Teachers' Perspectives on the Contribution of Social Studies Education to the Formation of Students' Social and Cultural Identity through a Deep Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT

Education plays an important role in shaping students' social and cultural identity, particularly through Social Studies learning at the junior secondary level. However, Social Studies instruction is often still oriented toward cognitive achievement and lacks contextual learning experiences, which limits the internalization of social and cultural values in the midst of globalization and the gradual erosion of local culture. Therefore, this study aims to examine teachers' perspectives on the contribution of Social Studies learning through a deep learning approach to the formation of students' social and cultural identity in Pacitan Regency. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. The participants consisted of 5–10 junior secondary Social Studies teachers selected purposively. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. The findings indicate that teachers perceive Social Studies learning as having a strategic role in fostering students' social and cultural identity through the internalization of social, cultural, national, and civic values. The implementation of a contextual deep learning approach supports students' understanding, reflection, and meaning-making processes in relation to their social and cultural environment. However, the implementation still faces several challenges, including limited instructional time, resource constraints, and variations in teacher readiness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in shaping students' personality, social awareness, and cultural orientation, particularly at the junior secondary school level. Schools function as primary social spaces where students interact, construct meaning, and internalize social values embedded in society. Contemporary educational research indicates that learning processes contribute directly to adolescents' social identity formation through sustained learning experiences (Wahyuni & Dafit, 2024). Thus, education is not merely a vehicle for cognitive transmission but also a formative arena for identity construction. Students' social identity develops through complex social processes involving interactions with peers, teachers, school environments, and local and national cultural contexts. Identity is not formed naturally; rather, it emerges through conscious, structured, and meaningful educational processes. Sociopedagogical studies highlight the dominant role of schools in guiding the construction of social identity during early adolescence (Rusfandi, 2024). At this stage, students are particularly vulnerable to external influences and require pedagogical guidance that strengthens their sense of belonging and cultural rootedness. Globalization and digital media

penetration have significantly influenced how students interpret their social and cultural identities. Exposure to global values that do not always align with local culture creates new challenges in character and cultural education. Recent studies reveal that weak internalization of local values in classroom learning can result in identity confusion and a diminished sense of social belonging among students (Indrawati & Sari, 2024). These challenges necessitate educational strategies that reinforce cultural awareness and social cohesion.

Within this context, Social Studies education (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial/IPS) holds a crucial position. IPS explicitly examines social life, cultural diversity, historical development, and civic values. It serves as a pedagogical medium for developing social awareness, cultural appreciation, and reflective understanding of social realities. Research demonstrates that contextual Social Studies learning significantly contributes to students' social and cultural identity formation (Fathurahman, 2023). At the junior secondary level, IPS is designed not only to develop factual knowledge but also to cultivate social attitudes, national values, and cultural understanding. However, classroom realities indicate a gap between normative curricular goals and actual teaching practices. IPS instruction often remains dominated by cognitive delivery and memorization of concepts. Rahmawati and Utami (2025) found that Social Studies learning frequently fails to connect content with students' social and cultural experiences, resulting in suboptimal internalization of identity-related values. Similarly, limited integration of local cultural contexts in IPS instruction reduces its relevance to students' lived realities (Madyarini & Wijayanti, 2025). These challenges highlight the need for a pedagogical approach capable of fostering meaningful and reflective learning experiences. The deep learning approach has emerged as an alternative model emphasizing profound understanding, active student engagement, critical reflection, and real-life application of values. Studies indicate that deep learning enhances students' social awareness and critical thinking skills in Social Studies education (U. Khasanah et al., 2025). Deep learning transcends rote memorization by encouraging analysis, synthesis, reflection, and value internalization (Suwandi et al., 2024).

Implementing deep learning in IPS requires a transformation in the teacher's role from knowledge transmitter to facilitator of meaningful inquiry. Teachers guide discussions, encourage social reflection, and connect classroom content with students' socio-cultural realities. Dinata et al. (2025) emphasize that teachers' perceptions and readiness significantly determine the effectiveness of deep learning implementation. Consequently, teachers' perspectives become central in understanding how IPS contributes to identity formation. From a theoretical standpoint, Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory explains that individuals construct identity through group membership and social categorization. IPS provides structured opportunities for students to recognize social groups, local culture, and national identity (Reyhan, 2023). Likewise, symbolic interactionism suggests that identity is formed through meaningful social interactions and shared symbols. Dialogic and socially interactive learning activities in IPS strengthen this identity-building process (Jatiningsih, 2023). Pacitan Regency offers a rich socio-cultural environment characterized by strong communal values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), village traditions, and coastal and agrarian local wisdom. These cultural assets provide authentic learning resources for IPS. Research indicates that integrating local culture into classroom instruction reinforces students' social identity (Arifin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, preliminary observations reveal that IPS learning in several junior secondary schools in Pacitan remains textbook-centered and cognitively focused, with limited systematic integration of local culture and social reflection.

Teachers, as primary instructional actors, play a pivotal role in determining the direction and quality of IPS learning. Their perspectives influence instructional methods, material selection, and

the integration of socio-cultural contexts. Elok Fadillah (2024) asserts that teachers' competencies and viewpoints directly affect the meaningfulness of Social Studies instruction. Yet, existing research has largely focused on character and cultural value development, while studies specifically examining teachers' perspectives on social and cultural identity formation through deep learning in IPS remain limited (M. N. Khasanah et al., 2025). This gap underscores the urgency of investigating how teachers perceive the contribution of Social Studies education to students' social and cultural identity formation through a deep learning approach. Such inquiry aligns with the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes meaningful, contextual, and student-centered learning aimed at strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (Liktaf et al., 2025). Compared to previous studies, this research offers novelty by specifically examining teachers' perspectives on the formation of students' social and cultural identity through the implementation of a deep learning approach in Social Studies, an area that has received limited focused attention. In addition, this study integrates teachers' perspectives, instructional practices, and contextual socio-cultural factors within a single framework, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how deep learning–based Social Studies contributes to students' identity formation in a local cultural context. Therefore, this study seeks to explore teachers' perspectives on the contribution of Social Studies education in shaping students' social and cultural identity through a deep learning approach in Pacitan Regency. The research is expected to provide theoretical enrichment for Social Studies education scholarship and practical guidance for developing contextual, reflective, and identity-oriented IPS instruction.

Based on the background described above, this study focuses on three main research questions that are addressed in the results and discussion section. First, how do teachers perceive the contribution of Social Studies education to the formation of students' social and cultural identity. Second, how is the deep learning approach implemented in Social Studies instruction to support meaningful and reflective learning experiences. Third, what factors support and inhibit the implementation of deep learning–based Social Studies learning in fostering students' social and cultural identity. These three focuses serve as the main framework for analyzing teachers' perspectives and instructional practices in Social Studies learning in Pacitan Regency.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to explore teachers' perspectives on the contribution of Social Studies education to students' social and cultural identity formation through deep learning practices. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focused on meaning-making, interpretation, and teachers' lived experiences in classroom contexts. Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena holistically through words, actions, and relevant documents rather than statistical measurement (Sugiyono, 2023). The study adopted a case study design to obtain an in-depth contextual understanding of the implementation of Social Studies learning in junior secondary schools in Pacitan Regency. Case studies enable researchers to examine complex educational phenomena in real-life settings and are particularly suitable for interpretative and value-oriented educational inquiries (Robert K. Yin, 2018). The subjects of this study consisted of 5–10 junior secondary Social Studies teachers in Pacitan Regency selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included teachers who actively taught Social Studies, had at least one year of teaching experience, were familiar with or had implemented deep learning–oriented instruction, and were willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations. These participants were selected to provide rich and relevant information regarding Social Studies learning practices and their contribution to the formation of students' social and cultural identity.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perspectives on the contribution of Social Studies education to students' social and cultural identity formation as well as their understanding and implementation of deep learning practices. Classroom observations were carried out to examine teaching and learning activities and to identify how deep learning principles were implemented in authentic classroom situations. Document analysis included the examination of lesson plans, teaching modules, and assessment instruments to identify the integration of deep learning principles and socio-cultural content in instructional planning. The use of multiple data sources reflects methodological triangulation to enhance research credibility (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, & Johnny Saldaña, 2014). Data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and organized relevant data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. In the data display stage, the data were systematically arranged according to the main research focuses, namely teachers' perspectives, the implementation of deep learning, and supporting and inhibiting factors. In the conclusion drawing stage, patterns and relationships among themes were interpreted to answer the research questions. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking procedures (Lexy J. Moleong, 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Teachers' Perspectives on the Contribution of Social Studies Education to the Formation of Students' Social and Cultural Identity

The findings indicate that Social Studies teachers who are members of the MGMP in Pacitan Regency perceive Social Studies as a strategic space for shaping students' social and cultural identity. Based on interview data, teachers consistently emphasized that Social Studies is not limited to conceptual knowledge but also functions as a medium for instilling social and cultural values. One teacher explained: "*Social Studies is not only about memorizing material. What matters is that students understand their own social life, such as mutual cooperation in the village or the lives of fishermen in Pacitan.*" (Teacher 3). Another teacher highlighted the role of Social Studies in developing students' awareness of their social environment: "*Through Social Studies, students learn to understand their environment. They become more aware of how to live in society and appreciate their own culture.*" (Teacher 1). Classroom observations supported these statements. During a lesson on economic activities, the teacher connected the topic to local livelihoods by discussing fishing communities along the Pacitan coast. Students were asked to share their experiences or knowledge about local economic activities. Several students mentioned family members who worked as fishermen or farmers, and the teacher used these examples to explain broader economic concepts. This interaction demonstrated how Social Studies learning connected academic content with students' lived realities. The findings also show that values such as cooperation and tolerance were integrated into classroom discussions. During a group discussion activity, students were assigned to work collaboratively and present their findings. The teacher emphasized the importance of cooperation and respect during the activity, explaining that these values reflected everyday life in their communities. These classroom practices indicate that Social Studies learning contributed to students' understanding of social relationships and cultural practices within their local environment. Furthermore, teachers reported integrating local culture into their

lessons. One teacher explained: "*I usually connect the material with local culture, such as community service activities or village traditions, so that students can understand more easily.*" (Teacher 5) The findings on teachers' perspectives regarding the contribution of Social Studies education to the formation of students' social and cultural identity were also supported by documentation data:

Figure 1. Teacher activities developing small group discussions

Figure 1 shows the teacher facilitating small group discussions as part of Social Studies learning activities. This activity reflects how Social Studies instruction supports the development of students' social and cultural identity through collaboration, dialogue, and the exchange of ideas related to their social experiences. Observations confirmed that local examples were frequently used to explain social concepts. Local traditions and community practices were not only mentioned as examples but were used as the primary context for discussion. These findings indicate that Social Studies learning in Pacitan contributed to the development of students' social and cultural identity through contextual and experience-based learning.

Implementation of the Deep Learning Approach in Social Studies

The findings show that teachers implemented elements of deep learning through contextual discussions, reflective questioning, and student-centered learning activities. Based on interviews, teachers described deep learning as learning that encourages students to understand concepts and relate them to real-life situations. One teacher stated: "*Deep learning, in my opinion, is learning that helps students truly understand, not just memorize. I usually use examples from daily life.*" (Teacher 2). Another teacher explained that deep learning involved encouraging students to think critically: "*Students are encouraged to discuss and express their opinions. From that, they learn to understand social problems.*" (Teacher 4). Classroom observations revealed that lessons often began with contextual questions. For example, in a lesson on social interaction, the teacher asked students about their experiences working together in their neighborhood. Students shared examples of community activities such as cleaning the village environment together. The teacher then connected these experiences to the concept of social interaction. Students were also observed working in groups to analyze simple social issues. In one classroom activity, students discussed the importance of cooperation in community life and presented their ideas to the class. The teacher guided the discussion by asking follow-up questions that encouraged students to reflect on their experiences.

Figure 2. The teacher provides an explanation regarding the project to be carried out

Figure 2 shows the teacher explaining the project activity as part of the Social Studies learning process. This activity reflects the implementation of the deep learning approach, where students are guided to engage in meaningful and contextual learning through project-based tasks connected to real-life situations. However, observations also showed variation in implementation. In some classrooms, deep learning activities were limited to question-and-answer sessions without extended reflection. One teacher acknowledged this limitation: "*Sometimes the time is limited, so discussions cannot go very deeply*." (Teacher 6). Overall, the findings indicate that deep learning in Social Studies was implemented through contextual learning, discussion activities, and reflective questioning, although the depth of implementation varied across classrooms.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementing Deep Learning–Based Social Studies

The findings reveal several supporting factors in the implementation of deep learning–based Social Studies learning. Based on interviews, teachers identified curriculum flexibility as an important support. One teacher explained: "*The current curriculum is more flexible, so we can adjust it to students' conditions*." (Teacher 2). Teacher collaboration also emerged as an important factor. Teachers reported sharing ideas and teaching strategies through MGMP meetings. One participant stated: "*In MGMP meetings, we usually share teaching experiences and learning methods*." (Teacher 1)

Figure 3. Activities related to the preparation of teaching materials by MGMP

Figure 3 shows MGMP activities related to the preparation of teaching materials to support Social Studies instruction. This activity reflects teacher collaboration as an important supporting factor in implementing deep learning–based Social Studies learning through the sharing of ideas and instructional strategies. Observations and interviews also indicated that the local socio-cultural

environment supported contextual learning. Teachers frequently used examples from students' daily lives, making lessons more meaningful and easier to understand. Despite these supports, several inhibiting factors were identified. One major challenge was limited time. Teachers reported that limited instructional time made it difficult to conduct in-depth discussions. "*Learning time is limited, so sometimes the material has to be delivered quickly*." (Teacher 4). Another challenge was limited resources and facilities. Some teachers reported difficulties in accessing learning media and teaching materials. "*Learning media are still limited, so we have to adjust to the school's conditions*." (Teacher 3). Student readiness was also identified as a challenge. Teachers noted that some students were not accustomed to discussion-based learning. "*Not all students are active in discussions; some are still passive*." (Teacher 5). Observations confirmed that some students were less engaged during discussion activities, while others participated actively. These differences affected the depth of classroom discussions. Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of deep learning–based Social Studies in Pacitan was supported by curriculum flexibility, teacher collaboration, and local socio-cultural contexts, but constrained by time limitations, resource availability, and variations in student readiness.

DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perspectives on the Contribution of Social Studies Education to the Formation of Students' Social and Cultural Identity

The findings indicate that Social Studies teachers who are members of the MGMP in Pacitan Regency perceive Social Studies as a strategic space for shaping students' social and cultural identity. The subject is not merely understood as a cognitive discipline focused on conceptual mastery, but as a medium for fostering social awareness, internalizing values, and strengthening cultural and civic identity. This perspective reflects a paradigm shift from transmissive instruction toward reflective and contextual learning. The findings align with James A. Banks (2020), who emphasizes that Social Studies education aims to develop socially aware, critical, and culturally responsive citizens within democratic societies. In the context of Pacitan Regency, teachers consistently connect Social Studies content with students' lived realities, such as coastal fishing communities, agrarian life in mountainous areas, and religious traditions in pesantren environments. This contextual approach reflects an understanding of social identity as a construct emerging from interactions between individuals and their social groups. This view is consistent with Michael A. Hogg (2021), who argues that individual identity is shaped through group membership and meaningful social interaction. Thus, Social Studies learning functions as a bridge linking social concepts with students' collective experiences.

Furthermore, teachers do not transmit values in a normative or indoctrinative manner. Values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, social responsibility, and care are internalized through dialogue, group discussions, experiential reflection, and connections to concrete situations. This reflective process aligns with the perspective of Darcia Narvaez and Larry Nucci (2021), who assert that values education is most effective when students engage in perspective-taking, moral dialogue, and reflection on lived experiences. Consequently, Social Studies becomes a dynamic moral-social learning space rather than a mere transmission of norms. Students' cultural identity also develops through the integration of Pacitan's local culture into Social Studies instruction. Local traditions such as village mutual cooperation, agrarian practices, and religious life are positioned not as supplementary examples but as foundational learning contexts. This approach is consistent with multicultural education theory developed by James A. Banks and further emphasized by Christine E. Sleeter (2021), highlighting the importance of integrating students'

cultural experiences into the curriculum to build inclusive and locally grounded identities. The findings also reveal the development of national and civic identity dimensions. Teachers connect local values such as cooperation and tolerance to broader Indonesian national values, enabling students to see local identity as integral to national identity. This supports Gert Biesta (2021), who argues that citizenship education should cultivate responsible public participation rather than merely transmit civic knowledge. Classroom observations show that identity formation occurs through dialogical pedagogical interaction. Teachers act as facilitators, encouraging discussion and meaning-making based on students' experiences. This reflects Social Studies learning oriented toward critical social awareness, as emphasized by Paul G. Fitchett and Thomas L. Heafner (2022), who argue that Social Studies is most effective when grounded in students' social realities. Overall, the findings confirm that Social Studies learning in Pacitan contributes holistically to the development of social, cultural, national, and civic identity through contextual and reflective pedagogical practices.

Implementation of the Deep Learning Approach in Social Studies

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of deep learning in Social Studies classrooms in Pacitan has moved beyond conceptual understanding into concrete pedagogical practice. Teachers interpret deep learning as emphasizing conceptual understanding, reflective meaning-making, and connections between academic content and students' social realities. This interpretation aligns with Michael Fullan et al. (2020), who define deep learning as a process in which students integrate knowledge into broader cognitive structures rather than merely memorizing information. Theoretically, deep learning is rooted in constructivist principles, where knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with the environment. Teachers initiate lessons using contextual questions related to students' social and economic experiences, supporting arguments by Linda Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) that effective learning connects academic concepts with authentic experiences. The implementation also reflects student-centered learning. Teachers function as facilitators who guide discussions and reflective inquiry. This aligns with constructive alignment theory developed by John Biggs and Catherine Tang (2022), emphasizing coherence between learning objectives, activities, and assessment to promote deep understanding. Local case studies such as the socio-economic life of coastal fishermen serve as authentic learning materials. This strategy supports findings by John Hattie (2021), who highlights the impact of elaboration, reflection, and feedback on meaningful learning. Reflective questioning and value-based assignments further demonstrate that deep learning addresses cognitive and affective dimensions simultaneously. Although implementation varies across schools due to differences in resources and teacher understanding, teachers show strong commitment to shifting from rote learning to meaningful engagement. Overall, deep learning in Social Studies contributes not only to conceptual mastery but also to critical thinking and social awareness development.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementing Deep Learning–Based Social Studies

The study reveals that the implementation of deep learning–based Social Studies in Pacitan operates within a complex interplay of supporting and inhibiting factors. Consistent with systemic change perspectives articulated by Michael Fullan (2020), successful pedagogical transformation depends on policy coherence, professional capacity, and institutional culture. The flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum serves as a key structural support, allowing teachers to design contextual and reflective instruction. This finding resonates with Linda Darling-Hammond (2020), who emphasizes that curriculum autonomy enhances meaningful learning. Additionally, MGMP functions as a professional learning community. According to Andy Hargreaves and Michael

O'Connor (2018), collaborative cultures foster sustained pedagogical innovation. Local socio-cultural values such as mutual cooperation and religiosity further support contextual deep learning practices. Teacher commitment and efficacy, as highlighted by John Hattie (2021), also play a critical role in maintaining reflective classroom practices. However, several barriers remain. Some teachers have limited conceptual understanding of deep learning, sometimes reducing it to simple discussion activities. Time constraints, administrative workload, limited infrastructure, and uneven student readiness also affect implementation. Reports from OECD (2021) similarly identify resource disparities as significant factors influencing innovation quality. Despite these challenges, teachers adopt adaptive strategies such as prioritizing essential content, utilizing local contexts as alternative learning resources, and gradually introducing reflective practices. Thus, the implementation of deep learning–based Social Studies in Pacitan can be characterized as adaptively evolving, supported by policy flexibility, professional collaboration, socio-cultural context, and strong pedagogical commitment, while still requiring sustained systemic support.

4. CONCLUSION

This study addressed three main research questions concerning teachers' perspectives on the contribution of Social Studies education to students' social and cultural identity formation, the implementation of the deep learning approach in Social Studies, and the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation in Pacitan Regency. The findings show that Social Studies teachers perceive Social Studies learning as a strategic space for shaping students' social and cultural identity, emphasizing not only conceptual understanding but also the internalization of social, cultural, national, and civic values through contextual learning connected to students' local environments, including agrarian, coastal, and religious community life, with identity formation occurring through dialogue, discussion, and reflection that foster students' social awareness and cultural understanding. The findings also indicate that the deep learning approach has been implemented through contextual discussions, local case studies, reflective questioning, and student-centered learning activities that support meaningful learning experiences and strengthen students' conceptual understanding, critical thinking skills, and social awareness, although the level of implementation varies across classrooms. Furthermore, the implementation of deep learning–based Social Studies learning is supported by several factors, including the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher collaboration through MGMP activities, supportive local socio-cultural contexts, and teachers' commitment to meaningful learning, while several inhibiting factors remain, such as limited understanding of deep learning concepts, time constraints and administrative workload, limited facilities and learning media, and differences in student readiness, indicating that successful implementation depends on the alignment between curriculum support, teacher collaboration, and adaptive classroom practices. IPS learning in Pacitan should continue to integrate local social, cultural, and civic contexts to strengthen students' identity formation and social awareness. Teachers are encouraged to expand the use of deep learning approaches, including student-centered discussions, local case studies, and reflective activities, to enhance conceptual understanding and critical thinking. Successful implementation requires addressing challenges such as teacher preparedness, time constraints, infrastructure, and student readiness through collaborative professional development and supportive educational policies, ensuring that deep learning–based IPS can be applied effectively and equitably across schools.

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