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The Implementation of Case Study Model in Social Studies Learning to Enhance Students' Conceptual Understanding at Public Junior High Schools in Makassar

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of the case study model in Social Studies learning at public junior high schools in Makassar, focusing on its impact on students' conceptual understanding. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with two teachers and 60 students, and analysis of student worksheets and reflective journals. The findings reveal that teachers applied the case study model by integrating real-life local issues, such as urban flooding and waste management, into classroom instruction. This approach successfully engaged students in active inquiry, group discussions, and reflective analysis. Students reported higher motivation and found Social Studies more relevant to their daily lives, while teachers observed improvements in students' analytical reasoning and ability to connect abstract concepts with real-world contexts. The analysis also showed that 38% of students achieved a high level of integrated conceptual understanding, moving beyond memorization to application and evaluation. Despite challenges related to time management and unequal group participation, the benefits of case-based learning outweighed its

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limitations. The study concludes that the case study model aligns with the Merdeka Belajar curriculum and constructivist principles, offering an effective strategy to foster deeper learning, civic awareness, and critical thinking in Social Studies classrooms in Indonesia.

Keywords: Case Study Model; Social Studies Learning; Conceptual Understanding

INTRODUCTION

Social Studies (IPS) in junior high schools plays a crucial role in equipping students with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to understand social realities and participate responsibly in society. However, the teaching of Social Studies in Indonesia, including in Makassar, often faces challenges such as the dominance of teacher-centered instruction, rote memorization, and limited use of innovative learning models. These conditions tend to hinder the development of students' higher-order thinking skills and conceptual understanding. As Putra and Subkhan (2020) note, Social Studies is often perceived as monotonous because it emphasizes memorization rather than active engagement, which decreases students' motivation and learning outcomes.

To address these issues, innovative approaches are needed to make Social Studies more interactive and meaningful. One promising model is the case study approach, which encourages students to examine real-life problems, analyze social phenomena, and connect abstract theories with practical experiences. This aligns with the view of Lyman and Moore (2021), who argue that case-based learning enhances critical thinking and promotes active student participation in the classroom. Through exposure to authentic cases, students are encouraged to develop analytical reasoning, problem-solving abilities, and reflective judgment, which are central to the objectives of Social Studies education.

Evidence from recent research shows that the case study model contributes positively to student learning outcomes across various disciplines. For instance, Herreid and Schiller (2020) found that case-based instruction increases students' engagement and deepens their conceptual understanding. Similarly, in the Indonesian context, Sutarto and Sari (2022) reported that case-based learning improves collaboration and critical discussion among junior high school students. These findings are consistent with the emphasis of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, which prioritizes student-centered learning and the development of 21st-century competencies, such as creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

Makassar, as one of the largest cities in Eastern Indonesia, provides a unique setting for contextualized Social Studies instruction. The city's socio-cultural diversity, urban development,

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and economic dynamics offer rich cases that can be integrated into classroom learning. According to Nurhayati (2021), contextualized case studies in urban schools help students relate concepts to their lived experiences, making the learning process more relevant and meaningful. By situating Social Studies instruction in the real-life issues of Makassar communities, teachers can enhance students' conceptual understanding and promote civic awareness.

Given these considerations, this study seeks to examine the implementation of the case study model in Social Studies learning at public junior high schools in Makassar, with a focus on enhancing students' conceptual understanding. Specifically, it investigates how teachers design and deliver case-based instruction, what challenges they encounter, and how students respond to this model. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to Social Studies pedagogy in Indonesia. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue, case study research not only provides empirical insights but also helps educators refine teaching strategies that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Studies Education and Conceptual Understanding

Social Studies (IPS) is designed to help students understand human interactions, social institutions, and cultural dynamics in society. It is not limited to transferring factual knowledge but also aims to develop critical thinking, civic responsibility, and conceptual understanding. Conceptual understanding is crucial because it enables students to integrate facts, principles, and generalizations into a meaningful framework that can be applied in real-life situations (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2019). Without adequate conceptual understanding, Social Studies may become fragmented, leading to superficial memorization instead of deep learning.

In the Indonesian context, conceptual understanding in Social Studies is emphasized in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which encourages students to connect abstract ideas with real-world contexts. According to Fadillah and Prasetyo (2021), many students still struggle to grasp the core concepts of Social Studies because instruction tends to rely on textbooks and teacher explanations without sufficient interactive learning. This lack of conceptual depth leads to disengagement and difficulty in applying knowledge beyond the classroom. Thus, improving conceptual understanding through innovative teaching models becomes essential.

Several studies highlight that conceptual understanding in Social Studies can be strengthened through approaches that engage students in active inquiry and contextual problem-solving. For example, Yuliani and Wibowo (2022) demonstrated that integrating community issues

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into Social Studies lessons improved students' ability to interpret and analyze social phenomena. Similarly, Alsubaie (2020) emphasized that conceptual understanding develops when students are encouraged to link classroom knowledge with their lived experiences. These findings suggest that pedagogical strategies emphasizing context, participation, and analysis are key to meaningful Social Studies learning.

Case Study Model in Social Studies Learning

The case study model is widely recognized as an effective teaching strategy that exposes students to real-world problems and encourages them to analyze, discuss, and propose solutions. According to Yin (2018), a case study approach allows learners to investigate complex phenomena within authentic contexts, making abstract concepts more concrete. In Social Studies, this model provides opportunities for students to engage with social, economic, and cultural issues, thereby enhancing both their conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills.

Recent studies affirm the potential of case study pedagogy in secondary education. Lyman and Moore (2021) argue that the model fosters critical inquiry and encourages students to reflect on diverse perspectives, while also promoting collaboration and problem-solving. In Indonesia, Sutarto and Sari (2022) reported that using case-based learning in junior high schools improved student engagement, discussion quality, and learning outcomes in Social Studies. Moreover, case study pedagogy is consistent with 21st-century skills frameworks that highlight creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking as essential learning outcomes (Trilling & Fadel, 2020).

The adoption of case study learning is also supported by the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative, which emphasizes contextualized and student-centered instruction. Nurhayati (2021) found that integrating local issues from Makassar into case-based Social Studies lessons enhanced students' ability to connect theoretical knowledge with their daily lives. Furthermore, international studies have shown that case study models are particularly effective in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby making learning more relevant (Herreid & Schiller, 2020). Collectively, these findings indicate that case study pedagogy can serve as a powerful tool for enhancing conceptual understanding in Social Studies education, especially within diverse urban contexts such as Makassar.

Method

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METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the implementation of the case study model in Social Studies learning at public junior high schools in Makassar. The case study approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of teaching practices within their real-life educational contexts (Yin, 2018). By focusing on selected classrooms, the study examined how teachers integrate case study pedagogy, how students engage with the learning process, and what challenges and opportunities emerge.

Participants

The participants of this study included two Social Studies teachers and 60 students from Grade VIII at two public junior high schools in Makassar. The schools were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) the schools had implemented innovative teaching models, (2) the teachers had at least five years of teaching experience, and (3) the willingness of both schools to participate in the study. The students were selected as intact classes to maintain the natural classroom setting. Teachers and students were assured that participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Instruments

Data were collected using three primary instruments: (1) classroom observation protocols to document teaching practices and student participation, (2) semi-structured interview guides for teachers and selected students to explore perceptions of the case study model, and (3) student worksheets and reflective journals as supporting documents to assess conceptual understanding. The instruments were adapted from validated tools in previous Social Studies pedagogy research (Lyman & Moore, 2021; Sutarto & Sari, 2022) and reviewed by two experts in Social Studies education for content validity.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection took place over six weeks in the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. Observations were conducted in four classroom sessions per school, focusing on how the case study model was implemented during Social Studies lessons. Semi-structured interviews with teachers were carried out after the teaching sessions, while student interviews were conducted in focus groups of 5–6 students. Additionally, students' written work, including

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case analyses and reflective journals, were collected to triangulate the findings. Field notes and audio recordings were used to ensure accuracy in capturing classroom interactions and interview responses.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2019) interactive model, which consists of three steps: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification. Observation notes, interview transcripts, and student documents were coded thematically using NVivo software. Codes were developed both deductively, based on the research questions, and inductively, based on emerging themes from the data. The analysis focused on three key areas: (1) the strategies used by teachers to implement the case study model, (2) students' responses and engagement, and (3) the influence of the model on students' conceptual understanding.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study on the implementation of the case study model in Social Studies (IPS) at public junior high schools in Makassar. The results are organized into three themes: (1) implementation strategies used by teachers, (2) students' responses and engagement, and (3) the impact on students' conceptual understanding.

Implementation Strategies in the Classroom

Classroom observations revealed that teachers applied the case study model through several stages: presenting real-life cases, facilitating group discussions, guiding analysis, and concluding with reflective synthesis. For example, one teacher introduced a case about urban flooding in Makassar, encouraging students to identify causes, consequences, and possible solutions. This contextual approach provided meaningful connections between Social Studies concepts (such as human-environment interaction) and students' lived experiences.

Teachers emphasized open-ended questioning and encouraged collaborative group work. However, differences were observed in facilitation styles: while one teacher allowed more student autonomy in problem-solving, another relied heavily on structured worksheets. Interviews indicated that teachers faced challenges in time management and in selecting appropriate cases that matched curriculum objectives.

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Table 1. Implementation of Case Study Model in Observed Classrooms

Dimension of Implementation	Teacher A (School 1)	Teacher B (School 2)
Case selection	Local issues (urban flooding, waste management)	National issues (corruption, cultural diversity)
Learning activities	Group analysis, role play, presentation	Worksheet analysis, guided discussion
Teacher role	Facilitator, motivator	Guide, evaluator
Challenges reported	Limited time, varied student participation	Selecting cases, balancing discussion and theory

Students' Responses and Engagement

Students showed positive responses toward case study–based Social Studies learning. Many expressed that the lessons felt more relevant and engaging compared to conventional lecture methods. Focus group discussions revealed that students particularly enjoyed group debates and presentations, as these allowed them to share opinions and learn from peers.

Nevertheless, challenges emerged in balancing participation within groups: some students dominated discussions, while others remained passive. Teachers attempted to address this by assigning rotating roles (e.g., note-taker, presenter, moderator). Despite these challenges, observation notes highlighted increased student enthusiasm, with more students asking questions and making connections between the cases and textbook materials.

Table 2. Students' Responses to Case Study Learning (N = 60)

Response Indicator	Percentage of Students
Reported higher engagement in learning	78%
Felt Social Studies became more relevant	72%
Improved confidence in expressing opinions	65%
Preferred case study to lecture method	81%
Reported difficulties in group dynamics	28%

Impact on Students' Conceptual Understanding

Analysis of student worksheets and reflective journals showed significant improvements in conceptual understanding. Students were able to move beyond memorizing definitions to

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applying concepts in explaining real-world phenomena. For example, in analyzing the case of waste management in Makassar, students correctly identified the roles of community participation, government policy, and environmental awareness, demonstrating integration of multiple Social Studies concepts. Interviews with teachers confirmed these improvements, as students demonstrated stronger analytical reasoning in classroom discussions and written assessments. Teachers also noted that students became more capable of linking local issues with broader national and global contexts, a key indicator of conceptual understanding.

Table 3. Levels of Students' Conceptual Understanding
(Based on Worksheet Analysis, N = 60)

Level of Understanding	Indicators	Percentage of Students
Low (surface-level recall)	Can define concepts but fail to apply them	20%
Moderate (partial conceptual connections)	Can apply concepts in limited contexts	42%
High (integrated conceptual understanding)	Can analyze, compare, and apply in new cases	38%

The findings collectively indicate that the case study model enhanced both student engagement and conceptual understanding in Social Studies classrooms. While challenges in time management and group dynamics remained, the overall benefits outweighed the limitations. The model encouraged students to think critically, apply concepts to real-world issues, and engage in collaborative problem-solving.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the case study model significantly improved student engagement and conceptual understanding in Social Studies learning at junior high schools in Makassar. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the potential of case-based learning to foster active participation and critical thinking (Herreid & Schiller, 2020; Lyman & Moore, 2021). The observed shift from teacher-centered lecturing to student-centered discussions demonstrates how the case study model can transform classroom dynamics, making learning more interactive and meaningful. Students' ability to connect Social Studies concepts with real-world issues such

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as urban flooding and waste management illustrates the practical relevance of this pedagogical approach.

The positive student responses further support the view that case study pedagogy increases motivation and interest in Social Studies. As Trilling and Fadel (2020) argue, 21st-century learners require opportunities to engage in authentic problem-solving that reflects real-life complexity. In this study, students expressed that Social Studies felt more relevant when linked to local issues in Makassar, which resonates with Nurhayati's (2021) findings on the importance of contextual learning. By situating abstract concepts within students' lived experiences, teachers succeeded in bridging the gap between theory and practice, thereby enhancing conceptual understanding.

The results also highlight that conceptual understanding improved when students engaged in collaborative analysis of social issues. This finding is consistent with Anderson and Krathwohl's (2019) taxonomy, which emphasizes the need for higher-order thinking processes such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Through group discussions and debates, students moved beyond rote memorization and began to construct integrated conceptual frameworks. These results echo the conclusions of Yuliani and Wibowo (2022), who found that community-based Social Studies learning enhanced students' ability to interpret social phenomena critically.

Nevertheless, challenges in implementing the case study model were evident, particularly in time management and group dynamics. Teachers reported difficulties in covering the required curriculum within limited classroom hours while also facilitating in-depth discussions. This mirrors findings from Sutarto and Sari (2022), who noted that case-based learning requires careful balancing between content coverage and active learning. Furthermore, group participation varied, with some students dominating discussions while others remained passive. Similar concerns have been documented in collaborative learning research, where equitable participation remains a persistent issue (Gillies, 2019).

From a policy perspective, the results reinforce the relevance of the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative, which emphasizes student-centered, contextualized, and competency-based learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). The case study model directly supports these goals by fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving. In the specific context of Makassar, the city's socio-cultural diversity and urban challenges provide a rich resource for case materials. Integrating local issues not only deepens conceptual understanding but also nurtures students' civic responsibility, as they become more aware of the societal problems around them (Alsubaie, 2020).

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Collectively, these findings suggest that the case study model offers both theoretical and practical contributions to Social Studies pedagogy in Indonesia. Theoretically, it supports constructivist learning principles that emphasize active meaning-making and contextual application (Yin, 2018). Practically, it provides teachers with a strategy to engage students in deeper learning while aligning with national curriculum reforms. However, sustaining its effectiveness requires ongoing teacher training, curriculum flexibility, and institutional support. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, educational innovations thrive when they are systematically supported, rather than implemented sporadically. Thus, future efforts should focus on scaling up case study pedagogy while addressing its challenges to maximize its impact on students' conceptual and civic development.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the case study model in Social Studies learning at public junior high schools in Makassar provides significant benefits in enhancing students' conceptual understanding, classroom engagement, and critical thinking skills. By presenting real-life cases such as urban flooding and waste management, teachers were able to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and students' lived experiences, thereby transforming learning from rote memorization into active inquiry and reflection. Students responded positively to this approach, reporting higher motivation, greater confidence in expressing opinions, and stronger connections between Social Studies lessons and their daily lives. Although challenges such as limited instructional time and uneven group participation persisted, the advantages of case-based pedagogy outweighed these obstacles. Moreover, the study confirms that the case study model is consistent with the principles of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and the broader goals of 21st-century education, which emphasize contextual, student-centered, and competency-based learning. Therefore, the integration of case study pedagogy not only strengthens theoretical and conceptual understanding but also nurtures civic responsibility and collaborative problem-solving, offering valuable insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to improve the quality and relevance of Social Studies education in Indonesia.

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