



Literature Study: The Effectiveness of Role-Playing Model in Social Studies Learning at Elementary School

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Abstract

The learning in the Social Studies Programme aims to give students the knowledge and skills to function in their life with issues concerning their family, community and nation. But social study learning is also known to be a dull curriculum which involved memorisation with relatively little student involved. It is why role-playing models in the learning of social studies are among the desired solutions in order to make meaningful learning and easy to understand. This study sought to explore role-play models in the social studies teaching and process and student out come. The approach adopted in this paper was a literature review conducted on 11 articles retrieved from Google Scholar published in the last five years. From the literature review, the Role-Playing Model is proposed as an interesting and creative learning strategy to increase the quality of learning social studies, especially at elementary school.

Keywords: Role Playing Model; Social Studies Learning; Elementary School.

Introduction

Social Studies (IPS) is a subject taught across various levels of formal education, from elementary to high school. At the elementary level, Social Studies integrates concepts from multiple disciplines including social sciences, science, humanities, and various real-world issues. According to S. Nasution, Social Studies is a branch of knowledge that values, processes, studies, and discusses matters related to human relationships, enabling comprehensive understanding and problem-solving. The delivery of Social Studies should be integrated according to the selected branches—such as history, economics, sociology, geography, anthropology, and social psychology—and tailored to the needs of each school and educational stage (Ratnawati, 2016). The primary goal of Social Studies instruction is to develop students' foundational knowledge and skills that are useful in everyday life, whether within the family, community, or nation. However, in practice, Social Studies lessons are often perceived as tedious, as they tend to emphasize rote memorization and offer limited opportunities for active student participation. This perception leads to decreased motivation and low engagement among students. To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt effective instructional models that foster meaningful learning experiences and facilitate deeper understanding of the material. An instructional model serves as a systematic framework that guides the design of learning activities (Octavia, 2020). It plays a vital role in achieving learning objectives, as effective instruction is characterized by meaningful engagement, active student participation, attainment of minimum competency standards, and the cultivation of character and critical thinking skills (Roshida, 2020).

Several instructional models have been recommended for use in elementary Social Studies, including Discovery Learning, Quantum Teaching, Contextual Teaching and Learning, Snowball Throwing, Value Clarification Technique, various Cooperative Learning types (such as Pair Check, Think Pair Share, and STAD), Inquiry, and Role Playing. Among these, the role playing model is the focus of this literature review. This approach encourages students to grasp



concepts through direct experience and the simulation of real-life situations. Hamdani (2011) highlights several advantages of role playing, such as fostering freedom of expression, adaptability to various situations, and creating enjoyable learning experiences. Teachers can also assess students by observing their performance during the enactment of roles. Role playing actively involves students in specific social scenarios. To maximize its effectiveness, it is important to understand its systematic implementation steps. Subagiyo (2013) outlines the process: identifying the issue to be dramatized, selecting participants, developing the scenario, designating observers, enacting the roles, conducting discussions and evaluations, repeating the performance for improvement, and sharing experiences to draw conclusions. These steps are organized to achieve learning objectives by engaging students both emotionally and intellectually.

Furthermore, scholars have noted distinctive characteristics of the role playing model. Djamarah (2010) describes it as similar to sociodrama, where students dramatize behaviors related to social issues, allowing for contextual understanding of real-life situations. George Shafteel, a pioneer of the role playing model, asserts that this approach can raise students' awareness of social problems through spontaneous involvement (Uno, 2012). These issues prompted the present study, which explores the effectiveness of the role playing model in elementary Social Studies instruction. The central question addressed is: How effective is the role playing model in Social Studies learning at the elementary level? The objective is to examine how role playing can be implemented effectively and how it influences both the learning process and student outcomes.

Methodology

This article employs a literature review approach as its primary research method. A literature review involves identifying relevant theories, sourcing academic references, and analyzing documents pertinent to the research topic (Wirsa & Saridewi, 2020). According to Sugiyono (2017), this method enables researchers to gather data from a variety of credible sources, including books, scholarly journals, and other academic publications. The purpose of this approach is to provide a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of the issues under investigation (Setyaningsih, 2023). The process includes collecting references, conducting thorough reading, and analyzing the material in accordance with the study's focus. For this study, the researcher reviewed 11 journal articles obtained through Google Scholar, taking into account both relevant literature and previous research findings. Google Scholar was selected due to its ability to provide quick access to a wide range of academic sources, as well as its search features that allow filtering by keywords, publication year, and author name. The literature review in this research focuses on scientific articles published within the last five years that are closely related to the topic—specifically, the effectiveness of the role playing model in Social Studies instruction at the elementary school level.

Results and Discussion

Results

This literature review draws on a range of scientific journal articles that explore the effectiveness of the role playing model in Social Studies (IPS) instruction at the elementary level. To examine both the differences and similarities across these studies, the researcher reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, all sourced from Google Scholar. The following synthesis presents the main findings regarding the implementation and impact of role playing in elementary Social Studies classrooms. Research conducted by Herawati and colleagues (2024) revealed a notable improvement in students' understanding of economic activities when the role playing model was applied. Students became directly involved in lessons that explored economic concepts and different types of jobs. The average post-test score of students taught through role playing reached 75.65, outperforming the control group, which used the STAD cooperative learning model and achieved an average of only 66.52. Elsinora (2023) study at SD Inpres Benjina demonstrated that incorporating role playing into lessons on Indonesia's proclamation of independence significantly enhanced learning outcomes for fifth-grade students. The percentage of students who met the minimum



competency standard (KKM) rose from 55% in the first cycle to 85% in the second, indicating a substantial improvement.

In another investigation, Dinny *et al.* (2024) found that role playing increased both student engagement and learning achievement among fifth graders at SDN Pamarisen. The percentage of students actively participating in lessons rose from 84% to 87% across two cycles, both rated as excellent. Moreover, the proportion of students reaching the KKM increased from 34% at the outset to 73% after the first cycle and 82% after the second, suggesting that nearly all students could participate actively in Social Studies, especially when studying social interaction. Agit (2024) research highlighted that role playing helped students focus better when demonstrating how needs were met before the invention of money. Initially, only 31.03% of students achieved mastery. This figure increased to 62.07% after the first cycle and reached 100% in the second cycle. By simulating real-life situations in the classroom, students could experience and resolve issues related to fulfilling needs, making the learning process more tangible and effective. A. Ridho (2024) reported that the implementation of role playing proceeded according to plan. During the first cycle, the average implementation score was 68.75%, categorized as insufficient. However, this improved to 82.5% in the second cycle, meeting the criteria for successful implementation. The improvement could be seen in the increased number of students who actively expressed opinions, answered teachers' questions on the topic of independence preparation, and engaged in role play activities.

Data analysis from Rilfa (2023) showed that students' interest in learning increased significantly through the use of role playing in lessons on buying and selling. In the first cycle, 58% of students were classified as having sufficient interest, with 15 out of 26 students meeting the criteria. By the second cycle, this had risen to 81%, with 21 students showing marked improvement in engagement and interest. Yuli (2023) research indicated a clear boost in student achievement after role playing was introduced. The average student score improved from 65.4 to 70.4 in the first cycle, with the mastery rate rising from 46% to 71%. In the following cycle, the average score climbed to 80.2, and the mastery rate reached 90%. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of role playing within the Merdeka Curriculum for increasing student achievement in Social Studies. Sri (2023) also found that role playing enhanced both learning outcomes and students' understanding of Indonesian independence heroes. The average score in the first cycle was 68.2, with 67% of students achieving mastery. In the second cycle, the average rose to 78.4, and mastery reached 100%, reflecting a 10.2% improvement. Student participation increased, and teachers became more active, innovative, and creative in managing Social Studies lessons, making the learning process more effective and enjoyable. Restio (2020) concluded that role playing improved student achievement in Social Studies, particularly on the topic of the contributions of historical figures in preparing for Indonesia's independence. In the first cycle, 60% of students achieved mastery, with an average score of 62.6, still below the minimum standard of 70. After the second cycle, the proportion of students achieving mastery increased to 86.67%, and the average score rose to 78.66, meeting the criteria for classical completeness.

Bela (2024) investigated the impact of role playing on lessons about the importance of cooperatives for community welfare and found positive results. The average student score increased from 54.56 at the beginning to 72.36 in the first cycle, and then to 89.2 in the second cycle. The percentage of students achieving mastery (scores above 75) also rose significantly, from 32% at the start to 48% in the first cycle, and finally to 92% in the second cycle. Dwi (2023) observed that Social Studies lessons using role playing in grade II at SD Negeri 4 Pahandut were successful in making students more active and enthusiastic. Students paid greater attention to the teacher's explanations, followed group instructions, performed scenarios, and collaborated with peers. This led to higher involvement in the learning process. In the second cycle, the average student score reached 86.6, with all students achieving mastery. Taken together, the reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that the use of role playing in Social Studies at the elementary level has a positive and significant impact on learning outcomes, student activity, interest, and engagement. The research findings indicate increases in average scores, mastery rates, and active participation with each cycle of implementation. Role playing allows students to engage directly with the material through relevant simulations, whether the topic is economic activity, the proclamation of independence, or social interaction. By participating in these simulations, students gain both conceptual and contextual understanding, as they experience the situations firsthand (Maulidiyah *et al.*, 2022).



The application of role playing also helps build students' confidence, communication abilities, and teamwork skills. Student activity levels, which may have previously been average, become higher, while teachers grow more active and innovative in facilitating learning. Lessons become more enjoyable, as the classroom atmosphere becomes more meaningful and authentic. Role playing provides students with the freedom to learn in a more open environment, express their ideas, and develop both social and cognitive skills. These advantages are in line with findings from Rilfa (2023) and Fitrianiingsih *et al.* (2023), who found that role playing increases learning motivation, encourages problem-solving, and connects classroom learning to everyday life.

However, successful implementation of role playing requires careful attention to several factors. As Hariani (2019) points out, this model can be time-consuming and demands well-prepared lesson planning to achieve the intended goals. Not all subject matter is suitable for role playing, and some teachers may not yet fully understand how to implement the model effectively. Research by Kartika *et al.* (2021) also indicates that students may need additional encouragement to be creative in their roles. Role playing places students at the center of the learning process. It gives them the opportunity to practice, play, and maintain a positive and collaborative learning atmosphere. Students can choose roles and improvise, fostering independent learning that aligns with their interests. Through role play, students can express themselves, develop problem-solving awareness, and reflect on their own and others' behaviors in an enjoyable way (Bahtiar & Suryarini, 2019). The model also supports students in exploring their emotions, shaping attitudes and values, and building self-awareness.

In practice, role playing in Social Studies is implemented through active, innovative, and creative learning. Lessons are designed as role play activities, such as simulating economic actors, independence heroes, or market participants. Innovative teaching is evident when teachers combine role playing with questioning or engaging assignments, keeping the process dynamic and interesting. Creative instruction appears when teachers design varied scenarios that accommodate different learning styles (Nurfauzi *et al.*, 2023). The application of role playing in Social Studies brings numerous benefits. It increases student engagement by sparking interest in the subject matter and making learning more enjoyable (Herawati *et al.*, 2024). The model also sharpens students' critical thinking skills by having them portray different characters or situations, allowing them to analyze problems from multiple perspectives (Yuli, 2023). Furthermore, role playing stimulates creativity by giving students room to develop new ideas related to the lesson content (Agit, 2024). In summary, role playing creates a more active and enjoyable classroom environment and has a positive effect on students' potential and learning outcomes.

Discussion

The combined evidence from the reviewed studies offers compelling evidence on the effectiveness of the role playing model at the elementary level when used in a Social Studies context. In this conversation, the results reported will be interpreted, linked with theory and other research, and a consideration of their wider implications for teaching and learning in the elementary classroom is provided. The findings from different studies that show the consistent enhancement of student performance, engagement, and motivation demonstrate that role playing can be an instrument of transformative pedagogy. Student dramatization of 'real life' or historical stories, as described in the studies reported by Herawati *et al.* (2024), theirs is more than just an imposition of 'filling the gaps'; rather they are not simply passive recipients of knowledge, but in fact the co-creators of knowledge. This is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which argues that students are most likely to learn when they are able to connect new content to their prior knowledge and actively engage in the learning experience. One important theme that can be derived from the results is the marked improvement of cognitive and affective learning achievements. The role playing model not only increases test scores and the rate of mastery, but also self confidence, communication, and social skill in their lives. These results are consistent with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory and his claim that cognitive development is the result of social interaction. Role play is a method that encourages students to talk, negotiate, and work together with a view of greater internalization of new ideas, says Jennifer Eddy in UCF Frontiers.

In addition, the reviewed research notes the wide range of topics in Social Studies where role playing could be used, such as economic activity and the history of independence, market factors and the role of cooperatives. This flexibility means role play can be used across curriculum content, as a useful tool for teachers seeking to bring abstract or



complex subject matter to life in a more engaging and accessible manner. Enhancement of class climate is another positive effect. Teachers stated that they felt more innovative or creative and that their students tended to be more enthusiastic and not afraid to speak. As the learning environment transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered, a sense of agency and ownership is taking place with students. It also posits that teachers should constantly add to their instructional profile, as highlighted by Sri (2023) and Nurfauzi *et al.* (2023).

Crucially however, the literature also raises a number of caveats and concerns. Successful role plays call for good planning, the allocation of enough time, and a consideration of the extent to which both teachers and students are ready to take on different roles and ways of learning. Some topics are not as suitable for dramatization, and some of the teachers might feel uncomfortable with, or do not have any experience in, providing role play (cf Hariani, 2019; Kartika *et al.* (2021). This highlights the importance of in-service training and support from peers in enabling teachers to effectively integrate innovative approaches, such as role play. In addition, the personal and social advantages associated with role play are not limited to academic success. Students consider the motivations of others, hone their problem-solving abilities through challenging scenarios and learn resilience by examining their own and others' behavior. These results are especially important in Social Studies where the promise is to instill knowledge, responsibility, and empathy in future citizens.

The research also suggests that role-playing can help to narrow the gulf between theory and practice. By modeling real-world scenarios, they learn content conceptually and they begin to recognize its applicability to everyday situations. Such experiential activities allow learning to be more meaningful and memorable, as students are able to relate classroom knowledge to their actual experiences. However, role playing can also be challenging and there are a range of factors that must be in place. Teachers need to create the setting that is culturally familiar, age appropriate and consistent with the aim of the lesson. They also have to foster a supportive step class environment, where students feel both comfortable taking risks, and are free to express themselves. Differentiation is important for all students, even the shy or resistant ones, as it provides them opportunities for success and participation. Policy and practice implications The findings indicate that schools and educational partners alike should promote the implementation of student-centred, interactive models that lead to action such as role playing. I'm not talking about resources, training, and time to plan and reflect on their practice for teachers. Joint planning between teachers, exchange of best practices and a combination of role playing with other methods of instruction can also contribute to its efficiency.

Conclusion

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that role-playing is an effective model for use in social studies learning in elementary schools. Implementing this model has a positive impact on improving student learning outcomes, activity, interest, and engagement in the learning process. Average student grades have increased significantly, and the percentage of learning completion has also increased with each cycle. Through role-playing, students more easily understand the material because they can relate social studies concepts to real-life situations. This model also helps students develop critical thinking skills, creativity, and collaboration skills. However, several obstacles remain, such as uneven student understanding and limitations in implementation, which require careful planning. Therefore, teachers need to evaluate and adjust strategies to optimize the implementation of role-playing and adapt it to the needs and characteristics of students in the classroom.

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