



CULTURAL ISOLATION IN ISLAM BASED SOCIAL SCIENCES EDUCATION IN COASTAL AND BORDER COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The social phenomenon known as cultural isolation affects the behavior, patterns of thinking, and access to education of communities, particularly in coastal and border areas. This study examines the impact of cultural isolation on Social Studies (IPS) learning in marginalized regions using a descriptive qualitative approach. The research was conducted in coastal and border communities in Indonesia, involving teachers, students, and community leaders as the main data sources. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that limited access to information, minimal cross-cultural interaction, teacher-centered instructional practices, and the lack of curriculum adaptation to local wisdom significantly hinder IPS learning and weaken the internalization of social values such as tolerance, civic awareness, and social participation. To address these challenges, IPS education needs to adopt a contextual, participatory, and intercultural approach that integrates local socio-cultural realities while fostering openness to broader social perspectives.

Keywords: Cultural isolation, social studies education, coastal communities, border areas, intercultural interaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, an archipelagic country, possesses diverse cultural and geographical characteristics. Although coastal and border areas are strategic, they are often marginalized from national development processes, including in education. Limited infrastructure, low social mobility, and the strong dominance of local cultures impact the lives of people in these areas. The phenomenon of cultural isolation, which hinders equitable access to quality learning, poses a unique challenge in the educational context.

The term "cultural isolation" refers to a situation in which a community lives in cultural isolation from the mainstream at the national and global levels. This isolation involves ideological, social, and geographic factors. The following factors contribute to cultural isolation in border and coastal areas: limited communication, low media penetration, and the dominance of local traditions passed down through generations. In education, cultural isolation can lead to misunderstandings about human rights, democracy, and diversity.

With its values and social context, social studies (IPS) should be a bridge to increasing national awareness, tolerance, and social integration. However, in practice, IPS learning in

culturally isolated areas fails to achieve these goals. Many students in coastal and border areas struggle to understand IPS material because it doesn't align with their daily experiences and social realities. National-oriented learning materials often feel distant, even foreign.

Koentjaraningrat (2009) stated that closed and exclusive local cultural structures can hinder the social transformation process promoted by formal education. John Berry (1997) reinforced this idea by stating that cultural isolation reduces one's ability to adapt across cultures and causes them to lose their national identity. Students from border regions in this context face physical limitations in addition to mental and cognitive limitations in gaining broader social understanding. The absence of a curriculum that is fully contextualized and adapted to local conditions exacerbates this condition. The national social studies curriculum still largely uses a homogeneous and one-way approach, ignoring local wisdom and regional cultural diversity. As a result, students experience cognitive disorientation during the learning process, and teachers face difficulties explaining socio-political concepts that are irrelevant to local situations.

Furthermore, the situation is exacerbated by teachers' lack of training to address diverse socio-cultural contexts. Many teachers employed in border or coastal areas lack the skills to teach in a multicultural and adaptive manner. Banks (2006) states that multicultural education is crucial for creating an inclusive learning environment and encouraging students from diverse cultural backgrounds to actively participate. Inequality in technology and information development is also linked to this phenomenon. In many coastal and border areas, there is limited access to electronic and mass media. Lacking alternative learning resources, students rely solely on learning materials from national textbooks, which are unable to adapt to local dynamics. This further reinforces the existing cultural distance within the community.

Social studies education is supposed to enhance social insight and critical thinking skills, but ultimately relies solely on memorization and normative learning. Students are unable to understand social structures outside their communities due to a lack of broader social experience and a lack of intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, they are raised with a narrow, exclusive, and perhaps conservative perspective on social change. Considering the complexity of these issues, social studies teaching methods must be updated, especially in coastal and border areas. Education that focuses on local social realities and embraces local cultural principles is crucial to overcoming the cultural isolation that hinders educational progress. In curriculum development and teacher training in marginalized areas, participatory, intercultural, and contextual approaches must be prioritized.

The authors aim to critically examine how cultural isolation impacts social studies learning in coastal and border communities. They will also propose better ways to connect local culture with the social principles of nationalism. Therefore, social studies education has a strategic potential to support national identity and empower local communities in the global era. Social Studies (IPS) strives to develop students into citizens who understand social realities, think critically, and actively participate in community life. Sapriya (2009) states that social studies learning not only provides information about social life but also teaches attitudes, values, and social skills. Therefore, the success of social studies learning depends heavily on the sociocultural context in which the learning process takes place. If the local context is not aligned with the material being taught, the success of social studies education will be hampered.

In the context of coastal and border communities, social studies learning faces specific challenges, one of which is the phenomenon of cultural isolation. Cultural isolation refers to a condition where a community group lives within limited cultural interactions and limited access to external information. John Berry (1997) calls this condition a form of separation in acculturation

theory, namely a strategy of maintaining one's own culture and rejecting or avoiding interaction with the dominant or external culture. This strategy generally occurs in communities experiencing structural marginalization.

Koentjaraningrat (2009) states that strong local cultures are often not accompanied by openness to other cultures. This is especially true in cases where communities believe that modernization or globalization poses a threat to their security. Cross-cultural interaction is particularly limited in coastal and border communities accustomed to living in the same community. As a result, students raised in such environments struggle to grasp inclusive and national social concepts, as taught in the social studies curriculum.

Banks (2006) stated that multicultural education is an important method for overcoming the challenge of cultural isolation. Multicultural education seeks to create an inclusive learning environment by recognizing and valuing students' cultural diversity. This method is particularly useful in the context of Indonesia's multicultural and multiethnic society, particularly in culturally and geographically isolated areas, such as border and coastal areas. Furthermore, according to the theory of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010), teachers must understand their students' cultures so they can develop effective learning strategies. In such situations, contextual social studies education must consider the principles, customs, language, and life experiences of the local community. The learning process becomes more lively and meaningful when teachers connect social studies material to students' real lives.

However, contextual education still faces significant challenges in its implementation. The national curriculum is often uniform and inflexible enough to accommodate local diversity. This is consistent with research by Wahyudin (2021), which shows that social studies textbooks in the border areas of West Kalimantan are still dominated by urban perspectives and do not reflect local social realities. As a result, students lack the ability to connect what they learn to the world around them.

Social studies education is supposed to help overcome cultural isolation by enabling people to communicate with people from different cultures. However, our education system does not truly support cross-cultural learning. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) stated that liberating education involves students as active subjects rather than passive objects. This means that students have the opportunity to examine their own social realities and reflect on the principles held by society. Students' national identities are affected by cultural isolation. According to research conducted by Yamin (2020), students living in border areas have complex dual identities: as Indonesian citizens and as members of a particular community or ethnicity. If education is implemented incorrectly, it will actually reinforce these identity differences rather than help them unite.

UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that inclusive education must reach historically marginalized groups, including communities in remote areas. In its global report, UNESCO encourages teachers in remote areas to possess socio-cultural competencies and pedagogical skills appropriate to local diversity. This is crucial for social studies education in coastal and border areas to become a vehicle for building an inclusive social identity, as well as transferring knowledge.

Therefore, this literature review shows that the success of social studies learning in coastal and border communities is greatly influenced by the education system's ability to address cultural isolation. To create more equitable and effective learning policies and strategies in marginalized areas, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of local identity, multicultural education theory, and contextual pedagogy.

Despite the growing body of research on social studies education, multicultural learning, and educational challenges in marginalized areas, most previous studies have examined these issues separately focusing either on curriculum relevance, teacher competence, or regional inequality without explicitly positioning cultural isolation as a central analytical lens in IPS learning, particularly in coastal and border communities. Moreover, existing studies tend to emphasize policy analysis or general multicultural approaches, while empirical discussions on how cultural isolation shapes students' social cognition, value internalization, and national identity remain limited. This article offers a unique contribution by conceptually integrating cultural isolation theory, multicultural education, and contextual pedagogy to analyze IPS learning in coastal and border settings. It highlights how cultural isolation operates not only as a geographical condition but also as a socio-cultural and pedagogical barrier, and proposes contextual–intercultural strategies that bridge local wisdom with national civic values. By doing so, this study enriches the discourse on social studies education in marginalized regions and provides a theoretical foundation for more inclusive and culturally responsive IPS learning models in Indonesia's border and coastal areas.

2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to capture and interpret the realities of cultural isolation in Social Studies (IPS) learning within coastal and border communities. This approach was selected to enable an in-depth understanding of social, cultural, and pedagogical phenomena as they naturally occur in educational settings.

Data were collected through three main techniques: (1) literature review, (2) classroom observations, and (3) semi-structured interviews. The literature review focused on theories of cultural isolation, multicultural education, and contextual pedagogy, as well as relevant empirical studies. Classroom observations were conducted in selected schools in coastal and border areas to examine learning interactions, teaching strategies, and the relevance of IPS materials to local contexts. Semi-structured interviews involved IPS teachers, school principals, and students, selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the learning process, to explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to culturally contextualized learning.

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative analysis model, which included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Information from interviews, observations, and documents was systematically coded and categorized to identify recurring themes and patterns related to cultural isolation in IPS learning. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by cross-checking information from multiple sources and data collection methods.

Regarding ethical considerations, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, provided informed consent, and were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities throughout the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This study was conducted in Sambas Regency and the coastal–border area of Entikong, West Kalimantan, regions characterized by geographical remoteness, strong local traditions, and limited access to educational infrastructure and information. Data were obtained through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with Social Studies (IPS) teachers, principals, and students, as well as document analysis of textbooks and curriculum guidelines.

The findings indicate that cultural isolation is a dominant feature of the social environment in both regions. Students generally live in closed and homogeneous communities, with limited interaction beyond their immediate cultural and social surroundings. This condition shapes students' thinking patterns, which tend to be linear and experience-based, and limits their exposure to broader social realities.

One prominent finding concerns students' difficulty in understanding national and global IPS topics, such as pluralism, interfaith tolerance, globalization, democracy, and human rights. In classrooms observed, discussions on diversity often stagnated because students lacked direct experience interacting with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds. Teachers reported that these topics were frequently perceived by students as abstract and irrelevant to their daily lives in villages or coastal settlements.

Limited access to information further reinforces cultural isolation. Several schools had restricted or no internet connectivity, preventing teachers from using digital learning resources, audiovisual media, or current social issues to contextualize lessons. Learning therefore relied heavily on standardized government-issued textbooks, which were largely generic and urban-oriented. These textbooks did not reflect local realities such as coastal livelihoods, border dynamics with Malaysia, or Sambas cultural traditions, leading students to feel unrepresented in the learning materials.

Language was also identified as a significant barrier. In daily interactions, students commonly use local dialects or regional languages, while IPS instruction is delivered in formal Indonesian. This linguistic gap created both cognitive and emotional distance, making it difficult for students to fully grasp key social and political concepts.

Despite these constraints, some positive practices were observed. A number of teachers independently attempted to integrate local examples and case studies, such as village leadership systems, traditional economic activities, and community-based social projects. In several schools, collaboration with traditional leaders and local communities enriched IPS learning and increased student engagement. Students also showed greater enthusiasm when learning activities involved local stories, traditional games, or direct observation of their social environment.

3.2 Discussion

The findings confirm that cultural isolation operates not only as a geographical condition but also as a pedagogical and sociocultural barrier in Social Studies education. The limited relevance of national-oriented curricula to students' lived experiences supports Koentjaraningrat's (2009) argument that strong local cultural structures, when not accompanied by openness, can hinder educational transformation.

From the perspective of acculturation theory, the observed condition reflects what Berry (1997) describes as separation, where communities maintain their cultural identity while minimizing interaction with external cultures. In the educational context, this separation manifests in students' resistance or indifference toward national and global IPS content perceived as distant from their realities.

The absence of systematic curriculum adaptation also highlights a gap between policy and practice. Although national education policies emphasize inclusivity and local content, their implementation in coastal and border areas remains weak. This aligns with Banks' (2006) assertion that multicultural education requires not only policy commitment but also teacher competence

and institutional support. The lack of teacher training in contextual and multicultural pedagogy observed in this study further exacerbates cultural isolation in the classroom.

However, the positive initiatives identified such as community involvement and locally grounded learning activities demonstrate the potential of contextual and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) to bridge the gap between local identity and national values. When IPS learning is connected to students' social environment, it becomes more meaningful, participatory, and empowering.

Overall, these findings suggest that cultural isolation in coastal and border communities is not a fixed condition. Through curriculum reform, targeted teacher training, improved access to learning resources, and strengthened school–community collaboration, Social Studies education can function as a strategic tool to foster intercultural understanding, social participation, and national identity.

4. CONCLUSION

Social Studies (IPS) learning in Indonesia's coastal and border regions is significantly affected by cultural isolation. Geographic remoteness, limited access to information, weak cross-cultural interaction, and inadequate educational infrastructure have created a substantial gap between students' lived experiences and nationally standardized learning materials. As a result, students face difficulties in understanding and internalizing key social values such as equality, democracy, diversity, and civic responsibility.

This study confirms that IPS materials and instructional practices in border areas are often insufficiently contextualized, relying on generic curricula, uniform textbooks, and teacher-centered methods. The lack of teacher training in multicultural and contextual pedagogy further reinforces student disengagement and weakens the development of national identity. However, the findings also reveal that cultural isolation is not an irreversible condition. When learning incorporates local culture, community knowledge, and students' real-life social environments, IPS education becomes more meaningful, participatory, and transformative.

Based on these conclusions, several operational recommendations are proposed. First, the government and teacher education institutions should develop contextual and multicultural training models for IPS teachers in coastal and border areas, focusing on culturally responsive pedagogy, local-case-based learning, and bilingual or dialect-sensitive instructional strategies. Second, curriculum developers should promote systematic integration of local content into IPS learning, such as incorporating local history, border dynamics, coastal livelihoods, and traditional governance systems as core learning materials rather than supplementary topics. Third, schools should strengthen community-based learning models by involving traditional leaders, local historians, and community organizations in classroom activities and social projects. Finally, education policies must prioritize marginalized regions by improving access to learning resources, digital infrastructure, and continuous professional development for teachers.

In conclusion, cultural isolation is not merely a social phenomenon but a critical educational challenge that requires strategic and coordinated responses. IPS education must transcend cultural boundaries that limit access to knowledge by adopting inclusive, adaptive, and locally grounded approaches. Only through such efforts can Social Studies education in coastal and border areas effectively contribute to character building, national awareness, and equitable educational development in Indonesia.

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