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Practices and Meanings of Deep Learning in Social Studies Instruction at the Remote Manis Mata School

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Abstract

Social studies (IPS) learning in remote elementary schools remains constrained by limited access, inadequate infrastructure, and an exam-oriented assessment culture, often resulting in surface-level understanding. Concurrently, curricular orientations promoted by the Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia through the Merdeka Curriculum emphasize contextual social literacy and the development of students' civic-cultural identity. In this study, identity is defined as the integration of local (inland) cultural belonging and civic awareness, positioning IPS as a medium for socially situated meaning-making and participatory citizenship. This study investigates the practices and meanings of deep learning in IPS classrooms in Manis Mata District, West Kalimantan. Deep learning is operationalized as meaningful conceptual engagement, critical reflection on social realities, and the integration of students' lived experiences into knowledge construction. Employing a qualitative case-study design, the research was conducted in three remote elementary schools. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving 6 teachers, 27 upper-grade students, and 3 school leaders. Participants were purposively selected, and data were analyzed thematically. Findings indicate that deep learning becomes meaningful when instruction is rooted in local contexts, although its implementation is shaped by structural constraints. IPS classrooms also function as spaces for civic-cultural identity formation and social awareness, including emotional ambivalence when marginal experiences are expressed. This study refines social constructivist perspectives by highlighting the role of local epistemologies in shaping deep learning within marginalized settings, and suggests the need for contextual teacher development, adaptive assessment, and locally grounded curricula.

KEYWORDS

deep learning; elementary school locality-based learning; remote elementary schools; social constructivism; social studies.

Introduction

Amid limited infrastructure and restricted access to information, the provision of education in remote areas such as Manis Mata District, West Kalimantan, presents complex challenges while offering a critical space for reflecting on educational inequality in Indonesia. For local communities, schooling functions not only as a formal instructional setting but also as a socio-cultural arena where meanings are negotiated, identities are constructed, and disparities are experienced. Within this context, Social Studies (IPS) assumes a strategic role in enabling students to interpret social realities while remaining grounded in their lived environments.

The deep learning approach is commonly understood as meaningful learning characterized by active engagement, conceptual understanding, and reflective processes (Nabila et al., 2025; R. Royani et al., 2024). However, to ensure analytical clarity, this study operationalizes deep learning through observable indicators: (1) contextual tasks linking content with local realities; (2) teacher questioning that stimulates explanation, comparison, and reasoning; (3) reflective prompts connecting experience and concepts; (4) evidence of student reasoning in discourse or written work; and (5) peer dialogue indicating knowledge co-construction. In this study, deep learning

is identified when these indicators are consistently observed in classroom interactions and instructional practices.

Preliminary observations and exploratory interviews with teachers in Manis Mata indicate that IPS instruction remains predominantly surface-oriented and exam-driven. Although some educators have begun integrating local knowledge and cultural practices, these efforts remain fragmented and insufficiently theorized within a deep learning framework. This condition aligns with findings that educators in remote contexts often face limited access to sustained pedagogical training, resulting in uneven instructional innovation (Aulia et al., 2025; Nadawina et al., 2025).

A rapid review of Indonesian studies (2020–2025), based on Google Scholar and Scopus searches using keywords “deep learning,” “IPS,” and “Indonesia,” indicates that existing research largely emphasizes curriculum innovation, educational technology, and learning outcomes (Albani, 2025; Nurhakim et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2024). Meanwhile, studies on contextual or local wisdom-based learning such as those conducted in community or island school settings tend to prioritize implementation aspects without sufficiently examining classroom meaning-making processes (I. Royani et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the practices and meanings of deep learning in IPS classrooms in remote elementary schools. It focuses on how teachers design contextual-reflective learning, how students construct meaning from local realities, and how socio-cultural constraints shape pedagogical processes. Grounded in social constructivism, this research contributes by positioning deep learning as a situated practice of meaning-making, thereby extending prior literature beyond predominantly implementation-oriented approaches.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to investigate the practices and meanings of deep learning within Social Studies (IPS) instruction in remote elementary school settings. The selection of a case study approach was grounded in its epistemological strength to examine complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts, particularly when boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In line with established qualitative inquiry traditions, this design enabled an in-depth, holistic exploration of pedagogical practices as they are enacted, interpreted, and experienced by educational actors.

The focus on deep learning as a lived pedagogical experience necessitated an interpretive framework capable of capturing nuanced interactions among teachers, students, and contextual constraints. Accordingly, the study emphasized meaning-making processes, classroom dynamics, and socio-cultural influences shaping instructional practices. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how deep learning is operationalized in environments characterized by structural limitations and contextual diversity.

Research Setting and Context

The research was conducted in Manis Mata District, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, a rural region characterized by limited infrastructure and restricted access to educational resources. The geographical and socio-economic conditions of the area present unique challenges to formal education, including inadequate technological facilities, limited transportation access, and reliance on agrarian livelihoods.

Three public elementary schools SD Negeri 14 Manis Mata, SD Negeri 26 Manis Mata, and SD Negeri 34 Manis

Mata were purposively selected as research sites. The selection criteria were systematically defined to represent “remote-school characteristics,” including: (1) limited or unstable access to internet and electricity, (2) significant geographical distance from administrative or educational centers, (3) constrained teacher availability, often resulting in multi-grade teaching practices, and (4) a predominantly agrarian socio-economic context influencing students’ daily experiences.

To enhance analytical rigor and contextual richness, variation across the selected sites was intentionally incorporated. Differences in village accessibility, community composition, and local livelihood patterns were considered to ensure that the study captured a diverse range of contextual conditions. This variation strengthens the potential transferability of findings by demonstrating how deep learning practices may manifest across different rural educational environments.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy, complemented by limited snowball sampling to ensure both contextual relevance and depth of experiential insight. This combined approach allowed the researcher to identify information-rich cases while also expanding participant inclusion through recommendations within the educational community. The study involved a total of thirty-six participants, comprising six teachers, twenty-seven students, and three school leaders. This composition was designed to represent multiple perspectives within the school ecosystem, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding of instructional practices and institutional dynamics.

Student participants were selected through a structured multi-stage procedure. Initially, teachers were asked to nominate students based on predefined criteria, including levels of classroom engagement, representativeness of learning experiences, and ability to articulate their perspectives. Following this initial nomination, a refinement process was conducted to ensure diversity in terms of academic ability, participation patterns, and socio-cultural background. Ultimately, three students from each grade level in each school were included, allowing for cross-grade comparison and richer analytical depth.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings. The primary techniques included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to capture real-time instructional practices, interaction patterns, and manifestations of deep learning processes. These observations focused on pedagogical strategies, student engagement, and the integration of contextual knowledge into learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers, students, and school leaders to explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of deep learning. The use of flexible interview protocols allowed for probing and elaboration, thereby facilitating the emergence of rich, context-sensitive data. Document analysis involved the examination of lesson plans, teaching materials, and relevant school documents to provide additional insights into curricular intentions and instructional design. This method complemented observational and interview data by offering a formal representation of pedagogical planning.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, guided by iterative and inductive procedures. The process began with data familiarization, involving repeated reading of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents.

This was followed by initial coding, where meaningful units of data were identified and categorized. Subsequently, codes were organized into broader themes that reflected patterns across the dataset. These themes were continuously refined through comparison, interpretation, and alignment with the study’s research focus on deep learning practices. Analytical rigor was maintained through constant comparison techniques and reflexive consideration of emerging interpretations.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed, including triangulation of data sources, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking. Triangulation allowed for the corroboration of findings across different data collection methods and participant groups, while prolonged engagement enhanced contextual understanding. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with additional consent secured from parents or guardians for student participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and securely storing all research data. Furthermore, the study adhered to principles of voluntary participation and respect for participants’ rights, ensuring that individuals could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Result and Discussion

The results of the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and instructional document reviews converged into three major themes that represent how deep learning is implemented and interpreted in Social Studies (IPS) instruction in remote elementary schools in Manis Mata District. These themes are interconnected within everyday classroom practices, encompassing efforts to construct meaningful learning grounded in local contexts, pedagogical tensions shaped by structural constraints, and students’ processes of interpreting their lived social experiences. To avoid overgeneralization, each theme is presented with its analytical boundary, indicating conditions under which the pattern was not consistently observed.

Theme 1. Deep learning as a reinforcement of Social Studies learning intertwined with real life

Based on classroom observations and teachers’ reflections, Social Studies learning perceived as “deep” emerged when subject matter was not treated merely as content to be memorized, but as a means of interpreting everyday life (see [table 1](#)). Teachers tended to begin lessons from experiences familiar to students, such as family farming activities, parents’ work routines, social events in the village, and local customs and traditions. Classrooms became more dynamic and dialogical when students were positioned as owners of their stories rather than as passive recipients of information.

These accounts indicate that teachers understood deep learning as a process of bridging academic concepts with students’ real worlds. Depth of learning did not primarily arise from the complexity of content, but from the sense of connectedness that fostered students’ engagement. For students, learning became meaningful when they realized that Social Studies knowledge helped explain issues they encountered or observed in their surroundings.

This theme underscores that locality is not merely an additional background, but a gateway to social reflection. However, the close alignment of instructional content with students’ lived experiences also introduces pedagogical vulnerability, particularly when classroom discussions intersect with sensitive local issues. This dynamic was observed in several classroom interactions and reflected in teacher narratives. For instance, one teacher noted: *“When discussing land ownership, some students began referring to actual disputes in their village. I had to redirect the discussion carefully so it would not lead to conflict or make certain students uncomfortable.”* This indicates that teachers actively mediate the boundary between critical engagement and maintaining classroom social cohesion.

An observation vignette further illustrates this tension. During a lesson on economic inequality, a student referenced disparities between families in the village, prompting visible discomfort among peers. The teacher responded by reframing the discussion toward general concepts of fairness and community cooperation, while establishing norms of respectful dialogue. Rather than suppressing the topic entirely, the teacher guided students to reflect on structural issues without personalizing the discussion.

These findings suggest that while contextualization enhances the relevance of IPS learning, it simultaneously requires teachers to exercise pedagogical sensitivity in navigating socially embedded tensions. Therefore, this

Table 1. Summary of Theme 1: Deep Learning in Social Studies Through Real-Life Integration

Aspect	Key Findings	Interpretive Explanation
Meaning of Deep Learning	Deep learning is perceived as learning that goes beyond memorization of content.	Teachers understand deep learning as a process where Social Studies concepts are used to interpret and make sense of students’ everyday lives rather than merely recalling factual information.
Learning Approach	Lessons are initiated from students’ familiar experiences.	Teachers commonly draw on local contexts such as family farming, parents’ occupations, village social events, and local traditions to anchor abstract academic concepts.
Classroom Dynamics	Learning becomes more dialogical and participatory.	Students are positioned as active contributors and owners of their narratives, which transforms classrooms into interactive spaces rather than teacher-centered environments.
Student Engagement	Engagement emerges from relevance and connectedness.	Depth of learning is not driven by content complexity but by students’ perceived relevance of Social Studies knowledge to real-life situations they observe or experience.
Learning Outcomes	Social Studies is viewed as meaningful and applicable.	Students recognize that Social Studies helps explain social phenomena in their surroundings, increasing the perceived value and usefulness of learning.
Role of Locality	Local context functions as a gateway to social reflection.	Locality is not merely supplementary content but serves as an entry point for critical reflection on social realities.
Pedagogical Challenges	Risk of sensitivity when addressing local social issues.	Teachers must carefully balance critical discussions with social safety, especially when lessons involve sensitive topics such as land disputes, poverty, or local social inequalities.

condition is interpreted not as a generalized constraint, but as a context-dependent challenge that emerges when local realities become part of classroom discourse.

Theme 2. Teachers' tension between pedagogical ideals and the realities of remote contexts

Although teachers sought to build meaningful learning, they often found themselves caught between pedagogical aspirations and the concrete constraints of remote schools. Limited availability of learning media, infrequent access to professional training, administrative demands, and pressure to meet examination targets meant that deep learning practices could not always be implemented consistently. In some situations, learning flowed meaningfully, while in others it reverted to more superficial and procedural forms.

"I actually want the children to discuss longer, but time is limited. If it takes too long, other materials are left behind, and then I am the one held responsible." (G-2, placeholder)
"Training rarely reaches this area. So we learn on our own. Sometimes we feel confident, sometimes unsure because there are no direct examples." (G-5, placeholder)

In the classroom, this misalignment was clearly visible. There were sessions in which teachers encouraged reflective discussion, but in subsequent meetings they returned to lecture-based approaches due to time considerations or doubts about students' readiness. Such tensions should not be understood merely as individual pedagogical shortcomings, but rather as consequences of the structural conditions of remote schools, where teachers are required to assume multiple roles simultaneously (see table 2).

"Discussion is good, but some children are shy to speak. Others are afraid of being wrong. So I have to go slowly; otherwise the class becomes silent." (G-4, placeholder)

Accordingly, deep learning in remote areas unfolds as a non-linear process. Teachers do not simply "apply a method," but continuously translate the ideals of deep learning into constrained conditions, while maintaining students' learning rhythms and striving to meet institutional expectations.

Theme 3. Social Studies as a space for identity reflection: how students make sense of their social experiences

For students, deep learning experiences in Social Studies

were not always perceived as a "new method," but rather as moments when they felt better able to understand themselves and their environment. This theme was evident in how students described lessons that resonated with their personal experiences, such as family occupations, migration, customary rules, gotong royong (mutual cooperation), and social changes observed in their villages.

"When we learned about occupations, I understood why my father is often not at home. It turns out he works for the family's needs, not because he doesn't want to be at home." (S-3,placeholder)

"When we talked about village rules, I realized why we have to join gotong royong. If we don't, others get tired on their own." (S-11, placeholder)

Some students also expressed mixed emotions. Discussions related to their lives were engaging, yet simultaneously produced discomfort when personal experiences became shared classroom material. Feelings of pride and embarrassment coexisted, particularly when topics touched upon poverty, limited facilities, or differences in social status within their immediate environment.

"I like telling stories about my village, but sometimes I feel embarrassed when asked about my house being far away and not having electricity yet. My friends then know." (S-14, placeholder)

This theme demonstrates that deep learning - based Social Studies instruction extends beyond social understanding to become an arena for identity formation. Students learn to name their lived experiences, recognize cause-and-effect relationships in social events, and become aware of their positions within broader social structures. Depth of learning thus emerges from a growing process of meaning-making rather than solely from cognitive achievement (see table 3).

Thematic Summary

The findings in Table 4 indicate that deep learning in social studies is most effective when the learning material is closely tied to the students' lived experiences, allowing the local context to serve as a meaningful entry point for understanding these concepts. Reflective dialogue further strengthens this

Table 2. Teachers' Tensions Between Pedagogical Ideals and Structural Constraints in Remote School Contexts

Analytical Aspect	Key Findings	Illustrative Evidence (Teachers' Voices)	Interpretive Meaning
Pedagogical Aspirations	Teachers aimed to implement meaningful and reflective learning through discussion and deep engagement.	"I actually want the children to discuss longer..." (G-2)	Teachers possess strong pedagogical ideals aligned with deep learning principles.
Structural Constraints	Limited learning resources, lack of professional training, time pressure, and exam-oriented demands constrained instructional practices.	"Training rarely reaches this area..." (G-5)	External conditions significantly restrict teachers' ability to consistently apply deep learning approaches.
Instructional Inconsistency	Teaching practices fluctuated between reflective discussions and lecture-based methods.	Observed shifts between discussion-oriented and procedural instruction.	Pedagogical inconsistency reflects contextual pressures rather than teachers' lack of competence.
Students' Readiness and Participation	Students' shyness, fear of making mistakes, and uneven participation affected classroom interaction.	"Some children are shy to speak..." (G-4)	Teachers must adapt learning pace to students' socio-emotional conditions.
Teachers' Multiple Roles	Teachers were required to balance instructional goals, administrative accountability, and student readiness simultaneously.	Responsibility for unfinished material placed on teachers.	Pedagogical tension is structurally produced within remote school systems.
Nature of Deep Learning Implementation	Deep learning occurred unevenly and developed through continuous adaptation.	Learning sometimes meaningful, sometimes procedural.	Deep learning in remote contexts is non-linear and translational rather than method-driven.

Table 3. Social Studies Learning as a Space for Identity Reflection and Meaning-Making

Analytical Aspect	Key Findings	Illustrative Student Experiences	Interpretative Meaning
Students' perception of deep learning	Deep learning in Social Studies was not viewed as a completely new method, but as learning moments that felt more meaningful and relevant to students' lives	Students connected lessons to familiar topics such as family occupations, village rules, migration, and social change	Learning depth emerges from relevance and personal connection rather than instructional novelty
Connection between learning content and lived experience	Social Studies lessons resonated strongly when linked to students' everyday social realities	Understanding parents' occupations and community practices like <i>gotong royong</i> helped students reinterpret daily experiences	Learning facilitates self-understanding and social awareness through contextualized content
Emotional responses to personal reflection	Students experienced both engagement and emotional discomfort during discussions related to their personal lives	Feelings of pride and embarrassment arose when discussing poverty, distance from home, or lack of electricity	Identity reflection involves emotional complexity, not merely cognitive engagement
Classroom as a space for identity negotiation	The classroom became a place where personal experiences were shared and socially interpreted	Students became aware that their private experiences were visible to peers	Social Studies learning functions as a social arena where identity is negotiated and recognized
Meaning-making and social positioning	Students learned to recognize cause-and-effect relationships in social life and their position within broader structures	Reflection on community obligations and social differences fostered awareness of social roles	Deep learning is characterized by ongoing meaning-making and identity formation, beyond academic achievement

Table 4. Thematic Summary

Main Theme	Key Subthemes	Core Meaning
1. Social Studies learning close to life	Locality as a gateway to reflective dialogue	Learning depth is grounded in the connection between content and students' realities
2. Teachers' struggles in remote contexts	Limited training/media; time and exam pressures	Deep learning practices are negotiative and non-linear
3. Social Studies as a mirror of students' selves	Meaning-making of social experiences; emotional ambivalence	Social Studies becomes a space for the growth of identity and social awareness

process by enabling students to interpret social phenomena through personal and communal experiences. However, the implementation of deep learning is shaped by teachers' struggles in remote contexts, particularly limitations in training, learning media, and time allocation, as well as pressures related to examination demands. These constraints suggest that deep learning practices are inherently negotiative and develop in non-linear ways rather than through fixed instructional models. Moreover, Social Studies learning operates as a reflective mirror through which students make sense of their social experiences, revealing both cognitive engagement and emotional ambivalence. Overall, the results demonstrate that the depth of Social Studies learning extends beyond academic outcomes to support identity formation and the growth of social awareness.

In brief, this study yielded three main findings. First, deep learning in Social Studies instruction becomes meaningful when it is grounded in students' local contexts and lived experiences. Second, such practices are constantly confronted with structural constraints in remote schools, resulting in implementation that is neither linear nor uniform. Third, for students, deep learning - based Social Studies functions as a "social mirror" through which they understand themselves, their communities, and their positions within the social order. Together, these findings affirm that deep

learning in remote areas cannot be reduced to a mere instructional technique; rather, it constitutes a social process shaped by context, relationships, and identity construction.

Deep learning, locality, and the construction of social meaning
 The first theme demonstrates that learning depth is formed when Social Studies content is genuinely connected to students' everyday lives for example, experiences in family farms, parents' occupations, village infrastructure conditions, and local customary values. Conceptually, this finding aligns with the principles of deep learning in Indonesia, which emphasize mindful engagement, meaningful understanding and joyful learning experiences through contextual linkage. From a social constructivist perspective, knowledge is not transmitted unidirectionally from teacher to student but is constructed through dialogue and the negotiation of meaning within the classroom; in this sense, locality functions as a "symbolic bridge" that renders Social Studies concepts socially relevant and acceptable to students.

This finding is also supported by recent literature. Studies on the integration of deep learning in elementary education show that learning meaningfulness increases when content is connected to real issues in students' environments and provides space for reflection. In the field of Social Studies, prior research consistently indicates that deep learning is strengthened when instruction is anchored in students' familiar and contextual experiences, enabling learners to construct meaning through connections between academic concepts and everyday life. This perspective aligns with constructivist-oriented studies in Social Studies education, which emphasize the role of contextualization and lived experience in fostering interpretive understanding rather than rote memorization.

Accordingly, the previous citation to Fajar & Maulina (2024) has been removed due to its lack of conceptual alignment with the pedagogical argument presented. The study, which focuses on sentiment analysis of the Kurikulum Merdeka using a convolutional neural network (CNN), does not provide an appropriate empirical or theoretical basis for claims regarding deep learning practices in classroom contexts. To maintain the integrity and coherence of the argumentation, this section now relies on literature that is directly relevant to Social Studies pedagogy and meaningful learning processes. Accordingly, this study not only corroborates prior research but also extends it by underscoring that locality in marginal regions is not merely a

background for learning, but a primary source for the formation of students' social awareness. Thus, the "depth" observed here is relational in nature, emerging from the interconnection among concepts, experiences, and local identities.

The deep learning approach in education highlights students' active engagement in constructing meaningful learning through links between academic material and real-life experiences, including local contexts that reflect daily activities, parents' occupations, and customary values (Hendrianty et al., 2024; Umar & Widodo, 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Empirical studies indicate that integrating local contexts into deep learning enhances students' capacity to construct social meaning and develop critical reflection on social phenomena in their environments, consistent with the social constructivist view that knowledge arises from interaction and the negotiation of meaning within social contexts (contextualized learning) (Supandi et al., 2024). In Social Studies, the application of deep learning has been shown to increase students' social awareness when instruction is designed to be relevant to local issues and lived experiences, thereby strengthening the relationship between academic concepts and students' social identities (Agyman, 2024; Nurhadi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, learning that is closely tied to students' social realities also presents challenges, particularly when content touches on sensitive issues such as inequality or local conflicts, requiring teachers to exercise sensitivity toward the politics of knowledge and the social safety of the learning community (Novak & Cañas, 2020).

Deep learning in *Social Studies* emerges most robustly when academic content is genuinely anchored in students' lived realities, such as family agriculture, local occupations, infrastructure, and community values, enabling learners to form meaningful social connections rather than engaging in rote recall of abstract facts (Fullan et al., 2014; Komariyah, 2025b). Consistent with *social constructivist* theory, knowledge is co-constructed through active dialogue and shared interpretation within classroom social contexts, positioning *locality* as a "symbolic bridge" that situates curricular concepts both socially and cognitively for students (Allen, 2022; Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020). Empirical educational research demonstrates that integrating real-world and contextual experiences into *deep learning* not only enhances student engagement and critical reflection but also strengthens learners' capacity to interpret social phenomena in their immediate environments, which is central to meaningful learning (Rizkiyah et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025). However, this localized *deep learning* approach also introduces pedagogical challenges, as educators must carefully navigate sensitive community issues, such as inequality or local conflict, to maintain social cohesion while simultaneously fostering students' reflective and critical thinking capacities (Fitrah et al., 2025).

At the same time, the close alignment between content and real life introduces a social paradox: when discussions address inequality, poverty, or local conflict, teachers must carefully balance opening critical spaces with maintaining community safety. This dimension enriches the literature, which has often portrayed deep learning as an idealized approach without sufficiently addressing the local politics of knowledge in remote classrooms.

Pedagogical negotiation under the shadow of rural constraints

The second theme reveals the tensions teachers experience between the ideals of deep learning and the realities of remote schools, including limited access to training, minimal learning resources, administrative burdens, and pressure to achieve examination targets. These conditions cause deep learning practices to fluctuate at times

dialogical and reflective, at other times reverting to procedural approaches. This finding is consistent with recent studies that identify teacher readiness, infrastructural support, and assessment culture as dominant barriers to deep learning in elementary education.

Theoretically, this condition indicates that deep learning is not merely a package of methods to be implemented, but a social practice dependent on the school ecology. Within a social constructivist framework, the classroom is a space for meaning production shaped by structures (curriculum, assessment, facilities) and agents (teachers and students). When school structures encourage surface learning, teachers engage in a form of "survival strategy," selecting particular moments for reflective discussion before returning to lecture-based instruction to meet targets. Such forms of pedagogical improvisation often remain invisible when research focuses solely on curriculum documents or learning outcomes.

Pedagogical negotiation in the context of deep learning in rural schools reveals tensions between ideal deep learning practices and the realities of school ecologies characterized by limited teacher training, inadequate learning facilities, and administrative constraints coupled with examination pressures that restrict instructional innovation (Arianti, Rahmawati, et al., 2025a). These conditions affect teachers' readiness to implement deep learning consistently, resulting in instructional practices that oscillate between dialogical approaches and procedural patterns oriented toward meeting curricular targets (Arianti, Rahmawati, et al., 2025b). Other studies affirm that structural barriers such as weak policy support and insufficient continuous professional development render deep learning a social practice highly dependent on school ecology rather than a mere set of pedagogical techniques (Rahmah, 2021; Rohman et al., 2024; Zulaeha & Mariina, 2025). Thus, this study extends the literature by showing that in remote areas, teachers often adopt non-linear pedagogical improvisations as survival strategies, and that without adequate structural support, deep learning risks being reduced to a policy slogan (Putra et al., 2025).

Pedagogical negotiation in rural schooling contexts reveals persistent tensions between the ideals of *deep learning* and the structural realities faced by teachers, where limited access to professional training, inadequate infrastructure, and administrative pressures frequently constrain instructional innovation, causing educators to oscillate between dialogical, reflective practices and more procedural, exam-oriented approaches (Arianti, Sama', et al., 2025). Empirical evidence indicates that rural teachers' readiness to implement *deep learning* pedagogy depends heavily on systemic support factors, as insufficient continuous professional development and weak institutional policies impede the consistent application of *constructivist* teaching methods in under-resourced environments (Fitrah et al., 2025). Broader literature on barriers to teacher competence in developing contexts further highlights organizational, infrastructural, and socio-cultural constraints that diminish teachers' capacity to adopt innovative pedagogies, underscoring the critical role of contextualized professional learning and policy alignment in enabling meaningful pedagogical change (Yulaikhah et al., 2025). Moreover, research on technology integration in rural schools emphasizes the persistence of the digital divide and the lack of context-sensitive support as central challenges that educators must navigate (Sepadi et al., 2025). Within this study, these structural limitations are reflected in participants' accounts of infrequent professional training, limited access to instructional media, and the continued dominance of assessment practices oriented toward examination coverage.

In this regard, rather than being fully enacted as a consistent pedagogical practice, deep learning may function more as a normative or policy-oriented aspiration in contexts where such structural supports remain limited. Here,

“structural support” refers specifically to the availability of sustained and contextually relevant teacher professional development, adequate learning resources (including digital and non-digital media), and more flexible assessment frameworks that allow time and space for reflective and dialogical learning. Without these enabling conditions, the translation of deep learning from policy discourse into classroom practice appears partial and uneven, as also evidenced by teachers’ reported need to balance pedagogical ideals with institutional demands.

At this point, the present study makes an important contribution by portraying deep learning as non-linear pedagogical work, particularly in remote contexts. National literature generally emphasizes the relevance of deep learning for 21st-century competencies and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. The present findings add a critical dimension: without sufficient structural support, deep learning is easily trapped as policy rhetoric. Consequently, this study offers a more realistic, experience-based reading rooted in the perspectives of groups long positioned at the margins of the education system.

Social Studies as an arena for students’ identity and self-awareness

The third theme affirms that deep learning - based Social Studies functions as a space for students’ self-meaning-making. Through instruction, students interpret the social reasons behind family experiences, migration, gotong royong (mutual cooperation), and village-level inequalities. This finding reinforces the view that Social Studies is not merely a cognitive subject, but an arena for the formation of contextual social and civic identities. Recent deep learning research similarly highlights the role of this approach in fostering metacognition, reflection, and emotional engagement. This study concretizes these ideas within remote contexts: students’ reflections emerge from lived experiences rather than abstract cases, closely tied to their marginal positions within development processes.

Deep learning - based Social Studies serves as an arena for students’ self-meaning-making, in which family experiences, migration, gotong royong, and village social inequalities are interpreted as part of the formation of contextual social identity and civic awareness (Dewanti & Putra, 2022; Kartika Sari, 2021; Sari et al., 2023). Recent studies indicate that deep learning in Social Studies not only enhances conceptual understanding but also promotes metacognition, self-reflection, and emotional engagement, rendering learning more meaningful and grounded in students’ lived experiences (Hämäläinen et al., 2022). In remote contexts, reflections derived from concrete experiences rather than abstract cases illustrate how students’ marginal positions within development processes shape critical yet personal social awareness, consistent with findings that Social Studies grounded in local wisdom strengthens prosocial behavior and sensitivity to social structures (Pratiwi & Subkhan, 2021). Notably, emotional ambivalence emerges in the form of pride alongside discomfort when local experiences are discussed in class, underscoring that deep learning engages students’ affective and identity domains and positions them as active subjects negotiating self-meaning rather than passive objects of educational policy (Flotman, 2021; Komariyah, 2025a; Widodo et al., 2024).

The emergence of emotional ambivalence pride coupled with awkwardness or embarrassment when life limitations become collective discussion topics is conceptually significant. It demonstrates that deep learning engages affective and identity dimensions, not merely conceptual understanding. Indonesian literature on Social Studies grounded in local wisdom likewise shows that community-

based learning strengthens prosocial behavior and awareness of social structures. This study enriches that body of work by revealing the more fragile side of social awareness: how rural identities grow through encounters between recognition and stigma. At this point, the study’s social contribution becomes evident, as students in remote areas appear as active subjects negotiating self-meaning, rather than as mere objects of educational policy.

Researcher reflection and conceptual implications

The researcher’s presence in remote classrooms carries two important implications. First, the prominence of locality in the data may have been amplified by the researcher’s deliberate attention to students’ everyday narratives. Second, some sensitive experiences may not have fully surfaced due to community norms or power relations embedded in interactions among the researcher, teachers, and students. Such reflection is necessary to ensure that data interpretation remains open to the social complexities that continuously shape school life.

Overall, this study extends understanding of deep learning in Indonesia through three key contributions:

- positioning locality as the core of deep learning in Social Studies within remote elementary schools;
- demonstrating deep learning implementation as a non-linear process of pedagogical and structural negotiation; and
- affirming Social Studies as an arena for the formation of identity and social awareness among students in remote areas.

Accordingly, this study not only consolidates the past five years of scholarship on deep learning in elementary education, but also advances an alternative perspective grounded in marginal contexts that remain underrepresented in dominant educational research and policy discourse. By situating rural classrooms as sites of situated meaning-making rather than mere loci of implementation, the findings demonstrate their relevance to both education policy and critical pedagogy. In particular, the study shows that remote learning environments can function as empirical spaces for contextual pedagogical innovation in Social Studies, where locally embedded knowledge, social realities, and classroom interaction dynamically shape the enactment of deep learning.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that deep learning in Social Studies (IPS) in remote elementary schools in Manis Mata operates as a situated meaning-making process rooted in students’ lived experiences rather than as a fixed instructional method. Learning depth emerges when academic content is connected to local realities, enabling reflective interpretation of social life. However, its implementation is non-linear and continuously negotiated within structural constraints, including limited professional development, restricted resources, and assessment pressures. Within this context, IPS learning also functions as a space for social identity formation, where students interpret their positions while experiencing both recognition and emotional ambivalence.

Analytically, the study proposes a concise typology of identity negotiation: cognitive identity (understanding community roles), relational identity (shaped through peer interaction), and reflective-critical identity (interpreting inequality and social position). At the same time, the study acknowledges that an emphasis on locality must be balanced with critical awareness to avoid romanticizing local knowledge, while still requiring systemic supports such as training and equitable resources.

Practically, implications align with the three themes:

integrating local issues as structured entry points for conceptual learning; providing sustained, context-sensitive teacher development (e.g., cluster mentoring); and applying safeguarding strategies for discussing sensitive topics. Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its localized scope and cross-sectional design. Two transferable

propositions emerge: (1) deep learning is most effective when locality serves as the primary entry point for conceptual understanding; and (2) its sustainability depends on alignment between contextual pedagogy and structural support systems.

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