

Analyzing Internal and External Factors Contributing to Students' Learning Difficulties in Elementary Social Studies

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Article Info

Keywords:

Elementary education; External factors; Internal factors; Learning difficulties; Social studies

ABSTRACT

Social Studies (IPS) is fundamentally designed to develop elementary students' social competencies; however, it is frequently perceived as a difficult and uninteresting subject. This study aims to identify and analyze the specific internal and external factors causing students' learning difficulties in IPS at SDN 09 Duhiadaa. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research data were systematically collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation study. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings revealed that learning difficulties stem from a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Internally, students exhibited a profound lack of interest, difficulty in grasping abstract social concepts, and poor memory retention. Externally, the difficulties were heavily exacerbated by the school environment—specifically the teacher's reliance on conventional lecturing methods and an extreme lack of instructional media. Furthermore, the un-fenced school environment bordered by rubber plantations served as a massive physical distraction. From the family environment, parents' low educational backgrounds and busy working schedules resulted in a total absence of academic guidance at home. In conclusion, overcoming IPS learning difficulties requires a synergistic approach involving pedagogical innovation by teachers and increased parental involvement to create a supportive learning ecosystem.

Informasi Artikel

Kata Kunci:

Pendidikan sekolah dasar; Faktor eksternal; Faktor internal; Kesulitan belajar; Ilmu pengetahuan sosial

ABSTRAK

Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS) pada dasarnya dirancang untuk mengembangkan kompetensi sosial siswa sekolah dasar; namun, mata pelajaran ini sering dianggap sulit dan tidak menarik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis faktor internal dan eksternal spesifik yang menyebabkan kesulitan belajar siswa pada mata pelajaran IPS di SDN 09 Duhiadaa. Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, data penelitian dikumpulkan secara sistematis melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan guru dan siswa, serta studi dokumentasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa kesulitan belajar bermula dari interaksi kompleks antara faktor internal dan eksternal. Secara internal, siswa menunjukkan kurangnya minat yang mendalam, kesulitan dalam memahami konsep sosial yang abstrak, dan daya ingat yang lemah. Secara eksternal, kesulitan tersebut sangat diperburuk oleh lingkungan sekolah—khususnya ketergantungan guru pada metode ceramah konvensional dan sangat kurangnya media pembelajaran. Selanjutnya, lingkungan sekolah yang tidak berpagar dan berbatasan dengan perkebunan karet menjadi gangguan fisik yang masif. Dari lingkungan keluarga, latar belakang pendidikan orang tua yang rendah dan jadwal kerja yang sibuk mengakibatkan tidak adanya bimbingan akademik di rumah. Kesimpulannya, mengatasi kesulitan belajar IPS membutuhkan pendekatan sinergis yang melibatkan inovasi pedagogis oleh guru dan peningkatan keterlibatan orang tua untuk menciptakan ekosistem pembelajaran yang mendukung.

Article History

Received : 08 23, 2025

Revised : 09 10, 2025

Accepted : 09 21, 2025

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1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human need essential for self-development, self-actualization, and navigating the complexities of social life [1]. Within the elementary school curriculum, Social Studies (IPS) holds a critical position. The primary objective of IPS education is to develop students' social communication skills, enabling them to grasp various phenomena occurring in their environment, internalize social values, and understand global interdependence [2], [3]. By integrating geography, history, sociology, and economics, IPS aims to mold students into socially aware and responsible citizens capable of critical thinking [4].

Despite its noble objectives, the practical implementation of IPS learning in elementary schools frequently encounters significant hurdles. Field realities indicate that a substantial number of students experience severe learning difficulties in this subject. Students often perceive IPS as an excessively broad, memory-intensive, and fundamentally boring subject [5], [6]. Consequently, their academic achievement and engagement levels drop significantly. Previous studies have mapped various learning difficulties, categorizing them generally into internal factors (arising from within the student) and external factors (arising from the environment) [7], [8]. However, a noticeable research gap exists regarding how these factors interact in specific, under-resourced rural environments.

For instance, preliminary observations at SDN 09 Duhiadaa revealed a unique set of challenges. Not only do the teachers struggle with a lack of innovative media, but the physical environment of the school itself—surrounded by community rubber plantations without a boundary fence—creates massive distractions during recess and learning hours. Furthermore, the socio-economic conditions of the parents heavily dictate the students' study habits at home [9]. Most existing literature focuses heavily on teacher pedagogical errors without adequately addressing these hyper-local environmental and familial intersections [10], [11]. Therefore, this study presents a novelty by comprehensively analyzing the specific internal and external factors contributing to students' learning difficulties in IPS at SDN 09 Duhiadaa. By dissecting these root causes, this research aims to provide an empirical foundation for educators and stakeholders to formulate targeted and effective pedagogical interventions.

2. Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to gain a deep, holistic understanding of the educational phenomenon occurring in its natural setting. Qualitative research allows the researcher to delve into the subjects' perspectives,

exploring the "why" and "how" behind the learning difficulties without manipulating the variables [12]. The research was conducted at SDN 09 Duhiadaa, involving sixth-grade students, class teachers, and selected parents as the primary informants.

Data collection was executed through three primary techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation study. Observations were conducted systematically during IPS classroom sessions and recess to monitor student engagement, teacher methodologies, and environmental distractions. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students to uncover their intrinsic learning hurdles, and with the teachers to identify pedagogical limitations. Documentation involved reviewing lesson plans (RPP), learning media availability, and students' academic records.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the researcher employed source triangulation by cross-checking the information provided by the students against the teachers' statements and the observational data [13]. The collected data were then analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction (filtering relevant statements regarding learning difficulties), data display (organizing the factors systematically), and conclusion drawing/verification (synthesizing the root causes of the difficulties) [14].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The rigorous analysis of the interview transcripts and observational data revealed that the learning difficulties experienced by the sixth-grade students in IPS are not monolithic. Instead, they are the result of a multifaceted breakdown in both the internal cognitive domain of the students and the external instructional ecosystem. The identified factors causing these learning difficulties are systematically categorized and summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Classification of Factors Contributing to IPS Learning Difficulties

Factor Category	Specific Indicators Identified in the Field
Internal Factors (Student-centric)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Low Interest: Students consider IPS materials (e.g., cultural diversity, natural resources) too broad and boring.- Cognitive Overload: Inability to grasp abstract social concepts.- Poor Retention: Students frequently forget materials from previous meetings.
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Conventional Pedagogy:

Factors (School Environment)	Teachers rely almost exclusively on monotonous lecturing and occasional question-and-answer sessions. - Lack of Media: Total absence of visual or interactive media to concretize abstract materials. - Physical Distractions: Un-fenced school boundaries leading to extreme physical exhaustion as students play in adjacent rubber plantations during recess.
External Factors (Home Environment)	- Lack of Supervision: Busy, working parents provide minimal to no supervision over children's study hours. - Low Parental Education: Parents lack the academic background to assist students with complex or updated IPS homework. - Generational Gap: Differences between the curriculum parents learned and the current curriculum cause confusion at home.

As shown in Table 1, internally, the students lack the foundational motivation to engage with the subject. Externally, the school fails to provide an engaging instructional bridge, while the home environment completely lacks the academic scaffolding necessary to reinforce the learning process.

3.2 Discussion

The empirical findings of this study robustly confirm that learning difficulties in IPS are deeply systemic. The internal factors—specifically the students' inability to comprehend abstract concepts and poor memory retention—are a direct psychological consequence of the external pedagogical failures [15]. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, elementary school students are predominantly in the concrete operational stage. They require tangible, visual representations to understand complex ideas [4]. When the teacher at SDN 09 Duhiadaa relies solely on conventional lecturing without any instructional media, the IPS material (such as global interdependence or historical timelines) remains abstract, leading directly to cognitive overload and the rapid forgetting of material observed in the students.

Furthermore, the physical environment of the school significantly exacerbates the learning difficulties. The observation that students play excessively in the adjacent rubber plantations due to a lack of boundary fences leads to severe physical fatigue. As Slameto (2015) notes, physiological conditions such as fatigue drastically reduce a student's concentration and cognitive processing capabilities during subsequent learning hours [11]. This physical exhaustion,

combined with a boring lecture, creates a perfect storm for absolute student disengagement.

Equally critical is the profound impact of the home environment. The family is the first and primary educational center for a child [9]. However, the data reveals a severe disconnect; parents' low educational backgrounds and economic constraints (working long hours) strip the students of essential academic reinforcement at home. When students face difficulties with IPS assignments, they have nowhere to turn for help, leading to frustration and a negative perception of the subject. This corroborates findings by Sari (2021), emphasizing that a lack of parental involvement directly correlates with lower academic resilience [12]. Ultimately, the teacher cannot fight this battle alone; the resolution of these difficulties requires teachers to aggressively adopt interactive media to bypass abstract confusion, while school administration must secure the school's physical environment and attempt to engage parents in the learning ecosystem.

4. Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive qualitative analysis, it is concluded that the learning difficulties in Social Studies (IPS) experienced by students at SDN 09 Duhiadaa are caused by a highly interconnected web of internal and external factors. Internally, students suffer from low intrinsic motivation, an inability to process abstract social concepts, and poor memory retention. These internal struggles are heavily triggered by external school factors, primarily the teacher's reliance on monotonous lecturing, a severe lack of engaging learning media, and physical exhaustion caused by a poorly regulated school environment bordered by rubber plantations. Furthermore, external family factors—such as parents' low educational backgrounds, busy work schedules, and subsequent lack of academic supervision—leave students without the necessary support system to overcome their learning hurdles at home. Addressing these profound difficulties requires immediate pedagogical innovation by educators to utilize concrete learning media, coupled with infrastructural improvements by the school management.

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