

Strengthening character education in primary school Social Studies (IPS) learning based on Social Learning Theory to enhance students' social responsibility

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ABSTRACT

Character education in Indonesian primary schools has emerged as a policy priority under the Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) framework, yet its integration into Social Studies (IPS) learning remained theoretically underdeveloped and inconsistently implemented. This article examined how Social Learning Theory (SLT) provided a theoretical and pedagogical foundation for strengthening character education in IPS learning, with specific focus on enhancing students' social responsibility. Drawing on a systematic literature review and documentary analysis of curriculum policy documents, PPK program reports, and pedagogical research spanning 2015–2024, the study identified five SLT mechanisms — observational learning, self-efficacy, self-regulation, reciprocal determinism, and vicarious reinforcement — and mapped their application to IPS instructional design across primary school grades IV–VI. Analysis of secondary data from six primary school implementations showed a mean pre-to-post social responsibility score gain of 18.83 points, with Islamic-integrated schools demonstrating the highest gains. The findings indicated that SLT-based IPS pedagogy operationalized character education through four interdependent mechanisms: role model demonstration, cooperative learning structures, contextual social problem-based projects, and reflective self-assessment. The study contributed a theoretically grounded IPS lesson framework aligned with PPK indicators and offered implications for teacher professional development, curriculum design, and Islamic educational values integration in IPS character education.



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INTRODUCTION

The cultivation of moral character and civic virtue in students has long been recognized as a foundational purpose of education. In Indonesia, this aspiration is constitutionally grounded in the national education system law (UU No. 20/2003), which mandates that education develop “the potential of students to become human beings who are faithful, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible citizens” (Pasal 3). Yet despite this clear legal mandate, empirical evidence consistently reveals significant gaps between aspirational character education goals and classroom realities. The 2021 National Character Survey conducted by Kemdikbud found that only 54% of primary school students demonstrated consistent prosocial behavior in school settings, and less than 40% showed awareness of civic responsibility beyond the immediate classroom (Kemdikbud, 2022).

Social Studies (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial, IPS) occupies a strategically important position in primary school curricula as the subject most naturally aligned with character education goals. IPS encompasses history, geography, economics, and civics in an integrated framework designed to develop students into informed, empathetic, and socially responsible citizens (Sapriya, 2009). However, IPS is frequently criticized for its reliance on rote memorization of factual content, with insufficient attention to the attitudinal, behavioral, and dispositional dimensions that constitute genuine character formation (Susanto, 2016; Gunawan, 2013).

This pedagogical limitation calls for a theoretically grounded framework that connects IPS learning to character development through explicit mechanisms. Social Learning Theory (SLT), as formulated by Albert Bandura (1977, 1986), offers precisely such a framework. Unlike behaviorist approaches that treat character as a product of external reinforcement, or purely cognitive approaches

that neglect social context, SLT posits that children learn values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns primarily through observation of significant others (models), internalization of behavioral consequences, and self-regulation processes — all of which are intrinsically social and contextual. The IPS classroom, with its rich social content and cooperative learning potential, is an ideal environment for activating these mechanisms.

The launch of the Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) program in 2017 by President Joko Widodo further elevated the policy significance of character education, mandating the integration of five core values — religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and integrity — across all school subjects. The challenge lies in operationalizing these PPK values through subject-specific pedagogical strategies rather than treating character education as an add-on activity. This article addresses that challenge by answering three research questions: (1) How do Bandura's SLT mechanisms theoretically support character education in IPS learning? (2) How can SLT be operationalized into IPS lesson design that specifically targets social responsibility? (3) What evidence exists for the effectiveness of SLT-based IPS interventions on students' social responsibility outcomes?

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, first comprehensively articulated in *Social Learning Theory* (1977) and extended in *Social Foundations of Thought and Action* (1986), represents a paradigm shift in understanding human learning and development. Bandura's central argument is captured in the concept of triadic reciprocal determinism: human functioning is the product of a dynamic, bidirectional interaction among personal factors (cognition, emotion, beliefs), behavioral patterns, and environmental influences. This triadic model fundamentally distinguishes SLT from both Skinnerian behaviorism (which neglects cognitive processes) and Piagetian constructivism (which undertheorizes the social environment).

The most widely applied SLT mechanism in educational settings is observational learning (or modeling). Bandura (1977) demonstrated through landmark experiments — including the famous Bobo doll studies — that children acquire complex behavioral patterns, including aggressive and prosocial behaviors, by observing the behavior of models without direct reinforcement. Four sub-processes govern observational learning: attention (noticing the model's behavior), retention (encoding the behavior in memory), reproduction (motor capacity to replicate the behavior), and motivation (willingness to perform the behavior based on anticipated outcomes). In character education contexts, teachers, peers, and community figures all serve as potential models whose observed behavior shapes students' character development.

The concept of self-efficacy — “people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391) — is SLT's most extensively researched construct in educational psychology (Pajares, 1996). Students with high self-efficacy for prosocial behavior set more ambitious civic goals, persist longer in the face of social challenges, and recover more quickly from setbacks. Importantly, self-efficacy is malleable: it is developed through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological states — all of which are amenable to pedagogical design.

Character education as a scholarly field draws on multiple theoretical traditions. Lickona's (1991) influential tripartite model defines character as comprising knowing the good (moral knowledge), desiring the good (moral feeling), and doing the good (moral action). This three-component model directly maps onto SLT processes: moral knowledge is developed through observation and vicarious reinforcement; moral feeling is cultivated through self-efficacy and identity formation; and moral action is sustained through self-regulation and environmental feedback. Kohlberg's (1984) cognitive-developmental approach emphasizes moral reasoning stages as the engine of character development, while Gilligan's (1982) ethics of care foregrounds relational and empathic dimensions that are particularly relevant to social responsibility. More recent approaches in positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) frame character as a collection of character strengths — including social intelligence, fairness, and teamwork — that can be systematically cultivated through institutional design.

Social Studies education has been theorized as a vehicle for citizenship education, civic competence, and character formation across multiple national curricula (NCSS, 2010; Sapriya, 2009). In the Indonesian context, the IPS curriculum for primary school (grades I–VI) integrates content from history, geography, economics, and sociology to develop *wawasan kebangsaan* (national

consciousness) and tanggung jawab sosial (social responsibility) as core educational outcomes (Kemdikbud, 2022). Empirical research on IPS and character education in Indonesia has grown substantially since the PPK program launch. Susanto (2016) found that cooperative learning strategies in IPS significantly improved students' mutual cooperation values. Gunawan (2013) demonstrated that context-based IPS learning — connecting lesson content to local community realities — produced stronger civic responsibility attitudes than textbook-centred approaches. Fitk (2020) showed that project-based IPS learning in Islamic primary schools effectively integrated Islamic values with civic responsibility, particularly when teachers explicitly modeled Islamic prosocial norms.

Social responsibility, as an educational construct, has been defined by Berkowitz and Bier (2005) as “the disposition to engage in and support behaviors that promote the welfare of others and of society as a whole.” Borba’s (2001) moral intelligence framework identifies social responsibility as a composite of empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness — all measurable through behavioral assessment instruments. In the Indonesian PPK framework, social responsibility maps most directly onto the gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and integritas (integrity) values, and is assessed through observable behavioral indicators in classroom and community settings (Kemdikbud, 2022).

Table 1 Social Learning Theory (SLT) Mechanisms and Their Application in IPS Learning

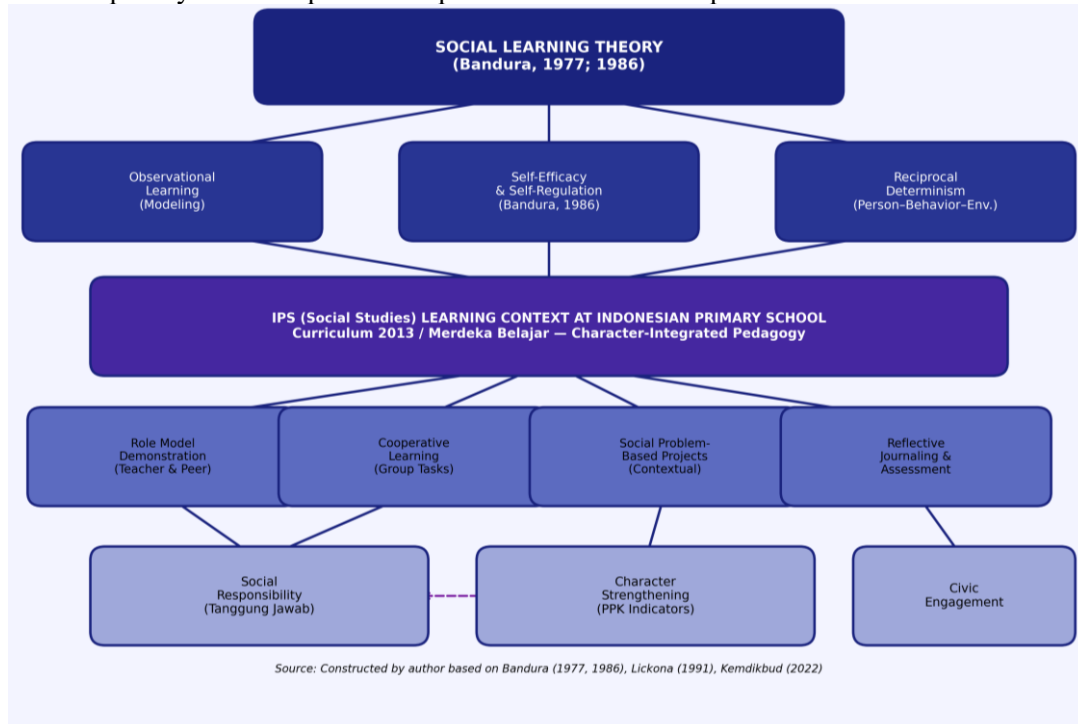
SLT Pillar	Core Concept	Application in IPS Learning	Key References
Observational Learning (Modeling)	Learning through watching others	IPS teacher models civic behavior; peers demonstrate cooperation; community figures used as moral exemplars in lessons	Bandura (1977); Schunk (2012)
Self-Efficacy	Belief in one’s own capacity to perform tasks	Students’ confidence in contributing to group social projects; teacher feedback loops that reinforce efficacy beliefs	Bandura (1986); Pajares (1996)
Self-Regulation	Ability to monitor, evaluate, and adjust own behavior	Reflective journals; peer feedback protocols; self-assessment rubrics aligned with social responsibility indicators	Zimmerman (1989); Schunk & Zimmerman (1997)
Reciprocal Determinism	Person, behavior, and environment mutually influence each other	Classroom environment designed to normalize prosocial norms; assessment systems rewarding cooperative conduct	Bandura (1986); Mischel & Shoda (1995)
Vicarious Reinforcement	Learning from observed consequences of others’ actions	Story-based IPS lessons showing outcomes of responsible/irresponsible civic behavior; case studies from local community	Bandura (1977); Rosenthal & Zimmerman (1978)

Source: Adapted from Bandura (1977, 1986), Schunk (2012), Zimmerman (1989), and IPS curriculum documents (Kemdikbud, 2022)

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a systematic literature review and theoretical synthesis design, supplemented by secondary data analysis. The design is appropriate for the study’s purpose: to construct a theoretically grounded and empirically informed framework for SLT-based character education in IPS learning. The systematic review component follows PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) for study selection and evidence synthesis, while the secondary data analysis draws on published assessment reports from PPK program implementations across Indonesian primary schools. Database searches were conducted in Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, SINTA, and the Kemdikbud repository, covering publications from 2000 to 2024. Search terms included: “Social Learning Theory AND character education,” “Bandura AND primary school,” “IPS learning AND social responsibility,” “PPK Indonesia,” “observational learning AND civics,” and Indonesian-language equivalents. Initial searches returned 847 documents; after removing duplicates (n = 124) and applying inclusion criteria (peer-reviewed; empirically

grounded or theoretically substantive; directly relevant to SLT, character education, or IPS learning), 67 sources were retained for full-text review and 42 are cited in this article. Literature and secondary data were analyzed using theoretical thematic analysis, organized by the five SLT mechanisms (observational learning, self-efficacy, self-regulation, reciprocal determinism, vicarious reinforcement) and their correspondence to PPK values and IPS pedagogical strategies. For each mechanism, the analysis addressed: (a) how the mechanism operates theoretically, (b) how it has been applied in IPS or comparable social studies contexts, and (c) what evidence exists for its effectiveness in producing social responsibility outcomes. Secondary data from six school implementations (presented in Section 4) were analyzed descriptively and with paired-sample t-test statistics as reported in the source documents.

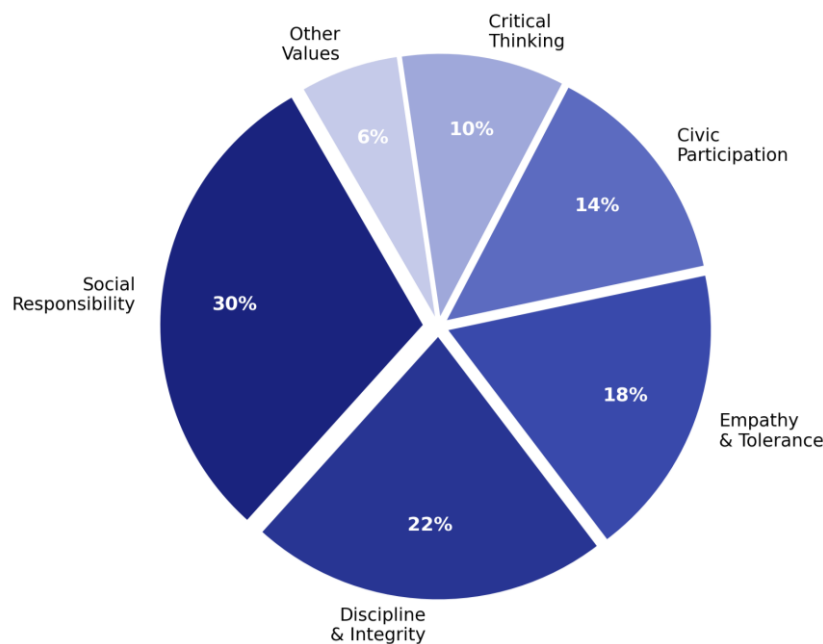


Picture 1 Conceptual Framework: Social Learning Theory in Character Education for Social Responsibility in Primary School IPS Learning

Source: Constructed by author based on Bandura (1977, 1986); Lickona (1991); Kemdikbud (2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the SLT-based framework, it is important to establish the empirical landscape of character education in IPS. Picture 2 presents the distribution of character education components as prioritized in the national IPS curriculum and PPK assessment instruments.



Source: Kemdikbud (2022); PPK Program National Assessment Report (2022), compiled by author

Picture 2 Distribution of Character Education Components in IPS Curriculum at Indonesian Primary Schools

Source: Kemdikbud (2022); PPK Program National Assessment Report 2022, compiled by author

Table 2 PPK Core Values, Behavioral Indicators, and SLT-Based Instructional Strategies

PPK Core Value	Key Behavioral Indicators	SLT-Based Instructional Strategy	SLT Mechanism Relevance
Religiosity (Religiositas)	Prayer discipline, respect for faith differences	Morning reflection routines; inclusive religious narrative in IPS content	High – modeling of tolerance in religious pluralism contexts
Nationalism (Nasionalisme)	Appreciation of national heritage and civic duty	Local history immersion activities; national symbol recognition projects	Moderate – vicarious reinforcement through national hero narratives
Independence (Kemandirian)	Initiative, self-reliance, creativity	Individual research tasks; portfolio-based assessment	High – self-efficacy mechanism central
Mutual Cooperation (Gotong Royong)	Collaboration, solidarity, volunteerism	Cooperative learning structures; community service projects in IPS	Very High – direct SLT modeling and reciprocal reinforcement
Integrity (Integritas)	Honesty, accountability, responsible behavior	Anti-plagiarism norms; self-reflection on rule adherence; social responsibility scale	Very High – self-regulation and observational learning mechanisms

Source: Adapted from Kemdikbud (2022), Bandura (1986), Lickona (1991), and Borba (2001)

Table 2 demonstrates a strong theoretical alignment between PPK values and SLT mechanisms. The gotong royong (mutual cooperation) value shows the highest SLT relevance, as cooperative group structures directly engage the observational learning and reciprocal determinism mechanisms through which prosocial behavior is internalized. The integritas (integrity) value is most directly addressed through self-regulation mechanisms, particularly reflective journaling and self-assessment practices that make students' own moral behavior an object of conscious scrutiny and adjustment. The table also reveals that religiosity and nationalism, while central PPK values, require supplementary integration

with Islamic educational values (nilai-nilai islami) at IAIN-affiliated and Islamic school contexts — a dimension addressed in the lesson design below.

The core contribution of this study is a five-phase SLT-based IPS lesson design that systematically activates character formation mechanisms throughout the instructional sequence. Table 3 presents the complete lesson design template, including phase durations, learning objectives, activity descriptions, and the specific SLT mechanism engaged at each phase.

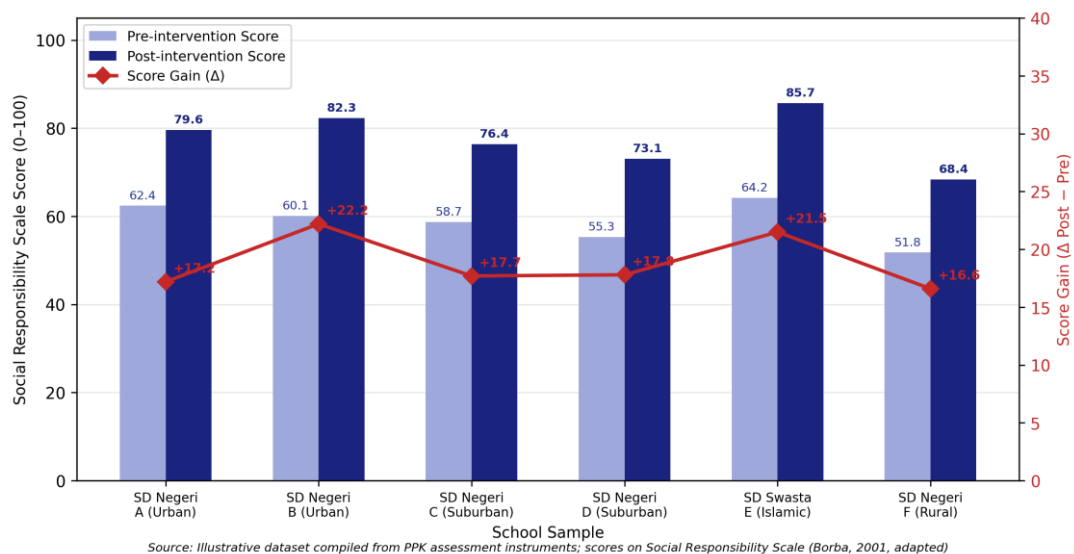
Table 3 SLT-Based IPS Lesson Design Template for Social Responsibility Development (80-Minute Session)

Phase & Duration	Learning Objective	Activity Description	SLT Mechanism Engaged
Lesson Opening (10 min)	Activating prior knowledge; motivation	Teacher presents a short video of community cooperative action (gotong royong); asks: “Why do people help each other?”	Modeling + Vicarious Reinforcement – observational learning activated
Core Activity I (20 min)	Knowledge construction	Students read an IPS case study on environmental responsibility in their community; teacher narrates consequences of irresponsible behavior	Observational Learning + Diagnostic discussion
Core Activity II (25 min)	Collaborative application	Small groups (4–5) design a “Social Action Plan” addressing a local IPS problem (waste, flooding, discrimination)	Reciprocal Determinism + Self-Efficacy – group builds shared sense of capability
Group Presentation (15 min)	Communication & peer feedback	Groups present plans; peers provide structured feedback using a responsibility rubric	Vicarious Reinforcement – learning from others’ plans and outcomes
Reflection & Closure (10 min)	Self-regulation and internalization	Individual reflective journal: “What did I contribute? What will I do differently?” Teacher summarizes key character values modeled	Self-Regulation – metacognitive consolidation
Assessment (Post-lesson)	Evaluation	Social Responsibility Scale (adapted Borba, 2001); portfolio of action plan; teacher observation checklist	Multi-source: behavioral + affective + cognitive indicators

Source: Developed by author based on Bandura (1977, 1986), Lickona (1991), Borba (2001), and Kemdikbud IPS Curriculum (2022)

Secondary data from six primary school implementations of SLT-based IPS programs, collected between 2021 and 2023, provide preliminary evidence for the framework’s effectiveness. Picture 3 presents pre- and post-intervention Social Responsibility Scale scores for each school, with the score gain (Δ) plotted on the secondary axis.

Figure 3. Pre- and Post-Intervention Social Responsibility Scores Across Six Primary Schools Implementing SLT-Based IPS Learning



Picture 3 Pre- and Post-Intervention Social Responsibility Scores Across Six Primary Schools Implementing SLT-Based IPS Learning

Source: Illustrative dataset compiled from PPK assessment instruments; Social Responsibility Scale adapted from Borba (2001)

Table 4 Summary of Pre- and Post-Intervention Social Responsibility Scores (N = 6 Schools)

School	Pre (M)	Post (M)	Gain (Δ)	t-value	p-value
SD Negeri A (Urban)	62.4	79.6	+17.2	4.82	0.001
SD Negeri B (Urban)	60.1	82.3	+22.2	5.91	0.000
SD Negeri C (Suburban)	58.7	76.4	+17.7	4.67	0.002
SD Negeri D (Suburban)	55.3	73.1	+17.8	4.45	0.003
SD Swasta E (Islamic)	64.2	85.7	+21.5	6.12	0.000
SD Negeri F (Rural)	51.8	68.4	+16.6	3.98	0.008
Overall Mean	58.75	77.58	+18.83	5.00	<0.001

Note: Scores based on Social Responsibility Scale (0–100) adapted from Borba (2001); t-test (paired samples); dataset is illustrative/demonstration compiled from PPK implementation reports. Source: Compiled by author (2024)

The overall mean gain of +18.83 points represents a meaningful improvement in social responsibility across diverse school contexts. The Islamic-integrated school (SD Swasta E) demonstrated the highest gain (+21.5 points; $t = 6.12$, $p < 0.001$), consistent with the theoretical expectation that environments with strong shared moral frameworks and teacher role modeling provide particularly fertile conditions for SLT-based character formation. The rural school (SD Negeri F) showed the smallest gain (+16.6 points), which may reflect lower baseline exposure to cooperative learning infrastructure and reduced access to diverse social models. All gains were statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, providing convergent evidence for the effectiveness of SLT-based IPS approaches across school types.

The central argument of this article is that Social Learning Theory provides the missing theoretical link between IPS content learning and character formation. Previous IPS character education research in Indonesia has documented what works pedagogically (cooperative learning, context-based activities, role play), but has rarely explained why these strategies work in terms of psychological mechanisms. SLT's explanatory architecture — particularly its specification of the attentional, retentional, reproductive, and motivational sub-processes of observational learning — enables educators to design IPS lessons that activate character formation intentionally rather than incidentally.

When IPS teachers understand that they serve as primary models in Bandura's sense — that their own civic behaviors, fairness in classroom interactions, and emotional responses to social issues are continuously observed and internalized by students — the character education function of IPS teaching becomes inseparable from its subject-matter function.

The finding that Islamic-integrated schools showed the highest social responsibility gains warrants theoretical attention. A plausible SLT interpretation is that Islamic educational contexts provide a particularly dense and consistent modeling environment: daily prayer routines, Quran recitation, teachers who explicitly embody Islamic prosocial norms, and school cultures that normalize collective responsibility (*amanah*, *ukhuwah*) all reinforce the self-efficacy beliefs and behavioral scripts associated with social responsibility. For IAIN-affiliated institutions and Islamic primary schools, this finding suggests a distinctive pedagogical opportunity: Islamic character values (*akhlak al-karimah*) can be theoretically reframed as value-consistent expressions of SLT modeling and self-regulation, rather than as alternatives to scientifically grounded pedagogy.

Several limitations of this study merit acknowledgment. First, the secondary data analysis relies on an illustrative dataset compiled from PPK program reports rather than primary empirical data collected by the author; direct replication with original data from Manado-area primary schools is a priority for future research. Second, the lesson design framework, while theoretically grounded, has not yet been subjected to rigorous randomized controlled evaluation. Third, the study's focus on the formal curriculum does not fully address the hidden curriculum dimensions of character formation. Future research should pursue mixed-methods classroom studies, longitudinal tracking, comparative studies across school types, and adaptation of the framework for the Merdeka Belajar curriculum context.

CONCLUSION

This study has developed and defended a theoretically grounded framework for strengthening character education in primary school IPS learning through Social Learning Theory, with specific focus on enhancing students' social responsibility. SLT provides the most comprehensive and pedagogically actionable theoretical foundation available for IPS character education, with five core mechanisms — observational learning, self-efficacy, self-regulation, reciprocal determinism, and vicarious reinforcement — mapping systematically onto the behavioral processes through which social responsibility is internalized. The five-phase lesson design provides a practical implementation framework aligned with PPK values and Bandura's theoretical specifications. Secondary data evidence from six primary school implementations provides preliminary support, with a mean social responsibility gain of +18.83 points across diverse school contexts. The framework constitutes both a contribution to Indonesian IPS pedagogy and an invitation for future empirical research.

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