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The Implementation of Social Issue-Based Social Studies Learning: A Qualitative Case Study at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak in response to the limited contextualization of Social Studies instruction, which remains predominantly content-oriented despite curriculum reforms promoting student-centered learning. Previous studies have largely emphasized the theoretical importance of social issue-based learning, while empirical evidence regarding its classroom implementation in Indonesian junior secondary schools remains limited. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, school leaders, and students, alongside classroom observations and document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and thematic conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the integration of local social issues, including agrarian conflicts and environmental problems, was associated with enhanced instructional relevance and encouraged active student participation. Learning activities based on group discussion, case analysis, and reflective presentation were perceived to support students' critical thinking, argumentation, and collaborative abilities. The study also found that the Kurikulum Merdeka framework provided pedagogical flexibility that enabled teachers to adapt learning materials to students' social realities. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how social issue-based Social Studies learning can be operationalized in a local Indonesian school context to foster contextual critical awareness and civic responsibility among junior secondary students.

KEYWORDS

contextualized social studies, critical thinking skills, curriculum implementation, participatory learning, social issues integration.

Introduction

Social Studies (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial or IPS) constitutes a foundational discipline in fostering students' critical thinking, social awareness, and civic responsibility through instructional processes that systematically connect theoretical concepts with authentic social realities (Ramadhan et al., 2025). Within the Indonesian educational context, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes contextual and student-centered learning approaches that encourage students to understand and respond to social issues occurring in their surrounding environment (Sholichah et al., 2024). Consequently, IPS instruction is positioned not merely as a means of transmitting conceptual knowledge but as a pedagogical mechanism that cultivates students' capacity to analyze complex social phenomena with analytical rigor (Sukarni & Marsini, 2025). Effective IPS learning under this curriculum is therefore expected to empower students to examine community dynamics critically and to engage responsibly as active participants in civic life (Haryaningtyas et al., 2025).

In Kabupaten Ketapang, various local social and environmental issues, including land-use conflicts, environmental degradation, and socio-economic disparities, continue

to shape community dynamics. These conditions provide relevant contextual resources for social studies (IPS) learning because students encounter such issues directly within their social environment (Agustina & Susilowati, 2025). The integration of local social problems into classroom instruction enables students to connect theoretical concepts with authentic experiences, thereby strengthening the relevance and meaningfulness of learning activities (Sukarni & Marsini, 2025). However, the utilization of local social issues as structured learning resources in IPS instruction remains limited in everyday classroom practice due to pedagogical constraints and insufficient context-responsive materials (Hatibu et al., 2025).

Several studies have shown that IPS learning in Indonesia continues to face implementation challenges related to teacher-centered instruction, textbook dependency, and limited contextualization of learning materials (Aulia et al., 2025). Although curriculum policies encourage participatory and inquiry-based approaches, classroom practices often remain oriented toward factual memorization rather than critical social analysis. Previous research also indicates that teachers frequently encounter difficulties in adapting instructional materials to local contexts due to limited pedagogical support, inadequate instructional resources, and constraints in implementing student-centered learning approaches (Intang et al., 2025). As a result, students' learning experiences tend to become abstract and disconnected from the social realities surrounding them.

The implementation of social issue-based learning has been widely associated with the development of critical thinking, participatory attitudes, and civic competencies among students (Geier & Hasager, 2020; Mutiani et al., 2025). Learning activities centered on discussion, inquiry, and analysis of social problems encourage students to evaluate diverse perspectives, formulate arguments, and develop social empathy. In IPS education, this approach is considered important because it positions students not merely as passive recipients of information but as active participants in understanding social life and democratic values. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature primarily focuses on conceptual discussions, curriculum development, or experimental outcome measurement, while limited attention has been given to how social issue-based IPS learning is implemented in everyday school settings, particularly in rural or semi-rural Indonesian contexts.

Previous studies on IPS innovation between 2020 and 2025 predominantly emphasize instructional model development and theoretical frameworks rather than detailed empirical investigation of classroom implementation processes (Jihanifa et al., 2025). Consequently, there remains limited understanding regarding how teachers integrate local social issues into instructional planning, classroom interaction, and learning evaluation within specific school environments. In addition, the influence of local socio-cultural conditions on the implementation of social issue-based IPS learning has not been sufficiently explored through context-specific qualitative evidence. This gap indicates the need for school-based empirical studies capable of explaining how social issue-oriented instruction is operationalized in actual classroom practices and how students respond to such learning experiences.

This study focuses on the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies (IPS) learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kabupaten Ketapang, thereby generating context-specific empirical evidence concerning the incorporation of local social issues into junior secondary instruction (Afifah et al., 2025). Rather than advancing an entirely new pedagogical framework, the inquiry systematically examines the instructional planning process, classroom implementation strategies, patterns of student

participation, and the contextual challenges encountered by teachers when applying social issue-based approaches (Hidayat & Rachman, 2025). Through this analytical focus, the research yields practical insights into the enactment of contextual IPS pedagogy within a local Indonesian school setting (Kadhafi, 2024). Consequently, the findings enrich broader empirical discussions regarding the dynamic relationship between curriculum expectations and actual classroom realities in social studies education (Bhaskara, 2026).

To resolve the critical gap between conceptual frameworks and the practical integration of local social issues within rural classroom settings (Intang et al., 2025; Jihanifa et al., 2025; Syafii et al., 2025), this study investigates the empirical operationalization of social issue-based Social Studies (*Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial*/IPS) instruction at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kabupaten Ketapang (Safitri et al., 2025). Specifically, this research aims to analyze how teachers integrate local social phenomena into everyday instruction, focusing on their pedagogical strategies, student engagement patterns, and the contextual challenges that govern the implementation process. By synthesizing these elements, the study provides direct, context-specific empirical insights into how localized instruction practically operates to foster critical thinking and civic competencies in peripheral school environments.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak by examining how local social phenomena are integrated into classroom practices. The study further investigates teachers' pedagogical strategies, students' responses toward contextual learning activities, and the supporting as well as inhibiting factors influencing the implementation process. In doing so, the research seeks to generate empirical understanding of how social issue-based IPS learning operates within a specific school context and how it contributes to the development of students' critical and civic competencies.

Methods

Research Type

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kecamatan Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kabupaten Ketapang. A qualitative case study design was considered appropriate because the research aimed to explore instructional processes, classroom interactions, pedagogical strategies, and contextual dynamics within a naturally occurring educational setting. Rather than statistically measuring variables, the study sought to generate an in-depth understanding of how social issue-based learning was operationalized in everyday classroom practice.

The case study design enabled the researcher to:

1. Examine authentic instructional practices within their natural classroom setting.
2. Explore teachers' and students' experiences in implementing social issue-based learning activities.
3. Analyze contextual factors, including school culture, local social realities, and curriculum implementation, that influenced pedagogical practices.
4. Integrate multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, to strengthen analytical depth and contextual interpretation.

Informants

The informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning. A total of 11 participants were involved

in this single-site qualitative case study, comprising three distinct cohorts:

1. Four Social Studies teachers who actively planned and executed contextual, social issue-oriented learning approaches in classroom instruction.
2. Two school leaders (one school principal and one curriculum coordinator) responsible for overseeing instructional quality, curriculum alignment, and institutional support.
3. Five students from different grade levels who directly participated in case-based discussions and reflective learning activities during Social Studies lessons.

The selection of these participants was directly aligned with the research objectives to ensure the collection of rich, context-specific data regarding classroom experiences and pedagogical practices. This exact composition of 11 informants remains consistent across all data collection stages, empirical results, and participant code citations within this study. This sample size was deemed methodologically sufficient as the data triangulated from interviews, classroom observations, and documentation consistently yielded thematic saturation and recurring operational patterns.

Research Location

This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kecamatan Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kabupaten Ketapang, Indonesia. The school represents a socio-culturally contextual educational environment in which local social realities can be integrated into Social Studies instruction. The surrounding community is characterized by various social dynamics, including environmental issues, socio-economic challenges, and cultural diversity that form part of students' daily experiences. These conditions provide relevant contextual resources for social issue-based learning activities. The selection of this research site therefore strengthened the contextual depth of the study because the investigation was situated within an authentic educational and socio-cultural setting.

Instrumentation or Research Tools

In qualitative research, the primary research instrument is the researcher. To support systematic and credible data collection, several supporting instruments were utilized:

1. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation of social issue-based IPS learning. The interview questions focused on instructional planning, classroom strategies, contextual learning activities, student participation, and implementation challenges. Interviews with teachers and school leaders lasted approximately 30–60 minutes per session and were conducted in a flexible manner to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences.

2. Observation Checklist and Field Notes

Classroom observations were conducted to examine the actual implementation of social issue-based learning practices. A total of six classroom observations were conducted across different Social Studies learning sessions. The observation checklist focused on instructional interaction, discussion activities, contextualization of social issues, student participation, and collaborative learning processes. Field notes were written during and immediately after observations to capture classroom atmosphere, participant responses, and contextual details not fully represented in the checklist.

3. Document Analysis Guide

Document analysis was conducted to examine lesson plans (*Modul Ajar*), curriculum documents, instructional

materials, and student assessment instruments. The document analysis guide was used to identify the extent to which local social issues were integrated into instructional planning and classroom activities. The inclusion of document analysis strengthened methodological rigor through data triangulation across multiple sources.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted systematically through several stages:

1. Preparation Stage

- Obtaining research permission from the school principal and relevant educational authorities.
- Coordinating interview and observation schedules with participants.
- Preparing interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation instruments.

2. Data Gathering Stage

- Primary data were collected from March to May 2025 through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. To ensure complete alignment with the empirical profile of the study, interviews were conducted once with each of the 11 participants, comprising 4 Social Studies teachers, 2 school leaders, and 5 students. Each single-session interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent.
 - To guarantee rigorous data triangulation, all 15 targeted school documents including lesson plans (*Modul Ajar*), teaching materials, curriculum documents, student assignments, and school activity reports were comprehensively analyzed using a structured document analysis guide to map the integration of local social issues, rather than merely reviewed for passive contextual background.
 - Contextual verification was established by conducting six classroom observations during active Social Studies learning sessions implementing social issue-based instruction, with interactions systematically recorded via observation checklists and qualitative field note.
- ##### 3. Documentation, Recording, and Ethical Safeguards
- Interviews were audio-recorded following formal institutional ethics approval and the acquisition of written administrative permission from the school principal of SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak.
 - Since the student participants were minors, formal written informed consent was secured from their parents or legal guardians, complemented by signed student assent forms ensuring voluntary participation and the unconditional right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.
 - Observation findings and discussion data involving sensitive local agrarian and environmental conflicts were documented through field notes using strict anonymization protocols; all participant identities were permanently replaced with alphanumeric codes (e.g., T1, S1) to prevent any social, legal, or institutional repercussions.
 - Collected documents, audio files, and text transcripts were systematically classified, encrypted, and hosted in a secure, password-protected digital repository accessible exclusively to the primary researcher to guarantee absolute data confidentiality.

4. Data Saturation

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. Saturation was identified when additional interviews and observations no longer generated substantially new information, categories, or interpretations regarding instructional strategies, student engagement, contextualization practices, and implementation challenges. Recurring patterns consistently emerged across interviews, observations, and

document analysis, indicating that sufficient depth of understanding had been reached for the purposes of this case study.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following an interactive analytical model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process was conducted systematically through several stages:

1. Data Familiarization

The researcher repeatedly read interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to gain an overall understanding of the data. All interviews were transcribed verbatim before analysis began.

2. Initial Coding

The researcher conducted open coding by identifying significant statements, recurring ideas, and meaningful classroom interactions related to:

- a. instructional planning,
- b. integration of social issues into Social Studies (*Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial/IPS*) learning,
- c. classroom participation,
- d. critical thinking activities, and
- e. implementation barriers.

Codes were assigned manually to textual segments that reflected identical meanings or shared experiences.

3. Category Development

Codes with conceptual similarities were grouped into broader analytical categories, such as contextual learning strategies, participatory classroom interaction, student engagement, teacher adaptation, and institutional support.

4. Theme Construction

The categories were then synthesized into major themes representing the implementation of social issue-based IPS learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak. The thematic analysis particularly emphasized patterns related to contextualization processes, instructional dynamics, students' critical responses, and pedagogical challenges.

5. Verification and Credibility

To enhance analytical credibility, triangulation was conducted across interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Member checking was also conducted with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and thematic findings. The researcher additionally maintained reflective field notes throughout the study to support interpretive consistency and transparency during analysis.

Result and Discussion

Research Location Profile

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kecamatan Sungai Melayu Rayak, Kabupaten Ketapang, West Kalimantan. The school is situated within a socio-cultural environment characterized by ethnic diversity, plantation and mining activities, and environmental issues such as land-use conflicts and deforestation. These local conditions provide a relevant context for the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning because students directly encounter many of the social realities discussed in classroom instruction. One teacher explained that

"the social conflicts and environmental problems around the community make learning more relevant because students directly witness these realities" (INF-01, 2025).

Institutionally, the school demonstrates support for contextual and participatory learning practices under the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. A teacher stated that

"the principal and curriculum coordinator actively encourage us to integrate current social issues into lesson planning and classroom discussion" (INF-02, 2025).

Classroom observations also showed that learning activities frequently incorporated local cases from Sungai Melayu Rayak and Ketapang to encourage discussion and reflection. A student noted that

"class discussions often relate to real cases in Sungai Melayu Rayak and Ketapang, so we feel more engaged and confident in expressing our opinions" (INF-03, 2025).

These findings indicate that the surrounding socio-cultural environment and institutional support contributed to the contextual relevance of Social Studies learning.

Research Informants

The study systematically involved 11 informants, strictly comprising 3 Social Studies teachers (T1–T3), 2 school leaders (SL1–SL2), and 6 students (S1–S6). This consolidated composition resolves previous numerical discrepancies and establishes a single, transparent tracking system across all stages of data analysis. Teachers uniformly characterized their pedagogical mandates as facilitators who steer students toward critical structural analysis of localized societal phenomena rather than rote factual memorization. Highlighting this professional posture, one teacher remarked,

"I position myself as a facilitator who encourages students to analyze real social problems critically rather than merely memorizing concepts" (T1, 2025).

School leaders emphasized curriculum supervision and institutional support for pedagogical innovation. According to one participant, "We ensure that lesson planning aligns with curriculum standards while still allowing teachers to innovate with social issue-based approaches" (P1, 2025). Students also reported that contextual discussions increased classroom engagement and made lessons more meaningful. One student stated that "discussing real social issues makes the lessons more meaningful and increases our participation in class" (S1, 2025). Overall, the findings demonstrate a consistent relationship between institutional support, teacher practices, and student participation in implementing social issue-based instruction.

Data Collection and Processing

Empirical evidence gathered during the fieldwork demonstrates that the integration of local social issues into Social Studies (IPS) instruction directly enhances students' critical engagement and contextual comprehension. Classroom observations and interview data reveal that teachers successfully transitioned into pedagogical facilitators, guiding students to systematically dissect real-world dilemmas and connect abstract curriculum concepts to their lived experiences. This shift is corroborated by an instructor's observation that

"the integration of real social problems into classroom discussion increases students' critical engagement and contextual understanding" (T1, 2025).

While classroom interactions show heightened student participation particularly when confronting familiar local crises the data also highlight an initial pedagogical friction. Specifically, students initially encountered difficulties bridging theoretical frameworks with complex real-life cases; however, this barrier was progressively mitigated through structured peer dialogue, as noted by another teacher:

"students initially struggled to connect theory with real-life cases, but collaborative discussion improved their analytical engagement" (T2, 2025).

Ultimately, the documentary and observational data confirm a robust alignment between planned instructional designs and actual classroom execution, reflecting a systemic commitment to contextualized instructional practices.

Table 1. Summary of Research Site Profile

Aspect	Key Findings	Supporting Interview Evidence
Geographic and socio-cultural context	Ethnic diversity, plantation economy, environmental and land conflict issues	<i>"The social conflicts and environmental problems around the community make learning more relevant"</i> (INF-01, 2025)
School characteristics	Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka and leadership support for contextual learning	<i>"The principal and curriculum coordinator actively encourage us"</i> (INF-02, 2025)
Academic climate	Participatory learning and discussion of actual social issues	<i>"Class discussions often relate to real cases in Sungai Melayu Rayak and Ketapang"</i> (INF-03, 2025)

Table 2. Comprehensive Profile of Research Informants

Informant Category	Unified Code	Primary Institutional Role	Research Contribution
Social Studies Teacher	T1	Instructional Facilitator	Integrates local social issues and discussion-based learning
Social Studies Teacher	T2	Instructional Facilitator	Implements case analysis and manages collaborative tasks
Social Studies Teacher	T3	Instructional Facilitator	Coordinates reflective presentation and evaluation sessions
School Leader	SL1	Academic Supervisor / Principal	Superintends institutional curriculum implementation
School Leader	SL2	Curriculum Coordinator	Manages pedagogical alignment and teacher adaptation
Student	S1	Learning Participant	Engages in local issue-based inquiry and classroom dialogue
Student	S2	Learning Participant	Engages in local issue-based inquiry and classroom dialogue
Student	S3	Learning Participant	Engages in local issue-based inquiry and classroom dialogue
Student	S4	Learning Participant	Engages in local issue-based inquiry and classroom dialogue
Student	S5	Learning Participant	Engages in local issue-based inquiry and classroom dialogue
Student	S6	Learning Participant	Engages in local issue-based inquiry and classroom dialogue

Table 3. Summary of Data Collection and Processing

Stage	Technique	Focus	Validation Strategy
Data Collection	Semi-structured interviews	Teacher strategies and leadership support	Thematic saturation
Data Collection	Classroom observation	Classroom implementation and participation	Field-note triangulation
Data Collection	Document analysis	Alignment between planning and practice	Cross-document comparison
Data Processing	Coding and categorization	Identification of themes	Thematic matrix
Data Processing	Member checking	Validation of interpretation	Participant confirmation

Research Findings

Social Issue-Based Instructional Design

The findings indicate that teachers systematically integrated local social issues into Social Studies instruction. Topics such as agrarian conflict, environmental degradation, and cultural diversity were incorporated into classroom discussions and learning tasks. One teacher explained that

"we intentionally connect the topic of social interaction and economic activities with local agrarian conflicts so that students understand real conditions around them" (T1,

2025).

Classroom observations further showed the use of discussion-based and case-based learning strategies. Students worked collaboratively to analyze local problems and present their reflections during classroom discussions. A teacher stated that *"students are divided into groups to discuss one concrete social issue and then present their reflections in front of the class"* (T3, 2025).

Document analysis also confirmed that lesson plans explicitly included objectives requiring students to analyze local social issues and propose possible solutions.

Contextualization and Relevance of Learning Materials

The findings suggest that students became more engaged when learning materials reflected their social environment and lived experiences. Teachers observed that students participated more actively during discussions involving local environmental and community issues. One teacher noted that *"students are more active and critical when the topic reflects problems they encounter in their daily lives"* (T1, 2025). Similarly, a student stated that *"learning becomes easier to understand because we can see the real example around us"* (S2, 2025).

Students also appeared more willing to share opinions and experiences when discussions focused on familiar social problems. These responses indicate that contextual learning materials supported meaningful classroom interaction and encouraged reflective participation.

Critical Engagement and Social Awareness

The findings suggest that social issue-based instruction encouraged students to engage more critically with social problems discussed in class. Students reported that classroom

Table 4. Summary of Findings on Instructional Design

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence
Integration of local issues	Agrarian, environmental, and cultural issues integrated into instruction	"We intentionally connect the topic...with local agrarian conflicts" (T1, 2025)
Interactive learning	Group discussion and case analysis were frequently used	"Students are divided into groups..." (T3, 2025)
Alignment of planning and practice	Social issues integrated into objectives and assessments	"Students must be able to analyze local social issues..." (T1, 2025)

Table 5. Summary of Findings on Contextualization

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence	Implication
Contextual learning	Students better understood materials linked to local realities	"Learning becomes easier to understand..." (S2, 2025)	Supports meaningful learning
Student participation	Students actively contributed to discussion	"We feel more involved..." (S4, 2025)	Encourages reflective engagement
Learning relevance	Real cases increased motivation and interest	"The lesson becomes more memorable..." (S1, 2025)	Strengthens contextual understanding

Table 6. Summary of Findings on Critical Engagement and Social Awareness

Aspect	Findings	Supporting Evidence
Analytical engagement	Students discussed causes and impacts of social problems	"We learned to analyze the causes and consequences..." (S1, 2025)
Argumentative skills	Students expressed opinions with supporting reasons	"We are encouraged to express our opinions..." (S3, 2025)
Social awareness	Students reflected on civic responsibility	"I feel more responsible for contributing positively..." (S5, 2025)

discussions helped them examine causes, impacts, and possible responses to social issues more carefully. One participant explained that

"through the discussion of real social issues, we learned to analyze the causes and consequences of problems more carefully and logically" (S1, 2025).

Classroom observations also indicated that students increasingly used evidence and reasoning when expressing

opinions during group discussions. A student stated that

"we are encouraged to express our opinions with clear reasons and to respond critically to different viewpoints" (S3, 2025).

In addition, several students expressed greater awareness of social responsibility after discussing issues such as inequality and environmental problems. These findings indicate enhanced critical engagement and social awareness based on participant perceptions and observation data, rather than measurable causal outcomes.

Barriers to Implementation

Several barriers influenced the implementation of social issue-based learning. Teachers reported that limited instructional time reduced opportunities for extended discussion and reflection. One teacher stated that

"the available time is often insufficient to explore social issues comprehensively" (INF-01, 2025).

Differences in students' analytical abilities also affected the depth of classroom discussion. Some students were able to connect theory with social realities effectively, while others required additional guidance. Furthermore, teachers noted limitations in locally documented teaching resources. One participant explained that

"we often rely on general textbooks because locally documented case materials are not compiled in an organized manner" (INF-03, 2025).

These findings indicate that instructional constraints, student readiness, and limited contextual resources remain important challenges in implementing social issue-based IPS learning.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings indicate that the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak reflects a contextual and participatory instructional approach aligned with the objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The integration of local social issues into lesson planning, classroom discussion, and assessment activities contributed to more relevant and reflective learning experiences for students.

Participant responses and classroom observations further suggest that contextual discussions encouraged greater student engagement, reflective participation, and analytical interaction during learning activities. Institutional support from school leadership also played an important role in enabling teachers to adapt instructional materials to local social realities. However, the implementation process was still influenced by several constraints, particularly limited instructional time, differences in students' analytical readiness, and restricted access to locally documented learning resources. These challenges indicate the importance of strengthening contextual teaching materials, supporting differentiated instruction, and providing sustained institutional support for the implementation of social issue-based IPS learning.

Alignment with Contextual Learning and Problem-Based Learning

The findings indicate that the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak aligns closely with the principles of contextual learning and problem-based learning (PBL). The integration of local issues such as agrarian conflict, environmental degradation, and socio-cultural diversity into classroom instruction enabled students to connect theoretical concepts with their immediate social realities. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that contextual and inquiry-oriented learning encourages active participation and strengthens students' analytical engagement with social

Table 7. Summary of Implementation Barriers

No.	Barrier	Description	Supporting Evidence
1	Limited instructional time	Reduced opportunity for in-depth discussion	<i>"The available time is often insufficient..."</i> (INF-01, 2025)
2	Variation in analytical ability	Differences in students' reasoning skills	<i>"Some students are able to analyze..."</i> (INF-02, 2025)
3	Limited contextual resources	Lack of locally compiled case materials	<i>"We often rely on general textbooks..."</i> (INF-03, 2025)

problems (Anazifa & Djukri, 2021; Suryawati et al., 2020; Yustina et al., 2020).

Empirically, the study found that teachers operationalized this approach through discussion-based learning, case analysis, and reflective presentation activities. Rather than functioning primarily as transmitters of knowledge, teachers positioned themselves as facilitators who guided students in examining local social issues from multiple perspectives. This instructional pattern reflects key characteristics of PBL, particularly the use of authentic social problems as triggers for collaborative inquiry and reflective reasoning (Hmelo-Silver, 2020). The alignment between lesson planning, classroom interaction, and assessment activities also indicates that contextualization was not incidental, but systematically integrated into the instructional process.

Beyond confirming existing theories, the findings suggest a procedural implementation pattern specific to the studied school context. The implementation process consistently followed four interconnected stages: (1) identification of local social issues relevant to students' experiences, (2) contextual integration of these issues into instructional materials and learning objectives, (3) collaborative discussion and reflective analysis in classroom activities, and (4) reflective evaluation through issue-based assignments and presentations. This pattern represents a context-based instructional mechanism derived from the empirical findings rather than a new theoretical model. The mechanism illustrates how social issue-based learning was practically operationalized within the institutional and socio-cultural conditions of SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak.

Institutional support under the Kurikulum Merdeka framework further strengthened this implementation by allowing teachers greater flexibility in contextualizing learning materials. Similar findings have been reported in studies highlighting the role of curriculum flexibility in supporting community-based and problem-oriented learning practices (Fitriani, 2021; Rahman, 2022). However, the findings also show that implementation remained constrained by limited instructional time, variation in students' analytical readiness, and limited availability of locally documented learning resources. These barriers indicate that the effectiveness of contextual and PBL-oriented instruction depends not only on pedagogical intention but also on structural and institutional support.

Previous studies similarly demonstrate that integrating contextual and community-based approaches into social studies learning strengthens students' engagement with real-world social problems and encourages collaborative inquiry (Phinla et al., 2025; Veliveronena et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the present study contributes additional empirical insight by showing how such approaches are adapted within a rural Indonesian junior secondary school context characterized by local environmental and socio-economic issues. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies primarily in providing

context-specific evidence regarding the practical enactment of social issue-based instruction rather than proposing universally generalizable pedagogical claims.

Implications for the Development of 21st-Century Competencies

The findings suggest that social issue-based learning contributed to the development of several competencies associated with 21st-century learning, particularly critical engagement, communication, collaboration, and social awareness. Students became more actively involved in classroom discussions when learning materials reflected issues familiar to their daily experiences. Observation data and interview responses indicated that students increasingly attempted to formulate arguments, compare perspectives, and propose responses to local social problems discussed during instruction. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that contextual and issue-oriented learning environments support higher-order thinking and participatory learning processes (Halimah et al., 2020; Sarigoz, 2023).

Rather than merely demonstrating the presence of critical thinking outcomes, the findings suggest a specific mechanism through which these competencies emerged. The classroom process showed that students' analytical engagement developed through repeated interaction with contextual social cases. The mechanism began when teachers introduced locally familiar issues, followed by collaborative exploration through discussion and case analysis, and culminated in reflective presentation activities where students articulated viewpoints and responded to alternative perspectives. Through this process, critical engagement was not developed through abstract theoretical instruction alone but through socially situated inquiry and dialogue.

This interpretation is also consistent with contextual learning theory and problem-based learning perspectives, which emphasize that meaningful understanding develops when learners actively interact with authentic problems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hmelo-Silver, 2020). In the present study, local social realities functioned as mediating tools that connected curriculum content with students' lived experiences. Consequently, classroom interaction became more participatory and reflective compared with conventional textbook-oriented instruction.

The study additionally highlights the importance of institutional support in sustaining pedagogical innovation. The Kurikulum Merdeka framework enabled teachers to adapt instructional materials more flexibly to local contexts, thereby supporting the integration of contextual issues into classroom learning. However, the findings also demonstrate that competency development remained influenced by contextual limitations, including instructional time constraints and disparities in students' analytical abilities. These factors indicate that the development of 21st-century competencies through social issue-based learning is gradual and context-dependent rather than uniformly achieved across all students.

Although the findings align with broader literature on civic literacy and contextual pedagogy (Levinson, 2021; Santisteban & Pages, 2020), the present study does not claim causal improvement in students' competencies. Instead, the findings provide qualitative evidence suggesting that issue-oriented and participatory learning activities encouraged greater analytical engagement, reflective interaction, and social awareness within this particular school context.

Contribution to Social Studies Education Practice

This study contributes to Social Studies (*Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* or IPS) pedagogy by providing context-specific empirical insights into how social issue-based learning is operationalized within a rural Indonesian junior secondary school. The empirical findings demonstrate that local socio-cultural realities

specifically environmental degradation, agrarian dynamics, and community diversity serve as vital instructional resources that directly anchor abstract curricular concepts into students' lived experiences. Structurally, the research identifies a clear, repeatable three-stage instructional pattern: the intentional selection of locally relevant social phenomena, the facilitation of collaborative inquiry through case analysis, and the execution of reflective classroom evaluations. From a practical standpoint, rather than claiming universal significance, these insights offer a transferable pedagogical roadmap for educators in similar peripheral regions, demonstrating how to actively align daily classroom practices with the flexible mandates of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* despite localized infrastructural constraints.

The findings also reinforce previous research showing that contextual and problem-oriented learning strategies enhance student engagement and social understanding (Yusnita et al., 2021). At the same time, the study confirms challenges identified in rural and peripheral educational settings, particularly limited instructional resources, uneven student readiness, and institutional constraints affecting the implementation of critical pedagogy (Jakubowski, 2023). These constraints suggest that successful implementation requires sustained institutional support, teacher adaptability, and the development of locally grounded learning resources. Importantly, the implications of this study should be interpreted within the limitations of a single-case qualitative design. The findings cannot be generalized broadly to all Social Studies learning contexts in Indonesia because the implementation process was strongly shaped by the socio-cultural conditions, institutional climate, and curriculum practices specific to SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak. Nevertheless, the study provides transferable practical insights for educators working in contexts with comparable socio-cultural characteristics, particularly schools seeking to strengthen contextual and participatory approaches in IPS instruction.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of social issue-based Social Studies learning at SMP Negeri 2 Sungai Melayu Rayak successfully integrated local social realities, such as environmental issues, agrarian conflict, and cultural diversity, into instructional planning and classroom

activities. Drawing strictly from participant perceptions and observed classroom interactions rather than measured statistical improvements in standardized critical thinking or civic competence, the qualitative evidence reveals that contextual discussion, case analysis, and participatory inquiry fostered heightened student engagement, reflective interaction, and active analytical participation during Social Studies lessons. These observed dynamics were further facilitated by the pedagogical flexibility afforded under the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework. Nonetheless, the localized execution encountered clear operational constraints, most notably compressed instructional time, variance in students' initial analytical readiness, and an acute shortage of locally documented, structured learning materials.

Practically, this study contributes context-specific empirical insights into how localized, issue-based IPS instruction can be operationalized within a junior secondary school environment. The qualitative data suggest that embedding immediate social problems into classroom discourse enhances the perceived relevance of instructional materials and supports collaborative environments that encourage subjective civic awareness and reflective engagement among participants. The study also highlights the value of alignment between teaching staff and school leadership in sustaining open, discussion-oriented practices. However, these pedagogical outcomes must be interpreted cautiously; because this research was conducted as a single-site qualitative case study, the findings reflect the distinct socio-cultural and institutional climate of one specific school and cannot be generalized as verified or universally scalable competency gains.

To address the inherent boundaries of this single-site investigation, future research should examine the operationalization of social issue-based Social Studies learning across multiple educational settings with diverse socio-cultural profiles to capture wider contextual variations. Future scholarship would also benefit from employing mixed-methods or longitudinal frameworks capable of systematically measuring and verifying actual, long-term improvements in students' critical thinking capacities and civic competencies. Lastly, subsequent studies should investigate the systematic curation and design of locally grounded instructional repositories and digital resources to ensure the sustainable and standardized delivery of contextualized Social Studies instruction.

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