

# AIMING FOR THE FUTURE: TRANSFORMING SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

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**Abstract:** The purpose of social studies learning is for students to become sensitive to problems that arise both within themselves and in their social environment. Social studies learning must adapt to face the challenges of the 21st century, Social studies education has significant relevance to 21st century skills; 1) Global Understanding, 2) Critical Thinking Skills, 3) Communication Skills, 4) Problem-Solving Ability, 5) Global Citizenship, 6) Technology and Media Literacy and, 7) Collaboration Skills. Thus, social studies not only provides an understanding of historical facts and social reality, but also forms skills and attitudes that are in accordance with the demands of the changing world in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Transformation, Social Science, 21st Century.

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## INTRODUCTION

Due to the ever-growing development of technology, the increase in knowledge today is very significant. This is very influential on the world of education because in the 21st century, education must be able to ensure that students have the necessary abilities to live their current and future lives. In this 21st century, technological advances have entered all aspects of human life, including education. To survive in the midst of the fierce competition of

knowledge in the modern era, it is imperative to take advantage of both the opportunities and challenges that exist in this century.

Facilitating one's learning is known as learning. Learning and learning are each other. Learning is specifically defined as a learning process designed by educators to develop moral, intellectual, and develop the skills possessed by students. In simple terms, learning can be defined as the effort to obey an individual's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual beliefs so that they can learn at their own pace. These skills include the ability to think, create, construct, and conceptualize. In the 21st century, which is characterized by advances in information technology, these capabilities are very important and must be developed. Everything is digital and very connected to each other. This provides a new perspective on the life of individuals as social beings in the modern era.

Social studies learning is expected to answer the challenges of this century, so this century's skills are needed in social studies learning. Social Sciences is a derived part of the curriculum in elementary and junior high schools and has an important responsibility to assist students in improving attitudes, values, and skills that are considered essential for living in society.<sup>1</sup> However, after graduating from school students must have the ability to exercise judgment and be responsible for morality, ethics, and social justice. They must also have the ability to solve problems, make rational decisions, provide information about their own lives, and take responsibility for their choices.

Social studies education has been given to students for a long time in Indonesia, but it first appeared in 1975. According to Sapriya, social studies education in Indonesia significantly adapts the social theory of NCSS studies.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of social studies learning is for students to become sensitive to problems that arise both within themselves and in their social environment. They must also be able to behave and think in a positive way when they face problems in a way that can deal with problems in society, the environment, the family, or themselves. The social sciences are expected to produce caring, skilled, and selective citizens. Here, reflective is someone who has a meaningful or goal-based thinking pattern and can solve problems based on principles and ethics instilled in himself and his environment. In this context, quality can also be related to one's ability to take all the decisions necessary to solve existing problems. However, caring is the ability or ability of a person in social life to carry

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Bank. *Strategi Ilmu Sosial Pendidikan dan Pengambilan Keputusan*. Bandung: Mutiara Press, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Sapriya. *Pendidikan IPS: Konsep dan Pembelajaran (8th ed.)*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosda Karya, 2017.

out his rights and obligations as a member of society. Thus, it can be concluded that the purpose of social studies is to educate students to become outstanding citizens and live in a democratic society.

People still believe that students only need to know about technology and information to live in the 21st century. Only the field of exact sciences is in great demand. The abolition of responsibility is the only subject of social science study. Therefore, social studies education and other social sciences seem to be eliminated from the curriculum. Although social science is the basis of social skills. One of the most important components of communicating, cooperating, and building relationships in 21st century society is social skills.

To achieve the goals of social studies education itself, social studies learning must be taught by teachers who are experienced in the field of social studies, not from other disciplines. As stated by Suyono and Harianto, social studies education does require innovation in its teaching. In addition, social studies learning must adapt to face the challenges of the 21st century.<sup>3</sup> One of the subjects that must be studied in elementary school is social studies education. However, so far many people see social studies as a second-class subject. This can be seen from the number of lesson hours given for social studies less compared to other subjects. In addition, social studies lessons are always given at the end of class when students are tired and tired. Many people still consider social studies education in elementary school unimportant. not to mention facing the perspective of students who believe that social studies lessons are not interesting.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the reconstruction of social studies education must be carried out.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative research that produces descriptive data. To examine the problems that have been formulated, literature studies are used. In literature studies to answer research problems, data collection and review are carried out from articles, books and other relevant sources. In literature studies, problem solving in research is carried out by examining materials that support research critically and in depth, so that valid data can be presented. According to mestika, there are several stages in conducting literature study research,

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<sup>3</sup> A. H. Schoenfeld. "Looking Toward the 21st Century: Challenges of Educational Theory and Practice". *Educational Researcher*, 1999. 28(7), 4-14.

<sup>4</sup> T. Heafner. "Using technology to motivate students to learn social studies". *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher*. 2004. 4(1), 42-53.

namely;<sup>5</sup> 1) list all variables that need to be studied, 2) look for each variable in the encyclopedia subject, 3) choose descriptions of the necessary materials from available sources, 4) check indexes that contain variables and topics of the problem studied, 5) look for articles, books and biographies that are very helpful to obtain materials relevant to the problem studied, 6) review and compile library materials in accordance with matters of interest and its relevance to the problem under study, 7) reading, recording and reorganizing the information that has been obtained, the final step is to write down the research that has been done

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Social Studies Education in Elementary School

Social science education and local wisdom are two things that should function equally and work together. That is, the purpose of social science learning is to integrate the principles of local wisdom into learning activities. As stated by Sapriya, social science consists of several elements, namely: "first, people, places, and environments; second, time, sustainability, and change; third, social and cultural systems; and fourth, economic behavior and well-being".<sup>6</sup> This opinion shows that social studies learning should focus on people's lives.

However, social studies lessons rarely use the social environment as a source of learning, and most of them are discussed theoretically. However, the values of local wisdom are incorporated into students' lives. Students are often taught about various social problems that occur in everyday life, but most students do not understand what causes them or how to deal with such problems.

Social Studies (Social Sciences) education in elementary schools is usually designed to provide a basic understanding of social life, history, and the environment around students. The main goal of social studies education in elementary school is to develop children's initial understanding of society, culture, and the environment around them. Here are some general characteristics of social studies education in elementary school:

1. Integrated Curriculum: Social studies education in elementary schools is often integrated with other subjects, such as Indonesian, Cultural Arts, and Mathematics. It aims to create holistic learning and provide daily life context for students.

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<sup>5</sup> Z. Mestika. *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Sapriya. *Pendidikan IPS: Konsep dan Pembelajaran (8th ed.)*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosda Karya, 2017.

2. **Thematic Approach:** Social studies learning materials in elementary schools are often presented in the form of a thematic approach, where several related concepts or topics are put together in a theme. For example, environmental themes may include aspects of geography, population, and ecology.
3. **Introduction to Basic Concepts:** Social studies in elementary school provides an introduction to basic concepts such as daily life, environment, family, and community. Students learn about the differences and similarities of cultures, values, and norms in their societies.
4. **Experiential Learning:** Social studies learning in elementary schools is often based on students' hands-on experience. Teachers can use field observations, visits to important places, and direct interaction with the community as part of learning activities.
5. **Interactive Learning:** Social studies learning in elementary schools tends to be interactive and involves active participation of students. Group discussions, group projects, and role plays can be methods used to make learning more interesting.
6. **Use of Local Resources:** Learning materials are often linked to the student's surroundings. This can involve the involvement of parents, local community leaders, or visits to historical and cultural sites in the local area.
7. **Social Skills Development:** In addition to knowledge, social studies in elementary schools also aims to help students develop social skills, such as communicating, cooperating, and appreciating diversity.
8. **Introduction to Local History and Culture:** Local history and culture are usually the focus of social studies learning in elementary schools. Students are invited to understand the cultural heritage and history of their own community.

Through holistic and experience-based social studies education in elementary schools, it is expected that students can build a strong understanding of the social world around them and develop a positive attitude towards the community and environment in which they live.

### **The Relevance of Social Studies Education to 21st Century Learning**

According to Turriman et al., the skills of the 21st century are four: digital literacy, innovative thinking, effective communication, and high productivity. In addition, research shows that applying the 4 C's (critical thinking), communication (communication), collaboration (collaboration), and creativity (creativity) in education is essential for teaching students social skills and global

insight.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is said that globalization affects all aspects of life, including social. The statement shows that social studies education is still needed around the world. Education with a focus on global social thinking can foster intellectual curiosity that transcends national and cultural boundaries.

Literacy, particularly digital literacy, is closely linked to the 21st Century and advances in information technology. However, in the era of the 21st century, mastery of technology is not the only field that must be mastered. Studies show that digital literacy and 21st century skills are different. Modern century skills are not always related to IT and communication.<sup>8</sup> Mastering core and contextual skills is of utmost importance. Core capabilities include technical skills, information management, communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving. Contextual skills include flexibility, cultural and ethnic awareness, self-direction, and lifelong learning.

Kaufman states that while mastery of technology is important, there are still other necessary life skills, such as self-control and social responsibility. This suggests that a person's skills should be complex.<sup>9</sup> That is, you cannot depend on one skill simply by eliminating another skill. In the same way, to enter the twenty-first century, it is not only necessary to sophisticate information technology but also consider other aspects, such as social skills.

Critical thinking skills are skills related to social aspects. According to Dwyer, Hogan, and Stewart, these skills are essential to help students analyze information well and adapt to new situations.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that innovation and creativity affect people's lives and economic development. Therefore, every learning activity must be aimed at cultivating innovative, creative, and creative thinking.<sup>11</sup> The power of information technology has determined the economic progress of this century. Such change requires people who are innovative,

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<sup>7</sup> L. Nganga. "Preservice Teachers' Perceptions and Preparedness to Teach For Global Mindedness and Social Justice Using Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity And Communication (4cs)". *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 2019. 10 (4), 26–57

<sup>8</sup> E. Van Laar., A. J. A. M van Deursen., J. A. G. M van Dijk, & J. de Haan. "The Relation Between 21st-Century Skills and Digital Skills: A Systematic Literature Review". *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2017. 72, 577–588.

<sup>9</sup> K. J. Kaufman. "21 Ways to 21st Century Skills: Why Students Need Them and Ideas for Practical Implementation". *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 2013. 49(2), 78–83.

<sup>10</sup> C. P. Dwyer., M. J. Hogan., & I. Stewart. "An Integrated Critical Thinking Framework for The 21st Century". *Thinking Skills and Creativity*. 2014. 12, 43–52

<sup>11</sup> K. J. Kaufman. "21 Ways to 21st Century Skills: Why Students Need Them and Ideas for Practical Implementation". *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 2013. 49(2), 78–83.

flexible, and intelligent thinking.<sup>12</sup> In addition, he stated that the school has committed to responding to global changes, but there is no clear program.

Social Studies (Social Sciences) education has significant relevance to 21st century skills. Here are some points that explain the relationship between Social Studies Education and 21st Century Skills:

1. **Global Understanding: Social studies provides global insight:** These subjects enable students to understand the dynamics of international relations, social conditions, and cultures in different parts of the world. This supports the development of global understanding and cross-cultural thinking skills.
2. **Critical Thinking Skills: Analysis and Evaluation:** Social studies involves the process of analyzing and evaluating historical events, economic conditions, and social issues. It helps develop students' critical thinking skills in facing complex challenges and taking informed decisions.
3. **Communication Skills: Presentation and Argumentation:** Through social studies, students are invited to compose arguments and presentations, helping them hone their speaking and writing skills. These skills are especially important in the information age where effective communication is the key to success.
4. **Problem Solving Ability: Understanding the Root of the Problem:** Social studies helps students understand the root of social and economic problems, as well as find relevant solutions. This ability is indispensable in dealing with complex problems that may be faced in everyday life and at work.
5. **Global Citizenship: Civic Education:** Social studies often covers aspects of civic education, helping students understand their responsibilities as citizens in a global context. This aligns with the values of 21st century skills, including social care and global citizenship.
6. **Technology and Media Literacy: Utilization of Digital Resources:** Social studies can also integrate technology in learning, helping students develop media literacy and technology skills that are essential in the digital age.
7. **Collaboration Skills: Collaborative Projects:** Social studies can facilitate collaborative projects where students work together to find solutions to social or economic problems. It builds crucial collaboration skills in the 21st century.

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<sup>12</sup> A. Velez. "Preparing Students for the Future – 21st Century Skills (Southern California)". 2012. Retrieved from <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/utills/getfile/collection/p15799coll3/id/26131/filename/26012.pdfpage/page/1>

Thus, social studies not only provides an understanding of historical facts and social reality, but also forms skills and attitudes that are in accordance with the demands of the changing world in the 21st century.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of social studies learning is for students to become sensitive to problems that arise both within themselves and in their social environment. Social studies learning must adapt to face the challenges of the 21st century, Social studies education has significant relevance to 21st century skills; 1) Global Understanding, 2) Critical Thinking Skills, 3) Communication Skills, 4) Problem-Solving Ability, 5) Global Citizenship, 6) Technology and Media Literacy and, 7) Collaboration Skills. Thus, social studies not only provides an understanding of historical facts and social reality, but also forms skills and attitudes that are in accordance with the demands of the changing world in the 21st century.

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