who transmit knowledge, but also act as agents of character transformation and contextual idols whose influence is direct, personal, and profound on students' moral and personality development. The finding that students tend to imitate their teachers' attitudes and behaviors is not a simple phenomenon, but rather a crucial psychological and sociological process during the golden age of elementary education. In this view, teachers become the primary mirror for students in understanding social norms outside the family. Therefore, the demand for teachers to consistently reflect positive values, such as honesty, responsibility, mutual respect, and integrity, becomes both a professional and moral imperative. Furthermore, the research reveals that this role modeling is not passive or solely reliant on personal charisma, but is active and deliberate. This exemplary behavior is realized through planned behavioral designs, encompassing good character traits, mastery of assertive communication and empathetic listening skills, teaching grounded in sincerity and affection (affective teaching), and the ability to create a learning environment that is simultaneously enjoyable, safe, and intellectually challenging. By positioning themselves as relevant contextual idols present in students' daily lives, teachers successfully shift students' admiration away from artificial figures in entertainment or social media to real-life role models who directly guide, correct, and instill life values. This shift is crucial in forming students' realistic and well-internalized value systems.

Second, within the specific context of Social Studies (IPS) learning, the teacher's role as a value integrator gains strong footing and extensive operational scope. The discussion regarding IPS's capacity to instill ethics, courtesy, morals, and a deep understanding of social phenomena is empirically supported by research findings. IPS is not taught as a collection of dry geographical, historical, or economic facts, but as a living narrative about humanity and society. Here, teachers serve as both narrators and interpreters who internalize character values into the storyline of the subject matter. For instance, when studying cultural diversity, teachers do not merely list ethnic and traditional names but guide students to internalize values of tolerance, appreciation for differences, and pride in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). This process trains students to think critically, creatively, and logically in responding to social issues while fostering a sense of social responsibility toward society, nation, and state. This value integration does not occur by chance or sporadically but through a systematic and measurable framework. Research findings indicate that the process begins with thorough planning, namely by developing Lesson Plans (RPP) that explicitly include

character-strengthening objectives. During the implementation stage, teachers bring these plans to life through deliberately chosen methods and strategies. Creative methods such as guided group discussions, role-play or social conflict simulations, case studies, and project-based learning (PBL) mentioned in the discussion have proven effective in research. Their effectiveness increases further when these methods are supported by innovative character-based learning media, such as digital comics. Digital comics are not merely visually appealing tools but a narrative medium capable of manipulating the physical form of messages through quality text and visuals to convey moral lessons. The use of such media has been shown to not only enhance students' conceptual understanding and learning motivation but also significantly contribute to the improvement of concrete character traits like discipline and responsibility, as measured through questionnaires and observations.

Third, the concept of character habituation highlighted in the discussion finds its concrete and structured operational form in the research findings. Character education is insufficient if only delivered in the classroom; it must be practiced repeatedly until it becomes a habit (*habitus*) and an integral part of one's personality. Schools, under the leadership of teachers, create value-laden rhythms and routines. Daily and weekly activities such as the 3S habituation, prayers before and after learning, Quranic recitations, singing the national anthem, flag ceremonies, and religious activities like Islamic study sessions or worship services function as soft infrastructure for value cultivation. These routines subconsciously and continuously instill values of religiosity, nationalism, discipline, responsibility, and healthy living. The teacher's role within this habituation ecosystem is multifaceted: as a driver, activity designer, consistency supervisor, and most importantly, as an active participant and role model. Teachers do not just instruct students to donate (*infaq*) but also contribute themselves. They do not merely command discipline but arrive punctually and adhere to rules. This active involvement transforms habituation from mere mandatory rules into a lived community culture. Habituation also extends to the socio-emotional realm, such as cultivating empathy by visiting sick friends, appreciating cleaning staff, or lending stationery. Through consistent habituation, character values transition from knowledge (to know) into attitude (to be) and ultimately manifest into real actions (to do).

Fourth, the development of social skills and care (social care and empathy) through IPS is strongly supported and enriched by research findings. At its core, IPS is education for community living. Therefore, teachers act as both facilitators and coaches in nurturing socially caring character. This is achieved through two main approaches: integration in learning and the creation of direct experiences. In learning, the value of care is integrated not only in IPS but also in related subjects such as Civics (PPKn, covering rights and duties) and Indonesian Language (through stories about helping others). Outside the classroom, teachers create and utilize small-scale social projects as character laboratories. Activities like Friday *infaq*, communal work, social visits, or group work to solve school community problems provide real-life experiences for students. In such activities, students do not just learn theories about cooperation but experience the dynamics of teamwork, manage differing opinions, feel the satisfaction of helping, and develop sensitivity to others' needs. The project-based or problem-based learning (PBL) approach mentioned as a digital-era strategy aligns with these findings. When students are invited in groups to analyze waste problems at school or ways to help less fortunate peers, they are simultaneously honing critical, creative, collaborative, and empathetic thinking skills. Learning becomes relevant, contextual, and directly impactful on character development.

Fifth, the challenges and complexities of the digital era anticipated in the discussion have been noted and even addressed within the research framework. The digital world presents a paradox: on one hand, it opens vast access to information and learning methods; on the other, it brings distractions, misinformation, and the potential degradation of interpersonal values. Teachers are now required to move beyond being frontline information providers and become wise socio-digital transformation agents. Research findings indicate that digital literacy must be viewed as an integral part of 21st-century character education. Digital literacy here is not merely the technical skill of operating devices, but a set of higher-order thinking skills that include the ability to critically and ethically select, analyze, and synthesize digital information, as well as communicate and collaborate responsibly in digital spaces. The teacher's role evolves into that of a content curator, facilitator of critical discussions on the impact of social media, and a skilled learning designer who selects and utilizes digital media (such as digital comics, animated educational videos, interactive simulations, or online collaboration platforms) that are not only pedagogically engaging but also rich in character value. Teachers help students build good digital citizenship, enabling them to be active in the digital world without losing their identity and human values.

Sixth, the discussion on the importance of synergy within the educational ecosystem among schools (teachers), parents, and the community gains context and a warning from the challenges identified in the research. Factors such as lower-middle-class family economic backgrounds can lead to a lack of parental attention and minimal initial moral understanding among students. This condition underscores an important reality: the success of character education cannot be borne solely by teachers and schools as isolated institutions. No matter how capable, teachers operate within limitations of time and influence. Synergy among the three educational centers is essential. However, within this synergy, teachers still hold a key role as initiators, primary connectors (key stakeholders), and professional partners for parents. Teachers can optimize their role through constructive, regular communication with parents (via meetings, communication books, or messaging groups), providing practical guidance for character reinforcement at home, and involving the surrounding community (religious figures, community leaders, practitioners) in school activities. Thus, the values taught at school receive consistent reinforcement at home and recognition within the community, creating a conducive environment for character internalization.

Through these multidimensional roles in IPS learning, teachers can effectively shape Elementary School students who are not only knowledgeable but also strong in character, critical thinkers, socially caring, collaborative, and prepared to face the complex dynamics of modern society. Strengthening all these roles requires systemic support, starting from enhancing teacher competency through relevant training, school policy support that prioritizes character education, to close and trusting collaboration with parents and the community. Only through a comprehensive and sustained approach can character education through IPS truly achieve its goal: forging a future generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also excels in character, ready to become positive agents of change bringing prosperity and civilization to Indonesia's future.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussion conducted through a literature review of several scholarly articles, it can be comprehensively concluded that the role of teachers in developing the character of elementary school students through Social Studies (IPS) learning is central, strategic, and multidimensional. Teachers

function as the primary architects of character formation, integrating moral, social, and citizenship values into all aspects of learning. As agents of character transformation and contextual role models (contextual idols), teachers do not only transmit knowledge but also model positive values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and empathy through attitudes, behaviors, and daily interactions, thereby becoming the main figures who shape the moral foundation of students from an early age. In the context of IPS learning, the teacher's role evolves into a creative and systematic integrator of values. Through character-oriented lesson planning (RPP), the use of innovative methods such as project-based learning and social simulations, as well as the utilization of character-based media such as digital comics, teachers transform IPS material into meaningful and contextual learning experiences. This enables students not only to understand social concepts but also to develop critical, creative, and solution-oriented thinking skills in responding to societal problems, while fostering a sense of social responsibility. Operationally, teachers also act as drivers of character habituation through structured school routines that create a consistent environment for value internalization. This habituation, reinforced by the exemplary behavior and active participation of teachers, transforms values from knowledge into attitudes and ultimately into real actions in students' lives.

Amid the challenges of the digital era, teachers are increasingly required to act as responsible guides for digital literacy and digital citizenship, instructing students to use technology critically, ethically, and with good character. However, the effectiveness of the teacher's role faces several obstacles, such as an excessive focus on cognitive aspects, limited competency in character-based pedagogy, and the influence of the external environment. Therefore, the successful development of character through Social Studies requires comprehensive systemic support, including continuous improvement of teacher competency through training, the development of flexible and value-oriented curricula, and strong synergy between the three centers of education: school, family, and community.

Thus, Social Studies learning in Elementary Schools, facilitated by teachers with multidimensional roles and supported by a collaborative educational ecosystem, can become a strategic vehicle for shaping a future generation that is not only academically intelligent but also strong in character, integrity, socially conscious, and ready to become positive agents of change in a progressive and civilized Indonesian society.

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