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The Constructivist Approach in Social Studies Learning to Develop Social Literacy in Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Social Studies (IPS) learning in elementary schools plays an important role not only in mastering knowledge, but also in fostering students' social attitudes and skills. However, practices that are still dominated by conventional methods often make students less engaged and result in low social literacy. This article aims to examine the application of the constructivism approach in IPS learning to develop the social literacy of elementary school students. The research was conducted through a literature study by reviewing relevant journals, proceedings, and books published between 2016 and 2024. The results of the study show that constructivism, especially through the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model and contextual learning, can increase student engagement, motivation, and critical thinking skills. In addition, this approach strengthens social literacy by linking learning to real experiences, local culture, and the use of digital media. The role of teachers as facilitators is key in guiding students to construct knowledge through discussion, reflection, and collaboration. Thus, the constructivist approach has the potential to make social studies learning more meaningful while preparing students to become active, caring, and responsible citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

Social Studies (IPS) in elementary schools serves not only to introduce basic knowledge of history, geography, and economics but also to shape the social attitudes and skills students need in their daily lives. Social Studies should function as a medium for students to understand social realities, develop empathy, and build critical thinking skills regarding issues in their environment. This aligns with the view that Social Studies education should not stop at the mastery of content but must also provide students with the foundation to act as caring and responsible citizens (Afrilyanti et al., 2024).

Unfortunately, Social Studies learning in many elementary schools is still dominated by conventional teacher-centered methods. The material is often delivered in a one-way manner, while students remain passive recipients of information. Such a pattern makes learning less engaging and results in low levels of student engagement and social literacy. In fact, social literacy is an essential competency that must be nurtured from an early age so students can understand values, norms, and social roles in community life.

The constructivist approach offers an alternative more suited to students' needs. In this approach, students are viewed as active subjects who build knowledge through experience, discussion, and reflection. Research shows that the application of constructivism can enhance critical thinking skills and independent learning among elementary students (Donny et al., 2024). Furthermore, implementing constructivism combined with project-based learning has been proven to encourage students to participate in real-life activities, thereby improving both their conceptual understanding and social skills (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Beyond cognitive aspects, constructivism also plays a role in strengthening students' social literacy. Learning connected to real-life contexts, including culture and local wisdom, helps students better understand the social meanings within their environment. This connection makes Social Studies learning more relevant, enjoyable, and meaningful in daily life (Nasution et al., 2023). In this regard, teachers play a crucial role as facilitators rather than merely transmitters of knowledge. Teachers guide students to find meaning in learning through direct experiences, group work, and reflective discussions (Zahroni et al., 2024).

Based on these considerations, this article aims to examine how the constructivist approach can be applied in elementary Social Studies learning to foster students' social literacy. This study is expected to provide an overview of strategies teachers can use, the benefits students may gain, and the potential challenges in classroom implementation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a literature review method. This method was chosen because the main purpose of the research is to examine various strategies and applications of the constructivist approach in elementary Social Studies learning to enhance students' social literacy. A literature review allows researchers to collect, review, and analyze data from various relevant scholarly sources without the need for direct field data collection (Snyder, 2019; Lubis & Ritonga, 2023; Lubis, 2024).

The data collection process was carried out by searching for journal articles, proceedings, and books published within the last ten years, particularly from 2016 to 2024. The selected sources come from both national and international journal databases that are openly accessible. The main criteria for source selection include relevance to the topics of constructivism, Social Studies learning, and social literacy among elementary students.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, selecting sources based on the research criteria. Second, critically reading to identify key ideas, findings, and their contributions to the research topic. Third, synthesizing by comparing and integrating findings from multiple sources to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. In this way, the literature review provides a holistic perspective on the application of the constructivist approach in improving elementary students' social literacy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Increasing Student Engagement and Understanding

The application of constructivism has been proven to make students more active in building knowledge. Students are engaged in discussions, observations, and reflections, resulting in a deeper understanding compared to simply listening to the teacher's explanation. For example, when students are asked to analyze environmental issues at school, they become more critical and confident in expressing their opinions. This aligns with the findings of Sarnoko et al. (2024), who reported that constructivism enhances higher-order thinking skills. Another study conducted at SDN 08 Sungai Rumbai also revealed that the CTL model encouraged greater activeness among fifth graders and significantly improved their learning outcomes (Anggriani et al., 2021; Lubis, 2025;).

Project-Based Learning and Strengthening Social Literacy

The Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model is consistent with constructivist principles because it provides opportunities for students to learn through real-life experiences. For instance, students may be tasked with creating social maps or conducting short interviews within their school environment. As a result, they learn to collaborate, take responsibility, and respect differences of opinion. A study at SDN 66 Kendari found that the average student learning score increased from 66.2 to 82.5 after PjBL was applied (Ahmad et al., 2025). Similarly, Amalia et al. (2023) confirmed that PjBL fosters creativity in Social Studies learning. More recent research at SDN 02 Ujung Gunung Ilir demonstrated that PjBL can enhance student activity as well as their learning outcomes (Septia & Syaflita, 2025).

Real-Life Contexts and Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL)

CTL uses students' everyday lives as learning resources. For example, teachers may use communal activities such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) or traditional markets as discussion materials in Social Studies. This approach helps students better understand social concepts while internalizing important values. Nasution et al. (2023) found that CTL trains students to think critically since they regularly analyze real-life phenomena. Another study conducted with fourth-grade students in Islamic elementary schools showed that CTL improved students' understanding of Social Studies concepts, as they perceived the material as directly relevant to their lives (Dewi et al., 2024; Lubis, 2023).

Social Literacy as a 21st-Century Competence

Social Studies plays an essential role in fostering students' social literacy from an early age. Social literacy helps students become more sensitive to values, norms, and social roles within society. For example, students can be encouraged to write about their group work experiences or engage in discussions on tolerance. Hilmawan et al. (2022) found that social constructivist learning environments strengthen students' literacy skills, both in reading and in writing social reflections. In addition, Aopmonaim (2025) emphasized that social literacy can be further strengthened through innovative digital media, which makes students more engaged and connected to their social contexts.

Integrating Literacy and Numeracy into Social Studies

Beyond social literacy, Social Studies also serves as a medium for integrating reading literacy and numeracy. Students not only learn to comprehend texts but also to interpret graphs, tables, or maps. For example, students may be asked to analyze population data and then discuss the need for public facilities. Fathurahman et al. (2023) found that integrating literacy and numeracy into Social Studies positively impacts 21st-century skills, particularly critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. This is further supported by a study at SDN 094129 Bah Tобу, which demonstrated that PjBL strengthens students' critical thinking when numeracy is incorporated into Social Studies lessons (Aulia et al., 2024).

The Teacher's Role as Facilitator

In constructivist learning, the teacher no longer serves as the main source of information but rather as a facilitator who creates an active learning environment. Teachers design activities, pose guiding questions, and encourage students to independently discover meaning within the subject matter. The book *Constructivism: Student-Centered Learning* emphasizes that meaningful learning only occurs when students are directly involved in constructing

knowledge (Zahroni et al., 2024). Other studies also highlight that the teacher's role as a facilitator is crucial in fostering students' social skills, particularly when CTL is applied in Social Studies learning (Hasanah R et al., 2024).

Innovation in Media and Technology in Social Studies Learning

The use of simple technology can strengthen the implementation of constructivism in classrooms. For example, students can create podcasts about social experiences or present project results using digital applications. Darwan et al. (2024) found that podcast-based PjBL enhances students' creativity and communication skills. Another study developed a Social Studies e-module based on local wisdom in Jombang Regency for fifth graders, which was proven feasible, engaging, and relevant in both content and media (Illahi & Rachmadyanti, 2023; Ritonga et al., 2022).

Challenges and Supporting Factors in Implementation

The implementation of constructivism is not without challenges. Teachers often face time constraints, limited learning media, and varying student abilities. However, research shows that these challenges can be overcome with school support, the use of local resources, and teacher training. Azizah Siti Lathifah et al. (2024) found that student activeness and learning outcomes improved when teachers received mentoring in applying constructivism. Similarly, Fariha Maulidya et al. (2023) stressed the importance of designing PjBL-based Social Studies lessons that are tailored to local contexts to ensure more effective learning.

CONCLUSION

This review shows that applying the constructivist approach in elementary Social Studies learning has a positive impact on the development of students' social literacy. Strategies emphasizing collaborative activities, discussion, reflection, and direct engagement with real-life contexts have been proven to enhance motivation, conceptual understanding, and critical thinking skills. Learning models such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) contribute significantly to building students' social skills, creativity, and sense of responsibility. The teacher's role as a facilitator is also a determining factor in the success of learning, as teachers guide, mentor, and create a conducive learning atmosphere. Thus, constructivism not only supports cognitive achievement but also plays a crucial role in instilling character values and preparing students to become caring, participative, and responsible citizens.

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