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Internalizing students' social awareness through social studies learning and madrasah culture: A qualitative study at MI Al Fithrah Surabaya

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Abstract

Students' social awareness is central to character formation in Islamic elementary education, yet its internalization through social studies learning remains underexplored. This study analyzed teacher strategies for internalizing students' social awareness through social studies learning at MI Al Fithrah Surabaya. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with one teacher and four sixth-grade students, and documentation of learning activities. The findings show that students' social awareness emerged in four dimensions: cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty, but these values were not consistently enacted in classroom interaction. The teacher internalized social awareness through heterogeneous group discussion, contextual social studies materials, madrasah cultural habituation, and personal-reflective feedback. However, the process was constrained by the absence of an operational affective assessment rubric, digital media influence, student diversity, and limited instructional time. The study contributes to social studies and Islamic elementary pedagogy by showing that madrasah culture can strengthen value internalization when connected with structured classroom practice and formative affective assessment.

Keywords: affective assessment; character education; Islamic elementary school; madrasah culture; social awareness; social studies learning

Abstrak

Kesadaran sosial siswa merupakan aspek penting dalam pembentukan karakter pada pendidikan dasar Islam, tetapi proses internalisasinya melalui pembelajaran IPS masih belum banyak dikaji secara mendalam. Penelitian ini menganalisis strategi guru dalam menginternalisasikan kesadaran sosial siswa melalui pembelajaran IPS di MI Al Fithrah Surabaya. Dengan desain kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan satu guru dan empat siswa kelas VI, serta dokumentasi kegiatan pembelajaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kesadaran sosial siswa muncul dalam empat dimensi, yaitu kerja sama, empati, tanggung jawab, dan kejujuran, tetapi nilai-nilai tersebut belum konsisten diwujudkan dalam interaksi kelas. Guru menginternalisasikan kesadaran sosial melalui diskusi kelompok heterogen, materi IPS kontekstual, pembiasaan budaya madrasah, dan umpan balik personal-reflektif. Namun, proses tersebut terkendala oleh belum adanya rubrik penilaian afektif yang operasional, pengaruh media digital, keragaman karakter siswa, dan keterbatasan waktu pembelajaran. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pedagogi IPS dan pendidikan dasar Islam dengan menegaskan bahwa budaya madrasah dapat memperkuat internalisasi nilai apabila dihubungkan dengan praktik kelas yang terstruktur dan penilaian afektif formatif.

Kata kunci: budaya madrasah; kesadaran sosial; madrasah ibtidaiyah; pembelajaran IPS; pendidikan karakter; penilaian afektif

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1. Introduction

Social awareness has become an essential educational concern because schools are increasingly expected to prepare children not only to master academic content but also to participate responsibly in diverse social life. In elementary education, social awareness refers to students' ability to understand others' feelings, respect differences, cooperate with peers, act honestly, and take responsibility for shared tasks. These capacities are central to social-emotional competence and moral development, as they shape how children build relationships, manage peer interaction, and respond to social problems in everyday contexts (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019). A large body of evidence shows that school-based social and emotional learning contributes to students' attitudes, prosocial behavior, peer relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017). From a developmental perspective, learning is inherently social and emotional; children's cognitive growth, motivation, and moral reasoning are shaped through interaction, relationships, and culturally situated experiences (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, strengthening social awareness in elementary classrooms is not an additional moral agenda separated from academic learning, but a core part of meaningful education that connects knowledge, emotion, moral judgment, and social action.

Recent developments in education have shifted attention from content transmission toward holistic, contextual, and values-oriented learning. Social and emotional learning has moved beyond individual emotion regulation to include equity, identity, cultural responsiveness, and students' participation in caring communities (Jagers et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019). In Indonesia, this trend is reinforced by character education, the Merdeka Curriculum, and the emphasis on the Pancasila Student Profile, which expects students to demonstrate faith and noble character, mutual cooperation, global diversity, critical reasoning, independence, and creativity. These developments are highly relevant to social studies education because social studies is designed to connect learners with social realities, community life, civic responsibility, and moral decision-making. Studies on elementary social studies have shown that character values can be integrated through discussion, contextual cases, collaborative tasks, reflective learning, and school culture (Kanji et al., 2020; Lasmawan, 2019; Melpi et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2021; Suwela Antara et al., 2024). In Islamic elementary schools, the development of social awareness also intersects with religious habituation, daily moral routines, and madrasah culture, where social care, honesty, respect, and responsibility are framed not only as civic virtues but also as expressions of Islamic moral conduct (Syaharuddin et al., 2025; Syarnubi et al., 2021).

Existing research provides several important insights into the relationship between social studies learning, character education, and students' social behavior. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that structured social-emotional learning programs are associated with improvements in students' social skills, attitudes, behavior, school climate, and long-term developmental outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). In the Indonesian context, studies have emphasized that social studies learning can support character formation by embedding values such as cooperation, tolerance, responsibility, and social care into classroom activities (Gunawan et al., 2020; Kanji et al., 2020; Putra et al., 2021; Sari Devi et al., 2025). Other studies have shown that empathy is closely related to prosocial behavior among elementary students and that learning models such as problem-based, project-based, and multicultural learning can strengthen prosocial tendencies when students are exposed to collaborative and socially meaningful tasks (Mulyawati et al., 2022; Prastyo et al., 2024). Research on moral development also indicates that moral knowing does not automatically become moral action; students may understand the value of honesty or cooperation, yet still fail to act consistently when peer pressure, fear, or classroom norms intervene (Lickona, 1991; Purwati et al., 2024). These findings

confirm the importance of studying not only what values are taught, but how values are internalized through classroom interaction.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain in the literature. First, many studies discuss character education in social studies at a general level, but fewer examine how social awareness is manifested in specific classroom behaviors such as unequal participation in group work, reluctance to help peers, weak responsibility, or silence toward dishonesty. Second, previous research often treats school culture as a broad supporting factor, while the specific mechanism through which madrasah culture strengthens social awareness in social studies learning remains insufficiently explored. Third, studies on Islamic schools frequently emphasize religious character, discipline, or general moral habituation, but they rarely analyze how social studies instruction and Islamic cultural routines operate together as a pedagogical system for internalizing social awareness (Arif et al., 2022; Augita & Arif, 2022; Pariyatin, 2022; Syarnubi et al., 2021). Fourth, the gap between moral knowledge and moral action among elementary students has not been adequately examined in the context of peer interaction during social studies learning. This gap is important because students may know that helping, cooperating, or being honest is good, but their actual behavior can still be shaped by peer norms, dependence on active classmates, fear of being judged, and limited affective assessment practices.

The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to conceptualize the internalization of students' social awareness through the intersection of social studies learning and madrasah culture. Rather than viewing social studies merely as a content-based subject or madrasah culture merely as a background condition, this study positions both as interconnected pedagogical spaces. Social studies provides contextual social problems, group interaction, discussion, and reflection, while madrasah culture provides moral language, religious habituation, spiritual motivation, and daily value reinforcement. This integration enables the study to show how cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty are introduced, practiced, monitored, and reinforced in a real classroom setting. The article also contributes by foregrounding the transitional nature of students' social awareness: students may understand social values cognitively, but their behavior remains inconsistent without repeated guidance, peer accountability, teacher feedback, and structured affective assessment. By focusing on sixth-grade students at MI Al Fithrah Surabaya, the study offers a situated account of how Islamic elementary education can transform social studies learning into a medium for value internalization, while also revealing the constraints that limit this process, including digital media influence, heterogeneous student character, limited instructional time, and the absence of an operational rubric for assessing social attitudes.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze teacher strategies for internalizing students' social awareness through social studies learning at MI Al Fithrah Surabaya. Specifically, the study focuses on three aspects: first, the forms of students' social awareness in social studies learning, particularly cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty; second, the teacher's strategies for integrating social studies instruction with madrasah culture through heterogeneous group discussion, contextual learning, religious habituation, and personal reflection; and third, the constraints and implications for strengthening social awareness through social studies learning in Islamic elementary education. By addressing these focuses, the study is expected to provide empirical and conceptual contributions to the literature on social studies education, character education, and Islamic elementary pedagogy. Practically, the findings are expected to inform teachers about how to design learning experiences that do not merely introduce social values verbally, but also create structured opportunities for students to practice, reflect on, and internalize those values in classroom life.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design, Site, and Participants

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine how teachers internalize students' social awareness through social studies learning in an Islamic elementary school context. A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because the study aimed to present a close, contextual, and data-grounded account of classroom processes, teacher strategies, student responses, and school-based value practices without transforming the phenomenon into abstract theory or statistical generalization. Qualitative description is appropriate when researchers seek to provide a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of participants and observed settings (Sandelowski, 2000; Kim et al., 2017). This design also aligns with the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research, which emphasize clarity of research purpose, context, sampling, data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness (O'Brien et al., 2014).

The study was conducted at MI Al Fithrah Surabaya, an Islamic elementary school located in Kedinding Lor, Kenjeran, Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively because the school integrates Islamic values into classroom learning and daily madrasah routines. This context was relevant to the research purpose because the study did not only examine social studies learning as a curricular subject, but also investigated how madrasah culture supported the internalization of cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty. The classroom setting was Grade VI social studies learning, where students were considered developmentally capable of participating in group discussion, reflecting on social behavior, and explaining their experiences in peer interaction.

Participants consisted of one Grade VI teacher who taught social studies and four Grade VI students. Purposive sampling was used because qualitative studies require participants who are directly involved in the phenomenon and able to provide information-rich data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The teacher was selected because of direct responsibility for designing and implementing social studies learning. The four students were selected to represent variation in classroom participation, social responsiveness, and peer interaction. In research involving elementary-aged children, participant selection and interview procedures need to consider children's capacity, comfort, assent, and power relations with adults (Do Carmo et al., 2024). For this reason, student participation was conducted using age-appropriate language, non-threatening questions, and attention to students' willingness to respond.

Table 1. Research focus, data sources, and evidence used in the study

Research focus	Data sources	Evidence presented in the results
Forms of students' social awareness in social studies learning	Observation of group work, student interviews, teacher interview	Table of social awareness dimensions and interview excerpts from students and teacher
Teacher strategies for integrating social studies with madrasah culture	Teacher interview, classroom observation, learning documentation	Strategy table, classroom documentation figure, and observation-based description
Constraints and implications for strengthening social awareness	Teacher interview, observation notes, document review	Constraint table and teacher interview excerpt on affective assessment

2.2 Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

Data were collected through three techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and document review. The use of multiple sources was intended to strengthen the credibility of findings through triangulation, because qualitative inquiry benefits from comparing interview accounts, observed behavior, and documentary evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The interview protocol was developed around the three research focuses: students' social awareness, teacher strategies,

and constraints in strengthening social awareness. For the teacher, the interview explored classroom conditions, instructional strategies, use of madrasah culture, assessment practices, and obstacles. For students, the questions explored experiences of group work, helping friends, honesty, responsibility, and responses to peers' difficulties.

Classroom observation was conducted during two social studies learning meetings. The observation focused on student participation during group work, peer assistance, responsibility in completing tasks, teacher guidance, use of contextual examples, and integration of moral or religious messages. Field notes were organized around four dimensions of social awareness: cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty. Although two classroom observations provided direct evidence of interaction, the study acknowledges that the short observation period limits the breadth of behavioral patterns captured. Therefore, observation data were used together with interview and documentation data rather than treated as the sole basis for interpretation.

Document review included teacher learning materials, classroom documentation, observation notes, interview transcripts, and photographs of learning activities. The photographs were not treated as primary evidence of students' attitudes, but as visual documentation of the learning setting, group arrangement, and teacher-guided interaction. In reporting visual data involving children, ethical care is necessary to protect identity and privacy. Accordingly, any photographs used for publication should be displayed only with institutional permission, parental consent where required, and visual anonymization of students' faces.

Table 2. Participants and data contributions

Participant code	Role	Selection rationale	Main data contribution
G1	Grade VI teacher	Taught social studies and understood classroom dynamics	Strategies, constraints, assessment practices, and madrasah culture integration
S1	Student	Demonstrated relatively positive peer-support behavior	Experience of helping peers during group learning
S2	Student	Represented general classroom participation	Experience of cooperation and group responsibility
S3	Student	Showed lower empathic response in group work	Individualistic response toward peers' learning difficulties
S4	Student	Provided information about honesty and peer norms	Response to cheating and fear of peer judgment

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative process consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by thematic coding. The analysis began by reading interview transcripts and observation notes repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Initial codes were then generated based on recurring meanings related to cooperation, empathy, responsibility, honesty, teacher strategies, madrasah culture, and constraints. The coding process was both deductive and inductive: deductive because it was guided by the research focuses, and inductive because additional meanings emerged from participants' accounts and classroom observation. Thematic analysis requires transparent movement from familiarization, coding, theme construction, review, and reporting to ensure analytic trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017).

After initial coding, related codes were grouped into categories. For example, "waiting for smart peers," "one student completes the task," and "silent members in group work" were grouped under unequal cooperation. "Helping friends," "ignoring confused peers," and "teacher reminder to work

together” were grouped under empathic responsiveness. Teacher strategies were categorized into heterogeneous group discussion, contextual social studies materials, madrasah cultural habituation, and personal-reflective feedback. Constraints were categorized into affective assessment limitations, digital media influence, student diversity, and limited instructional time. These categories were then organized into the three results subsections so that the findings remained aligned with the research purpose.

Data display was used to improve analytic clarity. Tables were constructed to connect themes, observed patterns, interview evidence, and interpretations. Interview excerpts were selected because they represented important contrasts among participants, such as the difference between students who helped peers and those who focused only on individual work. Visual documentation was used to support the description of group discussion and teacher monitoring. This analytic strategy reflects the principle that qualitative reporting should provide enough evidence for readers to judge the coherence between data, interpretation, and claims (Tracy, 2010; O’Brien et al., 2014).

2.4 Trustworthiness, Reflexivity, and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentation; member checking with informants; and the use of direct excerpts in the results. Transferability was supported by providing a thick description of the school context, participants, classroom setting, and learning activities so that readers can assess the relevance of the findings to similar Islamic elementary school contexts. Dependability was enhanced through systematic documentation of research procedures, coding decisions, and data displays. Confirmability was supported by linking interpretations to interview excerpts, observation notes, and documented classroom practices (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morse, 2015).

Researcher reflexivity was also considered because qualitative interpretation is shaped by the researcher’s position, assumptions, and interaction with the field. Reflexivity requires researchers to examine how their background and interpretive choices influence data collection and analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). In this study, reflexive notes were used to distinguish between participants’ statements, observed classroom behavior, and researcher interpretation. Ethical considerations were applied by protecting participants’ identities through coding, avoiding the use of real student names, and presenting student interview excerpts without identifying details. Because the study involved children, participation had to be voluntary, respectful, and sensitive to students’ comfort. The reporting of photographs should follow child-protection principles by obtaining permission and anonymizing visual identity before publication.

3. Results

This section presents the findings according to the three research focuses: students’ forms of social awareness in social studies learning, teacher strategies for integrating social studies with madrasah culture, and constraints with implications for strengthening social awareness in Islamic elementary education. To avoid presenting findings as unsupported description, each subsection is accompanied by evidence from classroom observation, interview excerpts, tables, or visual documentation. The evidence shows that social awareness was not yet consistently internalized by all students; rather, it appeared as a developing disposition shaped by peer interaction, teacher guidance, classroom tasks, and daily value-based routines in the madrasah.

3.1 Forms of Students' Social Awareness in Social Studies Learning

The first finding shows that students' social awareness appeared in four main dimensions: cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty. These dimensions were visible during group-based social studies activities, especially when students were asked to discuss social issues, complete tasks collaboratively, and respond to peers who experienced difficulty. However, the manifestation of these dimensions was uneven. Some students actively participated, helped peers, and accepted group responsibility, while others remained passive, worked individually, or depended on more capable classmates.

Table 3. Evidence of students' social awareness in social studies learning

Dimension	Observed pattern	Supporting evidence	Analytical meaning
Cooperation	Participation in groups was unequal	Observation: only several students initiated discussion and completed group answers	Cooperation was understood as a rule but not yet practiced as shared responsibility
Empathy	Peer assistance was inconsistent	Interview S3 and S1 showed different responses to friends who did not understand the task	Empathy had developed in some students but was not yet stable across the class
Responsibility	Active students carried most group tasks	Teacher reported that "the active students are usually the same ones"	Responsibility was concentrated among selected students
Honesty	Students recognized dishonest behavior but were reluctant to respond	Interview S4 showed fear of being labeled as reporting a friend	Moral knowledge had not fully become moral action

The observation data in Table 3 indicate that cooperation was the most visible but also the most unequal form of social awareness. In several groups, one or two students became task leaders, while other members waited for instructions or answers. The teacher repeatedly reminded students that group work required shared participation. This pattern demonstrates that social studies learning had created opportunities for cooperation, but students still needed structured guidance to transform cooperation into a consistent classroom habit.

Interview excerpt 1 – Teacher G1

"The children actually know that helping friends is important. But when they work in groups, the active students are usually the same ones. The others stay silent and wait for answers from their smarter friends. I have to remind them frequently; otherwise, the task is completed by only one student."

Empathy was also visible but unstable. Some students helped classmates by explaining instructions or repeating the teacher's explanation in simpler language. However, others focused only on completing their own work. This difference was clearly reflected in the contrast between Student S3 and Student S1.

Interview excerpt 2 – Student S3

"If a friend does not understand, I think it is their own matter with the teacher. I focus on finishing my own work first."

Interview excerpt 3 – Student S1

“If someone in my group is confused, I explain it slowly. The teacher said that group work means working together, not only letting the smart students do the work.”

Honesty emerged as a more complex dimension because students could identify dishonest behavior but did not always act upon that awareness. A student reported choosing silence when seeing a peer cheat because of fear of social judgment from classmates. This finding shows that the challenge was not only whether students understood right and wrong, but whether they had the social courage to respond appropriately within peer relationships.

Interview excerpt 4 – Student S4

“Sometimes a friend cheats during a test. I know it, but I stay silent because I am afraid of being called someone who reports others. Even though I know it is wrong.”

3.2 Teacher Strategies for Integrating Social Studies Learning with Madrasah Culture

The second finding shows that the teacher used four interconnected strategies to internalize social awareness: heterogeneous group discussion, contextualization of social studies materials, habituation through madrasah culture, and personal-reflective feedback. These strategies were not implemented as isolated techniques. They were combined in classroom instruction and reinforced through daily religious and social routines in the madrasah.

Table 4. Teacher strategies and supporting evidence

Strategy	Classroom implementation	Evidence used in the study	Expected social value
Heterogeneous group discussion	Students with different abilities and participation levels were placed in the same group	Classroom observation and Figure 1, Panel B	Cooperation, tolerance, shared responsibility
Contextual social studies materials	The teacher used social cases, videos, and examples from students’ daily life	Observation notes and teacher explanation	Empathy and social sensitivity
Madrasah cultural habituation	Prayer, greetings, morning reflection, advice, and mutual reminders were linked to social behavior	Documentation and teacher interview	Care, honesty, respect, religiously grounded responsibility
Personal-reflective feedback	The teacher gave individual reminders and asked students to reflect on their behavior	Observation notes and interview data	Self-awareness and gradual behavioral improvement

Heterogeneous group discussion was used to create social contact among students with different characteristics. The teacher arranged groups by combining active, quiet, high-achieving, and less confident students. This arrangement was intended to prevent students from working only with close friends and to train them to listen to different opinions. The visual documentation of classroom activities supports this finding.

Contextualization of social studies materials was another important strategy. The teacher connected IPS content with cases that students could recognize in their daily lives, such as helping a friend, respecting different opinions, being honest during assignments, and taking responsibility in group activities. When learning materials were linked to familiar situations, students responded more easily because they could relate the lesson to their own experiences.

Madrasah culture functioned as a value-based reinforcement mechanism. The teacher did not present social awareness only as a civic value, but also connected it with Islamic moral practice. Daily routines such as collective prayer, greetings, morning reflection, and mutual reminders were used to strengthen the message that helping others, being honest, and respecting friends are part of good character. In classroom interaction, the teacher often reminded students that helping a friend was not merely a learning rule but also an expression of moral responsibility.



Figure 1. Students working in heterogeneous discussion groups

Personal-reflective feedback was used when students showed passive, individualistic, or dishonest behavior. Instead of relying only on public correction, the teacher approached students individually, used gentle advice, and asked them to reflect on what they had done. The teacher also gave small behavioral targets, such as inviting one quiet student to speak, asking active students to involve peers, or reminding groups to distribute tasks more fairly. Observation notes showed that this strategy helped several students participate without feeling embarrassed in front of classmates.

3.3 Constraints and Implications for Strengthening Social Awareness in Islamic Elementary Education

The third finding concerns the constraints that limited the internalization of social awareness. The most visible constraint was the absence of an operational affective assessment rubric. The teacher relied mainly on general classroom observation to judge students' attitudes. As a result, changes in empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and honesty were not recorded systematically. This limitation made it difficult to identify which students needed additional support and which strategies had produced visible improvement.

Table 5. Constraints and Instructional Implications

Constraint	Evidence from data	Instructional implication
No operational affective rubric	Teacher observation of attitudes was still general and unsystematic	The teacher needs indicators and descriptors for empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and honesty
Influence of digital media	Teacher reported that students were exposed to conflict, mockery, and insensitive behavior online	Social studies learning needs guided media reflection and digital citizenship discussion
Diversity of student character	Students differed in confidence, empathy, participation, and willingness to cooperate	Value-based instruction needs differentiated guidance and repeated reinforcement

Limited IPS learning time	Reflection and affective reinforcement were often inserted between content delivery	Social awareness activities need to be planned as structured learning components
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Digital media also became a constraint because students were exposed to content that did not always support the values taught in the classroom. The teacher observed that conflict, mockery, and indifferent communication in digital spaces could influence students' ways of interacting with peers. This finding indicates that the classroom was not the only space shaping students' social behavior. Student diversity created another challenge. Some students responded quickly to teacher guidance, while others needed repeated reminders. This variation explains why the same strategy did not produce equal results for all students. In addition, limited instructional time in IPS made it difficult for the teacher to conduct deeper reflection after every activity. Character reinforcement was often inserted into ongoing instruction rather than planned as a fully structured affective learning sequence.

Interview excerpt 5 – Teacher G1

"I usually observe their attitudes during learning, but there is no specific rubric yet. Sometimes I know which students are helpful or passive, but it is not written in detailed indicators."

4. Discussion

4.1 Students' Social Awareness as a Transitional Moral-Social Competence

The findings indicate that students' social awareness in social studies learning was still transitional: students were able to recognize the importance of cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty, yet these values were not consistently enacted in classroom interaction. This pattern is theoretically meaningful because it illustrates the gap between moral knowledge and moral action. Lickona's (1991) framework explains that character formation requires the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. In this study, students generally knew that helping friends, working together, and being honest were desirable behaviors, but several students still remained passive in group tasks, ignored peers who needed help, or stayed silent when witnessing dishonest behavior. This finding is consistent with Purwati et al. (2024), who argue that moral development cannot be assessed only from students' cognitive recognition of values but must also be examined through feelings, commitments, and actual behavior.

From the perspective of social-emotional learning, social awareness involves the capacity to take others' perspectives, show empathy, appreciate social norms, and act constructively within relationships (Jones et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2019). The present findings support this view but also show that social awareness in elementary classrooms is highly dependent on interactional conditions. Students who were more confident and socially responsive tended to assist peers, while others prioritized their own tasks. This uneven pattern supports the argument that social, emotional, and cognitive development are deeply intertwined and shaped by relationships and classroom context (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2020). The results also align with meta-analytic evidence showing that social-emotional learning can improve students' social behavior and attitudes when it is intentionally structured, sustained, and embedded in classroom practice (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

However, this study extends prior findings by showing that the difficulty lies not only in teaching social values but in helping students transform those values into socially courageous action. The case of a student who knew cheating was wrong but remained silent because of fear of peer judgment demonstrates that honesty is relational, not merely individual. This finding resonates with studies on empathy and prosocial behavior among elementary students, which show that prosocial action is

influenced by affective readiness, peer norms, and situational pressure (Mulyawati et al., 2022; Prastyo et al., 2024). Thus, social awareness should not be reduced to students' ability to define good behavior; it must be understood as a situated moral-social competence that requires repeated practice, peer accountability, and teacher-mediated reflection.

4.2 Social Studies and Madrasah Culture as Interconnected Pedagogical Spaces

The second major finding shows that the teacher internalized social awareness through heterogeneous group discussion, contextual social studies materials, madrasah cultural habituation, and personal-reflective feedback. This finding supports Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist view that learning develops through social interaction, guided participation, and culturally mediated experience. In this classroom, students did not learn social values only through verbal explanation; they encountered them through group tasks, peer interaction, teacher reminders, and the religious-moral language of the madrasah. Social studies learning therefore functioned as a social space where students could practice cooperation, negotiate responsibility, and reflect on their conduct.

The role of heterogeneous group discussion is consistent with research on collaborative learning, which emphasizes that group work becomes educationally meaningful when teachers actively guide participation, monitor interaction, and support students' problem-solving processes (van Leeuwen & Janssen, 2019). Gillies (2016) similarly notes that cooperative learning requires positive interdependence, individual accountability, and social skills, not merely placing students into groups. The present study confirms this argument because unequal participation persisted when students were not continuously guided. The teacher's role was therefore central in converting group work from a procedural classroom activity into a medium for social learning. Compared with studies that report the general benefits of collaborative or project-based learning for prosocial behavior (Chan et al., 2021; Prastyo et al., 2024), this study provides a more micro-level account of how collaboration can remain fragile when responsibility is concentrated among active students.

The use of contextual materials also strengthened students' engagement with social values. Social studies learning became more meaningful when the teacher used cases and examples related to students' daily experiences, such as helping friends, respecting differences, and being honest during assignments. This finding is in line with Lasmawan (2019), who argues that social studies should reconstruct social experience and connect classroom learning with real social life. It also supports Indonesian studies showing that social studies can function as a medium for character education when it integrates contextual discussion, reflection, and school culture (Kanji et al., 2020; Melpi et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2021; Suwela Antara et al., 2024). The contribution of the present study lies in showing that contextual social studies learning becomes stronger when combined with madrasah-based moral reinforcement.

Madrasah culture emerged as a distinctive mechanism of value internalization. Daily routines such as prayer, greetings, morning reflection, moral advice, and mutual reminders provided a cultural environment that reinforced the social values taught in IPS. This finding is consistent with Syarnubi et al. (2021), who found that religious programs and institutional culture support character education in madrasah settings. It also corresponds with Syaharuddin et al. (2025), who emphasize the relevance of integrating cultural and religious values to promote social awareness in Islamic schools. Nevertheless, this study adds an important nuance: madrasah culture does not automatically guarantee consistent social behavior. Some students still showed individualism, limited empathy, and reluctance to act honestly. This means that religious habituation needs to be connected with explicit classroom practice, affective assessment, and reflective dialogue. In other words, madrasah culture functions best when it becomes a pedagogical resource rather than a background ritual.

Personal-reflective feedback further illustrates the teacher's role as a moral mediator. Instead of relying only on public correction, the teacher used personal reminders, gentle advice, and small behavioral targets. This strategy is compatible with social-emotional learning approaches that emphasize supportive relationships, emotionally safe classrooms, and developmentally appropriate guidance (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2018). It also reflects transformative SEL principles, which place students' social identity, belonging, and agency at the center of value formation (Jagers et al., 2019). In this study, personal feedback allowed students to reflect without humiliation, which is important in elementary classrooms where public correction may produce shame rather than moral growth.

4.3 Constraints, Assessment Implications, and the Need for Structured Affective Pedagogy

The third finding shows that the internalization of social awareness was constrained by the absence of an operational affective rubric, the influence of digital media, student diversity, and limited instructional time. These constraints suggest that social awareness cannot be strengthened only through informal teacher observation. The teacher was able to recognize which students were helpful, passive, or individualistic, but without explicit indicators and descriptors, students' affective development remained difficult to monitor systematically. This finding supports Andrade and Brookhart's (2020) view that classroom assessment should function as co-regulation of learning, enabling teachers and students to identify expectations, monitor progress, and adjust behavior. Panadero and Jönsson (2020) also argue that rubrics can be useful when used formatively, especially to clarify expectations and support feedback.

The implication is that IPS teachers in madrasah need an affective assessment framework that operationalizes cooperation, empathy, responsibility, honesty, and respect. Such a rubric should not be used merely to assign scores, but to guide observation, feedback, reflection, and student self-assessment. This is especially important because the findings show that students' moral knowledge was more developed than their moral action. A well-designed rubric could help teachers identify whether a student only understands the value of cooperation, occasionally practices it, or consistently demonstrates it in group interaction.

Digital media also appeared as an external factor that complicated social awareness development. The teacher perceived that students were exposed to digital content involving conflict, mockery, and insensitive communication. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that digital media can shape adolescents' peer relationships, emotional comparison, and social behavior (Keles et al., 2020; Nesi et al., 2018). Although the present study did not directly measure students' digital media use, the teacher's concern indicates that classroom value education must be connected with digital citizenship and critical media reflection. If social studies aims to prepare students for social life, it must also address the digital environments where children learn communication norms.

Finally, student diversity and limited instructional time show the need for structured affective pedagogy. Students differed in confidence, empathy, participation, and willingness to cooperate; therefore, a single strategy could not produce equal behavioral change for all students. This finding confirms that character education requires sustained practice across classroom, school, and family contexts (Gunawan et al., 2020; Syarnubi et al., 2021). For MI Al Fithrah Surabaya, the practical implication is that social awareness should be planned as an explicit learning outcome in IPS, reinforced through madrasah routines, assessed through formative rubrics, and supported by teacher-parent collaboration.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that students' social awareness in social studies learning at MI Al Fithrah Surabaya was still in a transitional stage between understanding values and consistently practicing them. Cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and honesty appeared in classroom interaction, but their enactment remained uneven. Some students showed willingness to help peers and participate in group work, while others remained passive, depended on more active classmates, or hesitated to respond to dishonest behavior because of peer pressure. The teacher addressed this condition through four interconnected strategies: heterogeneous group discussion, contextual social studies materials, habituation through madrasah culture, and personal-reflective feedback. These strategies indicate that social studies can become a pedagogical space for value internalization when classroom learning is connected with religious-moral routines and reflective interaction.

The main implication is that strengthening social awareness requires more than verbal moral instruction. Teachers need structured opportunities for students to practice social values, receive feedback, and reflect on their behavior. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on social studies education and Islamic elementary pedagogy by demonstrating that madrasah culture can function as a moral reinforcement mechanism when integrated with social studies learning. However, the study is limited by the small number of participants and the short observation period. Future research should involve broader participants, longer classroom observation, and the development of affective assessment rubrics to evaluate students' social awareness more systematically.

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