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Experiential Learning Model in Social Studies Instruction to Improve Learning Outcomes at Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

Social Studies learning at the elementary school level faces challenges due to low student learning outcomes caused by passive, conventional instructional methods. This study aims to improve the learning outcomes of fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Passo through the experiential learning model. Utilizing a Classroom Action Research design across two cycles, this study involved 19 students. Data were collected through learning outcome tests and observation sheets, then analyzed using descriptive quantitative techniques. The findings demonstrated progressive improvement: the class average rose from 57.73 (Poor) in the pre-test to 68.6 (Sufficient) in Cycle I and reached 81.5 (Good) in Cycle II. The model eliminated the Poor and Very Poor categories starting from Cycle I, culminating in a 100% classical completion rate in Cycle II, where 52.63% of students achieved the good category and 47.37% reached Very Good. Furthermore, optimizing the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation stages effectively strengthened higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), evidenced by a significant score increase in the highest-weight assessment aspect from 50.10% to 37.1 (out of 50). This study concludes that from a constructivist perspective, the experiential learning model exerts a transformative impact by habituating a systematic learning cycle, integrating concrete experiences, reflective observation, conceptualization, and practical application. This approach actively constructs student understanding and successfully bridges abstract social studies concepts into meaningful, applicable knowledge for elementary school students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation for developing a generation capable of facing the increasingly complex challenges of globalization. In the Indonesian education system, Social Studies (IPS) instruction at the elementary school level plays a strategic role in equipping students with knowledge, understanding, and analytical skills regarding social phenomena in society (Ali et al., 2025; Devi et al., 2025; Sasmita et

al., 2022). This aligns with the mandate of Article 37 of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which stipulates that the elementary education curriculum must include social studies to prepare students to interact in a dynamic social environment (Rahmayati & Prastowo, 2023). However, the reality on the ground shows that social studies instruction still faces significant challenges, resulting in low student learning outcomes (Alfikri et al., 2025; Ester et al., 2025).

Learning outcomes themselves reflect observable and measurable behavioral changes, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions (Ariyani & Kristin, 2021). Low social studies learning outcomes are influenced by internal and external factors (Maksum et al., 2021). Internal factors include low motivation, self-confidence, and suboptimal study habits, while external factors include monotonous teaching methods, limited resources, and lack of parental support (Pamungkas et al., 2023). Similar problems were also identified by Susilowati and Sutama (2022): social studies learning difficulties are a serious issue requiring in-depth attention from education practitioners.

The primary cause of these low learning outcomes is the dominance of teacher-centred learning methods (Mpho, 2018). Decreased student motivation is closely related to instructional strategies that lack innovation and fail to actively engage students (Hidayati et al., 2022). One-way teaching without direct participation hinders material understanding, exacerbated by approaches that lack contextual relevance and fail to connect subject matter to students' authentic experiences (Viqri et al., 2024). Therefore, innovative learning models are needed that can connect academic content to real-life realities through direct, active student involvement.

The experiential learning model developed by David Kolb has emerged as a relevant alternative solution (Devi & Thendral, 2023). Kolb defines experiential learning as a process of knowledge creation through the transformation of experiences, involving a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Susiloningsih et al., 2023; Wijnen-Meijer et al., 2022). This model synthesizes the thinking of educational figures such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, emphasizing the crucial role of direct experience. Research by Ganira and Odundo (2023) concluded that this practice helps students develop more effective learning styles through the activities of doing, discovering, reflecting, and applying knowledge.

Various empirical evidence has confirmed the effectiveness of this model in improving academic achievement. Ranken et al. (2025) found a significant positive impact on children aged 4-14, while Kong (2021) confirmed its role in increasing motivation and engagement in the classroom. Aljurdi and Salloum (2024) also demonstrated that experiential learning effectively develops the cognitive and affective domains of elementary school students. The success of this model also spans across various disciplines. In mathematics, this model has been shown to improve conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills (Uyen et al., 2022), as well as

increase learning motivation in geometry through outdoor learning methods (Pambudi, 2022).

The implementation of the experiential learning model at the elementary school level in Indonesia has shown very promising results, particularly in stimulating significant increases in average grades and the percentage of classical completion. Susiloningsih et al. (2023) successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of this model in science learning content, which is reinforced by theoretical arguments from Kavitha Devi and Thendral (2023) that consistently adopting David Kolb's theory can foster a deeper understanding of the material (in-depth understanding). Beyond just the cognitive dimension, the characteristics of this instructional model have also proven effective in fostering student independence, as it prioritizes direct interaction with the surrounding environment as the primary learning medium (Ramadhan et al., 2025). This empirical reality contrasts with conventional learning patterns, which students often complain about due to the limited variety of methods applied in the classroom (Habbah & Sari, 2023).

Building upon initial observations at Elementary School 1 Passo, similar problems were clearly identified, characterized by the low achievement of fifth-grade students in social studies, with most scores still below the minimum completion criteria due to the dominance of the one-way lecture method. Referring to the theoretical synthesis and empirical evidence above, the experiential learning model is considered the most appropriate strategic intervention to address this instructional barrier at Elementary School 1 Passo. This model provides space for students to construct far more meaningful knowledge through systematic stages that integrate theoretical bridges with authentic practice (Chan et al., 2021). Based on this framework, this classroom action research was conducted to implement the experiential learning model to comprehensively boost and restore the social studies learning outcomes of fifth-grade students at Elementary School 1 Passo.

2. METHOD

This research was designed using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which aims to comprehensively optimize student competencies while creating a more effective, interactive, and responsive instructional environment to meet students' learning needs. This action approach was implemented cyclically to solve real-world classroom problems through continuous improvement of learning quality. Each cycle of this research was implemented systematically, adopting a spiral action model that encompasses four main stages: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection.

This research was conducted at Elementary School 1 Passo, with 19 fifth-grade students as subjects. The selection of these subjects was based on initial observations indicating significant gaps in student mastery and learning outcomes in Social Studies (IPS). The entire series of action interventions was integrated directly into the school's institutional schedule without disrupting the current academic calendar, ensuring that

the classroom dynamics and behaviors observed throughout the research process remained authentic and natural.

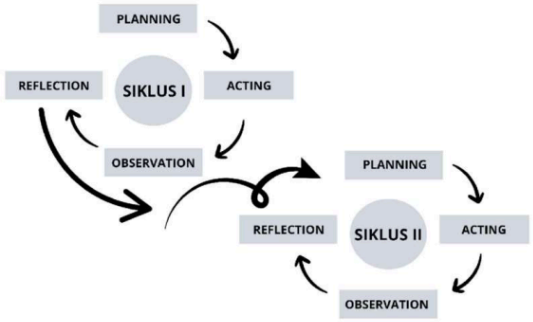

Figure 1. Classroom Action Research Design

To ensure the validity and objectivity of the data, this study utilized a structured instrument consisting of a learning achievement test and an observation sheet. The observation sheet was used in real time during the learning process to monitor teacher activity and student engagement during the implementation of the experiential learning phase. Meanwhile, the test instrument, consisting of end-of-cycle evaluation questions, was specifically designed to measure students' cognitive mastery, with a focus on the depth of analysis of social studies material and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS).

The data collection technique in this study utilized triangulation, combining observation, testing, and documentation. Observation focused on monitoring adherence to the syntax of the learning model, while testing was applied at the end of each cycle to obtain baseline data on post-intervention social studies learning outcomes. Furthermore, documentation, including photographs of learning activities, field notes, and lesson plans, was collected to strengthen the qualitative analysis results and serve as authentic evidence of the implementation of the interventions in the field.

The quantitative data obtained from the evaluation tests were then analyzed using descriptive quantitative analysis techniques to measure students' academic development in a classroom setting. This analysis was conducted by calculating the percentage of individual achievement scores to determine the frequency distribution of grades, the average class score, and the percentage of classical learning completion at the end of the cycle. The percentage of scores obtained by students was calculated mathematically using the following standard formula:

$$Mastery\ Level\ Presentation = \frac{Score\ Obtained}{Maximum\ Score} x\ 100\%$$

Student learning outcomes were subsequently analyzed based on the following criteria:

Table 1. Criteria for Student Learning Achievement Levels

No	Score Interval	Classification
1	85–100	Very Good

No	Score Interval	Classification
2	70–84	Good
3	55–69	Sufficient
4	40–54	Poor
5	<39	Very Poor

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Pre-Test Results

The initial data analysis (pre-test) conducted before the implementation of the experiential learning model showed that the initial achievement of the social studies learning outcomes of fifth-grade students at Elementary School 1 Passo was still in the Poor category, with a classical average score of 57.73 out of a total of 19 students. This baseline data reflects the students' overall initial competencies, the distribution of which is presented in detail in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of the Results of the Analysis of Students' Social Studies Pre-Test

Analysis Parameters	Indicators/Achievement Data	Key Notes and Findings
Very Good Category	0% (None)	This indicates that no students have mastered the material very well.
Poor Category	57.89% (Majority)	Being the dominant group indicates that overall learning outcomes are still concerning.
Very Poor Category	1 Student	There are students at the lowest ability level.
Achievement of the Third Aspect	50.10% (Lowest)	They have the highest score (0–50), but their success rate is the lowest.
Main Constraining Factors	Lack of high-level analysis	Students struggle with aspects requiring deep understanding and critical thinking (HOTS), creating a significant gap in their mastery of the social studies material.

An analysis of the distribution of individual scores during the pre-test phase indicates that the social studies learning outcomes of fifth-grade students at Elementary School 1 Passo remain at a concerning level. Most students, 57.89%, fall into the Poor category, with one student falling into the Very Poor category, and none achieving the Very Good category. A thorough evaluation of the three assessment aspects revealed that the lowest achievement occurred in the third aspect, which carries the highest weighting (0–50), with a success rate of only 50.10%. Students' inability to master this aspect—which requires in-depth understanding and higher-order analytical thinking skills (HOTS)—confirms a significant gap in their mastery of social studies learning materials.

These data findings also reinforce initial observations that conventional learning approaches dominated by lectures have not been able to facilitate students' understanding of abstract social studies concepts. The low achievement in this highest-weighted aspect strongly indicates that instructional processes that fail to connect

content to authentic experiences can hinder students' ability to understand and apply concepts effectively. Therefore, these pre-test results emphasize the urgency of implementing an experiential learning model as a strategic intervention to transform the learning process to make it more meaningful and comprehensively improve student learning outcomes.

Cycle I

The final test in Cycle I was conducted after the implementation of the experiential learning model that integrates four main stages, namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Based on the data presented in Table 3, the evaluation results of 19 students showed a classical average score of 68.6 which is included in the Sufficient category, where the distribution of these achievements is presented in detail in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Summary of Cycle I Analysis Results (Experiential Learning Model)

Analysis Parameters	Indicators/Achievement Data	Key Notes & Progress
Highest & Lowest Scores	Maximum: 78	Minimum: 60
Good Category	42.11% of students	Indicates significant positive shifts in most subjects.
Fair Category	57.89% of students	This represents a new majority group in this cycle.
Poor & Very Poor Categories	0% (Eliminated)	A significant success as no students is currently in the poor or very poor categories.
Achievement of the Third Aspect	Increased from 25.05 to 30	The highest-weight aspects experienced significant increases in average scores.
Effectiveness Indicators	Concrete involvement & active experimentation	Direct instruction is beginning to be effective in fostering a deeper understanding of the material.

The analysis results in Cycle I showed a significant positive shift in the distribution of student scores compared to the pre-test phase, where the highest score reached 78 (Good category) and the lowest score increased to 60 (Fair category). Cumulatively, 42.11% of students were in the good category and 57.89% in the Fair category, indicating that the Poor and Very Poor categories had been completely eliminated. This increase was also reflected in the average scores of the three assessment aspects, especially the third aspect with the highest weighting, which jumped significantly from 25.05 to 30; this indicates that direct student involvement through the concrete experience and active experimentation stages began to be effective in fostering a deeper understanding of the material. Although the implementation of the experiential learning model in Cycle I succeeded in boosting the classical average by 10.87 points (from 57.73 to 68.6), this achievement was generally still in the Fair classification and had not met the target success indicator, namely the good category (≥70). The success in restoring the performance of previously low-achieving students demonstrates the model's great potential, but these results also suggest the need for ongoing

instructional optimization. Based on reflections on the implementation of Cycle I, strengthening the intensity of direct experience, improving the quality of reflective activities, and strengthening abstract conceptualization are the focus of strategic improvements that must be integrated into Cycle II to achieve more optimal student learning outcomes.

Cycle II

The final test in Cycle II was conducted after the implementation of the experiential learning model that had been refined and optimized based on the reflective findings from Cycle I. Based on the data presented in Table 4, the final evaluation results of 19 students showed a classical average score that experienced a significant increase to reach 81.5 with a Good classification, where the details of the distribution of these achievements are presented in detail in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Summary of Results of Analysis and Transformation of Social Studies Learning Achievements in Cycle II

Analysis Parameters	Achievement Data and Indicators	Quality Notes & Transformative Impact
Student Score Range	• Maximum: 94 (Very Good) • Minimum: 70 (Good)	The lower limit of student scores increased dramatically, so that all students exceeded the minimum completion standard of "Good."
Grade Category Distribution	• Good Category: 52.63% • Very Good Category: 47.37%	100% of students successfully entered the Good and Very Good classifications. Fair, Poor, and Very Poor categories were officially scored at 0%.
Assessment Aspect Development	• Third Aspect (Highest Weight): Increased to 37.1 • First Aspect: Approaching the maximum score (20)	Optimization of the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation phases has proven successful in strengthening students' capacity to analyze social studies concepts in depth.
Class Average Improvement	From 68.6 (Sufficient in Cycle I) to 81.5 (Good in Cycle II)	This confirms that habituating an experiential learning cycle can produce comprehensive learning quality.
Transformative Case Evidence	Individual score jump: 43 (Very Poor) → 94 (Very Good)	This provides concrete empirical evidence that this model is not only effective for high-ability students but also significantly accelerates progress for previously low-achieving students.

Analysis of learning outcomes in Cycle II showed substantial improvement, indicating that the effectiveness of the experiential learning model had reached its optimal point. The distribution of individual scores recorded a maximum achievement of 94, classified as Very Good, while the lowest student score increased drastically to 70, categorized as Good. At this stage, all students (100%) successfully achieved the minimum classification standard of "Good," with 47.37% achieving the Very Good category. Consistent improvement was also reflected across all assessment aspects, particularly in the third aspect, which jumped to 37.1 and the first aspect, which nearly

achieved a perfect score of 20. This data record indicates that the tactical improvements implemented in the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation phases have successfully strengthened students' analytical capacity to understand and apply social studies concepts in depth.

This success in Cycle II also demonstrates the transformative impact of the experiential learning model, which has proven effective not only for high-ability students but also significantly boosts the performance of previously low-achieving students. Dramatic achievement increases, such as the case of a student who successfully increased his score from Very Poor (43) in the initial phase to Very Good (94) at the end of the cycle, providing strong empirical evidence of the model's success in facilitating understanding of abstract concepts. Through an approach based on a direct experiential cycle, cognitive barriers previously encountered by students with purely conceptual methods can be progressively overcome through systematic internalization of real-world experiences.

Overall, the transition in the classical average score from Adequate (68.6) in Cycle I to Good (81.5) in Cycle II confirms that accustoming students to the experience-based learning cycle can create high-quality and comprehensive learning outcomes for all students. This success confirms that when the learning stages from concrete experiences to independent experiments are continuously optimized, this model can minimize gaps in understanding within the classroom. Thus, these results strengthen the proposition that experiential learning is a valid and reliable instructional strategy for reconstructing the social studies learning landscape in elementary schools to be more meaningful and inclusive.

Discussion

This research was conducted with the primary objective of implementing an experiential learning model in Social Studies (IPS) to improve the learning outcomes of fifth-grade students at Elementary School 1 Passo. Based on findings obtained in the field, the results of the initial pre-test indicated a concerning achievement, with a classical average score of only 57.73, which falls into the Poor category. This low average score is emphasized by the fact that most students, reaching 63.15%, were unable to achieve adequate mastery of the material. This initial finding aligns with the scientific premise put forward by Nurdiah et al. (2024), who stated that the low quality of learning outcomes in elementary schools is often rooted in the use of conventional instructional approaches that minimize the involvement of students with direct experiences.

The lack of opportunities for students to construct their own understanding in a one-way lecture model tends to create passivity and hinder optimal material absorption. The low academic achievement of students in this early phase can be theoretically analyzed using Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. In this context, Susanto et al. (2024) emphasized that the developmental characteristics of elementary school-aged children, particularly fifth graders, are at the concrete operational stage, requiring concrete, directly observable learning experiences. At this

stage of cognitive development, students do not yet have the capacity to fully master abstract concepts without concrete experiential stimuli that serve as cognitive bridges. Social studies learning presented theoretically and textually without connecting it to the students' empirical realities is a major trigger for low learning outcomes. This is reinforced by a study by Dhana (2024), who found that the experiential learning model significantly increased student engagement. This implies that before this model was integrated, low student activity and engagement in the Passo class were directly correlated with their low pre-test scores.

The implementation of the experiential learning model, which began in Cycle I, began to show a positive impact on classroom dynamics and student academic performance, as indicated by an increase in the average classical score to 68.6, falling into the Fair category. The most significant change was the loss of student representation in the Poor and Very Poor categories, although most students (57.89%) were observed to still be concentrated in the Sufficient category. This improvement demonstrates that David Kolb's learning cycle—which integrates concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentations beginning to have a progressive impact on stimulating student understanding. The empirical findings in Cycle I are consistent with the research of Sulasriani et al. (2023), which demonstrated that the use of experiential learning tools is highly effective in building students' conceptual understanding through exploratory and practical activities.

Despite showing a positive development trend, learning outcomes in Cycle I, which remained in the Sufficient classification, indicate room for improvement and the need for further instructional optimization. Aini and Untari (2024) suggest that the successful implementation of this model depends heavily on teachers' readiness to facilitate each stage of the cycle precisely to create truly meaningful learning experiences. Reflections on the implementation of Cycle I revealed that students still require intensive and targeted guidance, particularly during the reflective observation and abstract conceptualization phases. Furthermore, Wadu et al. (2024) explained that in the early stages of transition, students require a period of psychological and procedural adaptation to shift from a passive, conventional learning pattern to an experience-based model that demands greater independence and active participation; this is why the first cycle's achievements have not yet reached optimal levels.

Entering Cycle II, student learning outcomes accelerated and improved significantly, with the average classical score soaring to 81.5, which falls within the good classification. The most prominent indicator of success at this stage was the 100% completion rate for students, who achieved at least the good classification, with nearly half of the class achieving the Very Good category. This 12.9-point jump from the Cycle I average reflects the cumulative effect of the experiential learning model, which has become increasingly optimal following tactical refinements based on the results of the previous cycle's reflective analysis. This improvement aligns with research by Ningrum et al. (2024), which emphasizes that the key to success in the second cycle lies in strengthening the abstract conceptualization stage, enabling

students to consolidate their empirical experiences into a holistic, robust, and comprehensive conceptual understanding.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of this experiential learning model is not only proven in terms of content mastery but also significantly contributes to the development of students' literacy competencies, including analytical and applied thinking skills. In their study, Sari & Murni (2024) successfully demonstrated that experiential learning can develop scientific literacy skills and students' capacity to effectively apply academic concepts to real-world contexts. The comprehensive success achieved by students at SD Negeri 1 Passo in Cycle II is strong evidence that this model is capable of developing students' understanding holistically; learning no longer stops at the level of memory or superficial factual knowledge, but has mutated into the capacity to analyze and apply learned social studies concepts to the dynamics of their daily lives.

Theoretically and epistemologically, the success achieved in Cycle II can be validated and explained through a constructivist perspective. Nerita et al. (2023) argue that knowledge is not something static to be transferred but rather is actively constructed by learners through constant interaction with their environment and real-world experiences. The experiential learning model implemented in this study operationalizes the basic principles of constructivism directly in the classroom. Through this model, students are no longer positioned as passive recipients of information from the teacher, but rather as active agents constructing their own understanding through an integrated cycle that combines real-life experiences, critical reflection, concept formation, and independent practical application.

When this entire learning process is optimized in Cycle II, students are proven capable of developing a much deeper, more meaningful, and more lasting understanding of the social studies learning materials. This habituation to this experiential-based cycle gradually reduces the learning barriers students have previously experienced when faced with conceptually dense social studies material. Ultimately, the optimization of the instructional stages, driven by this commitment to action improvement, leads to outstanding academic achievement. These results reinforce the experiential learning model's position as a valid, reliable, and transformative instructional strategy modality for comprehensively improving the quality and outcomes of student learning in elementary school.

4. CONCLUSION

The application of the experiential learning model in social studies learning for fifth grade students of Elementary School 1 Passo has been empirically proven to be able to improve learning outcomes gradually and significantly, as indicated by the increase in the classical average score from the pre-test phase of 57.73 (Poor) to 68.6 in Cycle I (Sufficient), until reaching the optimal point of 81.5 (Good) in Cycle II. The success of this model is marked by the total elimination of students in the Poor and Very Poor categories since Cycle I, until recording a classical completion rate of 100% at the end of Cycle II, with details of 52.63% of students being in the good category and 47.37%

of students successfully reaching the Very Good category. In addition to enhancing quantitative aspects, optimization of the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation stages also effectively strengthened students' higher-order analytical thinking skills (HOTS), as evidenced by the jump in achievement in the third assessment aspect (highest weighting) from only 50.10% in the pre-test to 37.1 (out of a scale of 50) in Cycle II. From a constructivist perspective, this series of findings confirms the transformative impact of habituating an experiential learning cycle that integrates concrete experiences, reflective observation, conceptualization, and practical application, thereby actively constructing students' understanding and bridging abstract social studies concepts into more meaningful and applicable ones for elementary school-aged children.

As a recommendation, it is recommended that elementary school teachers, particularly fifth-grade teachers, consistently integrate experiential learning models into social studies lessons as an effective instructional strategy for bridging abstract concepts through real, empirical experiences. Teachers need to place special emphasis on optimizing the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation phases through targeted guidance to stimulate students' higher-order analytical thinking skills (HOTS). Furthermore, school management is expected to support the sustainability of this model by facilitating the provision of adequate experience-based learning tools. For further researchers, it is recommended to expand the scope of this model's implementation to other materials or subjects to test the consistency of its effectiveness in transforming the quality of student learning outcomes more broadly and comprehensively.

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