

From Reflection to Responsibility: A Conceptual Framework for Ethics and Value Formation in Social Studies Education

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Abstract: From Reflection to Responsibility: A Conceptual Framework for Ethics and Value Formation in Social Studies Education. **Objective:** This study aims to analyze the role of reflective thinking in strengthening students' values and ethics, particularly within the context of Social Studies Education. The focus is directed toward identifying relevant pedagogical strategies to enhance reflective thinking skills as a foundation for character formation and responsible citizenship in the 21st century. **Method:** This study employed a qualitative approach through a conceptual review designed to synthesize diverse literature related to reflective thinking, ethical education, and Social Studies pedagogy. The synthesis aims to construct a new conceptual framework that explains the interrelation between reflective thinking, ethical education, and the development of students' moral and character values. **Findings:** The literature synthesis suggests that reflective thinking skills can be effectively developed through problem-based, project-based, and collaborative learning methods, supported by integrating digital technology to promote ongoing reflection. The process of strengthening values and ethics requires the integration of ethical content into learning materials, the implementation of character-based learning, the utilization of digital technology in reflective learning, and educators' moral exemplification. Within the context of Social Studies Education, Kolb's Reflective Model provides a practical framework linking experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application, enabling students to develop reflective thinking skills to analyze values, social issues, and ethical dimensions. **Conclusion:** Implementing learning practices that emphasize reflective thinking has the potential to produce graduates who not only master theoretical knowledge but also possess ethical awareness, character values, and civic competence in higher education. Further empirical research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of reflective learning models and their long-term impact on students' character formation.

Keywords: reflective thinking skills, values, ethics, social studies education, character development.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Social studies education can play an important role in shaping character through strengthening values and ethics among students in higher education. By engaging with the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of human life, social studies fosters students'

understanding of society and the wider world. This aligns with the university's role in shaping students to become more critical, responsible, and ethical individuals. The latest trend shows a shift towards a reflective-critical approach that emphasizes the integration of values, ethics, and character in the learning process (Hart, 2022;

Mohamed et al., 2022; Murphy et al., 2023; Purwaningsih, 2024; Susilo et al., 2022), including social studies (El Faisal et al, 2018; Klafke et al, 2025; Yildiz, 2023). In this context, social studies education is expected to cultivate essential thinking skills, enabling students to become reflective and responsible citizens. As Berson et al. (2017), Brookfield (2022), and Sheppard & Grosland (2015) argue, studying the social sciences at the university level fosters critical and reflective thinking to analyze complex social, political, and economic problems. Similarly, Feola (2015), Giddens & Griffiths (2006), Loorbach et al. (2017), highlight the importance of understanding social dynamics and change, while Avery & Barton (2017), Banks (2006), and Zummi et al. (2020), emphasize that social studies education serves as a foundational medium for cultivating democratic citizenship and civic responsibility. Furthermore, Abiddin (2024) and Noddings (2013) underscore the significance of ethical reflection grounded in empathy and care as a means of nurturing students' moral awareness and social responsibility. Taken together, these perspectives inform pedagogical strategies aimed at strengthening students' values and ethics within the social studies contexts of higher education.

Integrating ethical values, such as justice, responsibility, integrity, and empathy, in social studies education is essential for developing students' moral character and ethics (Banks, 2006; Davies, 2020; Khairani & Aulia, 2025; Löfström & Tammela, 2023). Strengthening ethics in this context not only provides theoretical knowledge but also shapes character and encourages ethical behavior (De Cremer & Moore, 2020; Hafferty & Franks, 1994; Tenbrunsel & Chugh, 2015). Recent research has demonstrated that educators' beliefs, attitudes, and commitment to ethics are crucial in fostering ethical awareness and decision-making (Balakrishnan et al., 2022; Biniaminov & Moshel, 2025; Lehnert et al., 2016; Sibarani, 2024). A culture of ethical responsibility can therefore

significantly influence students' behavior (Andriyanto et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022). However, although the literature widely acknowledges the importance of ethics and values in education (Parandeh et al., 2015; Luthar & Karri, 2005; Kaddoura & Al Hussein, 2023), there has been limited research explicitly examining how reflective thinking can be systematically integrated into social studies education to reinforce values and ethics. Most existing studies either focus on the general importance of ethical education or highlight critical thinking without adequately addressing the reflective dimension as a pedagogical bridge between knowledge and ethical practice. This gap highlights the need for further empirical and conceptual research on reflective thinking as a pathway to character development.

One effective way to strengthen values and ethics is by cultivating reflective thinking skills, which involve contemplating experiences or information to understand their meaning and implications (Dewey, 1933; Kimball & Daniel, 2020; Zidny et al., 2020). Reflective thinking enables students to evaluate their actions and decisions in light of ethical principles, fostering empathy, justice, and integrity (Noddings, 2013; Campbell, 2003; Van Baveren et al., 2018). In the context of social studies education, reflective thinking connects acquired knowledge with personal experiences and broader social values, enabling students to internalize ethics in their daily lives. This is relevant to the essence of social studies education, which seeks to encourage students to be actively involved in processing contextual information, demonstrating social care, and generating creative ideas and solutions for various social problems in society (Matias, 2020; Mensah, 2020; Pernantah et al., 2022). At the higher education level, strengthening values and ethics through reflective thinking becomes particularly crucial, as this stage represents a formative period in the development of a professional identity and the cultivation of adult

civic responsibility. University students are in a transitional phase between adolescence and adulthood, where they begin to construct ethical frameworks that will guide their professional practices and social participation (Budwig & Alexander, 2020; Wilczenski et al., 2017). Reflective engagement enables them to integrate disciplinary knowledge with moral reasoning, shaping them into professionals who are not only competent but also socially responsible (Laasch et al., 2023; Rebecchi et al., 2024). Furthermore, higher education plays a pivotal role in cultivating active democratic citizenship by fostering critical awareness, ethical sensitivity, and a sense of collective responsibility (Jakubik, 2023; Karamanoli, 2023). While contemporary research has examined experiential and project-based learning as vehicles for civic education, there remains a limited articulation of how *Kolb's experiential learning cycle* and *Dewey's reflective model* can be systematically applied to strengthen ethics in higher education classrooms. Thus, embedding reflective thinking in social studies pedagogy at the university level is crucial for bridging ethical understanding with civic agency, thereby preparing students to act responsibly within complex social realities. This article, therefore, offers a state-of-the-art contribution by synthesizing theoretical models of reflective thinking with practical strategies for ethics education in social studies.

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptual integration of reflective thinking as a pedagogical strategy to strengthen students' values and ethics within higher education social studies. Unlike previous research that has predominantly focused on ethics as curriculum content or professional standards, this article positions reflective thinking as an active and developmental process that connects learning experiences with ethical reasoning and social responsibility. By advancing this perspective, the study contributes to ongoing debates in ethics education by proposing a conceptual framework that utilizes reflective

practices, particularly those embedded in problem-based, project-based, and collaborative learning, to cultivate ethically responsible, socially engaged, and critically reflective citizens. Within this conceptual scope, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How can reflective thinking skills be effectively developed in higher education social studies contexts? (2) What pedagogical strategies can be implemented to strengthen values and ethics in education? Moreover, (3) In what ways can reflective thinking serve as a foundation for reinforcing ethical awareness and value formation among students?. These questions guide the synthesis of theoretical and pedagogical insights to propose a holistic model for integrating reflective thinking into ethics and values education in higher education.

■ METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual review design to explore and synthesize existing theories and scholarly discussions concerning the development of reflective thinking as a pedagogical foundation for strengthening values and ethics in higher education social studies. The conceptual review approach is deemed appropriate for this study because it allows for an integrative synthesis to generate a new theoretical framework that advances the discourse on ethics and values education (Kivunja, 2018; Schreiber & Cramer, 2024; Webster, J., et al, 2002).

Research Design

The conceptual review design employed in this study aims to build a theoretically informed framework that connects reflective thinking with ethical values. This study further innovates the review process by integrating theoretical perspectives, such as Dewey's reflective thinking and Kolb's experiential learning, with contemporary values education frameworks, into a synthesized model that connects reflective thinking with ethical and character development

in higher education. This methodological approach ensures a rigorous and transparent process while providing a conceptual contribution that advances the discourse on reflective thinking in social studies education.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, to ensure the credibility and breadth of reviewed sources. The search covered publications employing key terms such as reflective thinking, values education, ethics in higher education, civic responsibility, and social studies pedagogy. The search process was iterative and reflexive, allowing the inclusion of both classical theoretical works and recent empirical studies that contribute to the development of a conceptual understanding of reflective thinking in ethics education. A comprehensive search strategy was conducted across peer-reviewed journals, books, and relevant academic documents, with careful attention to the credibility and relevance of the selected sources. The literature review process followed established stages, including: (1) identifying and refining the research topic; (2) conducting a systematic search of academic databases and scholarly sources; (3) critically evaluating and selecting relevant studies; (4) synthesizing findings through thematic and conceptual analysis; and (5) writing the review in alignment with the article structure (Rowley, J., et al, 2004).

Data Analysis

The analysis employed a thematic and conceptual synthesis approach to identify recurring ideas, conceptual relationships, and theoretical contributions within the selected literature. Data were organized around three analytical dimensions: (1) the development of reflective thinking skills, (2) the pedagogical

strengthening of values and ethics, and (3) the integration of reflective thinking as a mechanism for ethical and civic development. Through an iterative reading and synthesis process, the study constructed an integrative conceptual model that illustrates how reflective thinking can serve as a pedagogical bridge between ethical reasoning, character formation, and social responsibility in higher education.

■ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Development of Reflective Thinking Skills

Reflective thinking is the process of reviewing experiences, identifying what has been learned, and how those experiences can be applied for future improvement. Reflective thinking is also the act of actively, persistently, and carefully considering every belief or form of knowledge it holds (Dewey, 1933; Saric & Steh, 2017; Titus & Muttungal, 2024). In addition, reflective thinking can also help students internalize the principles of values and ethics by encouraging them to think deeply about the actions and consequences of those actions (Dahl et al, 2018; Mezirow, 1991). Chen & Seng (1992) emphasized that reflective thinking can occur from the interaction between critical and creative thinking in the context of integrated thinking. To face the challenges of the 21st century skills (critical thinking, which is the ability to think rationally to determine what to believe or do) need to be developed so that students have adaptive attitudes and behaviors in society (Alam, 2022; Chusni et al., 2020; González-Salamanca et al., 2020; Njui, 2017; Supriatna et al., 2024).

Dewey (1933) proposed that reflective thinking should be driven by the educational process. Following Dewey, Baron's research (1981) proposed a general normative model of the reflective thinking phase in education, namely problem recognition, enumeration of possibilities, reasoning, revision, and evaluation. This model outlines a series of steps that educators can follow to consider a problem or situation in a reflective

manner. Here is a brief explanation of each phase in the model:

1. **Problem Recognition:** The first phase in reflective thinking is recognizing a problem. This stage involves being aware of a problem or situation that requires further thinking. This step is important because without recognizing the problem, one cannot initiate a reflective thought process.
2. **Enumeration of Possibilities:** After recognizing the problem, the next step is to identify various possible solutions or approaches that can be taken to address the issue. This will involve gathering as much information as possible about the situation and thinking creatively, innovatively, and reflexively about ways to solve the problem.
3. **Reasoning:** After identifying the various possibilities, the next stage is to conduct in-depth reasoning or analysis of each option that has been tried to be considered. This involves evaluating the pros and cons of any solutions that have been developed, as well as considering the long-term impact and implications of any actions that may be taken.
4. **Revision:** This stage is revision, which is when a person reconsiders the approach or solution they have previously identified. It can also change or modify the solution based on new

information or more in-depth, reflective thinking about the problem.

5. **Evaluation:** The final step in this model is evaluation, where one reassesses all the options that have been considered and chooses the most appropriate solution that suits the needs, values, and ethics. This involves considering the consequences of any possible actions taken and ensuring that the chosen solution is the best.

This model provides a useful framework for individuals who want to consider a problem or situation reflectively. By following the steps outlined in this model, one can ensure that they have considered all relevant aspects of the problem and selected the most suitable solution. This model can also be applied in the educational process in higher education. This is certainly relevant because, in terms of personality, students tend to think and act in accordance with more reflective considerations of values and ethics. Another research was also conducted by Choy et al. (2017), Yilmaz & Keser (2016), and Van Baveren et al. (2018), who tried to formulate a conceptual framework related to what factors can encourage the development of reflective thinking skills, where this skill is considered important to develop in education. This study aims to utilize research on reflective thinking to a conceptual framework, as illustrated in the following figure.

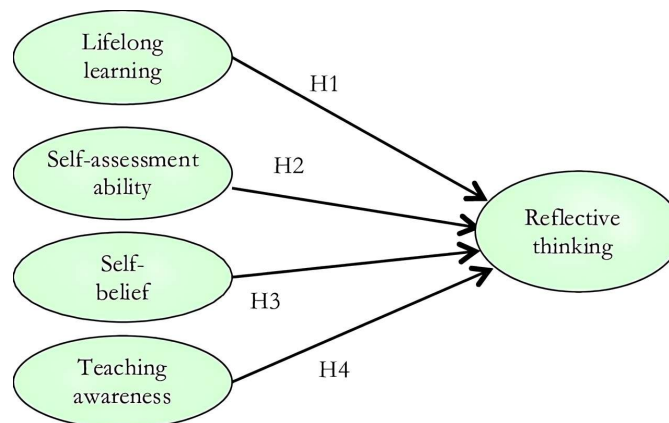


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the development of reflective thinking

The figure above illustrates the conceptual framework related to the influence of developing lifelong learning skills, self-assessment ability, self-belief, and teaching awareness on reflective thinking skills. The conceptual framework construction is based on the research of Choy et al. (2017), which is derived from the studies of Sparks-Langer & Colton (1991), Hamilton (2005), and Choy & Oo (2012). The framework can certainly be applied in the educational process in higher education. First, lifelong learning skills are abilities that allow students to continue learning and adapting throughout their lives. This skill is essential in the development of reflective thinking because the two support and reinforce each other. By being able to adapt and receive a variety of new information, students will be able to reflect and reassess their views and actions. As Kolb (2014) explains, lifelong learning involves continuous learning, which in turn fosters reflective thinking by encouraging individuals to constantly reassess their beliefs and actions. Second, the ability to self-assess is the capacity to evaluate oneself, which is also a crucial component in the development of reflective thinking skills. This ability allows individuals to critically reflect on their own understandings, thought processes, and actions. Self-assessment enhances self-awareness, which serves as the foundation for reflective thinking, as it enables individuals to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and identify areas for improvement (London et al., 2023; Chon & Sitkin, 2021; Panadero et al., 2016; Schön, 2017).

Furthermore, the third factor, namely self-belief, helps individuals feel more confident in evaluating experiences and learning from mistakes (Bandura, 1997; Lawson et al., 2019), as self-belief is a crucial factor in the development of reflective thinking. Self-confidence encourages motivation for lifelong learning, continuous self-improvement, and strengthens commitment to be reflective (Dabuke et al., 2023; Dweck, 2006; Warsah et al., 2024). For this reason, increasing

self-confidence and confidence in oneself can strengthen an individual's ability to develop deep and meaningful reflective thinking. Fourth, teaching awareness can also play an important role in the development of reflective thinking for educators and students. By increasing self-awareness in teaching practice, educators can enhance the quality of their teaching and provide more constructive feedback that encourages students to develop reflective skills. Constructive feedback can also provide insight and encourage students to reflect on their performance, striving to improve continuously (Adarkwah, 2021; Hattie, 2008). Educators who apply reflective thinking practices in their teaching not only improve teaching methods and quality but can also encourage students to be actively involved in the reflective thinking process (Beauchamp, 2015; Loughran, 2002; Sage & Sele, 2015; Tsingos et al., 2015).

Facing the challenges of the 21st century, individuals should adopt skills that were previously not appreciated much, such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and reflective thinking (Akpur, 2020; Thornhill-Miller et al, 2023). For this reason, the development of reflective thinking skills is a continuous and relevant competency development process to be strengthened through various educational strategies in the 21st century. The development of reflective thinking skills can also be done through learning processes that are relevant at this time, such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, collaborative learning, to integrating technology in learning that allows students to document and reflect on their learning continuously. In addition, by encouraging self-awareness, building reflective habits, providing constructive feedback, integrating various experiential learning approaches, creating a supportive learning environment, and utilizing technology, students can develop reflective thinking skills that positively impact character development and strengthen their values and ethics in higher education.

Strengthening Values and Ethics in Education

Strengthening values and ethics in education plays an important role in shaping the character and morals of students. During increasingly complex and dynamic living conditions, strengthening values and ethics is becoming increasingly important to ensure that future generations are still able to have integrity, social responsibility, and the ability to make ethical decisions. Lickona (1992), Marzuki (2025), and Sharma (2024) argue that character education, which encompasses strengthening values and ethics, plays a crucial role in shaping students' personalities and characters, instilling important moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy. Strengthening values and ethics can also help students reduce negative behaviors such as cheating, bullying, and other unethical actions, thereby creating a safer, more inclusive, and moral learning environment (Gamage et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2021; Lavy, 2020; Nucci et al., 2008). He further explained, when students develop emotionally and morally, they will change their character as moral individuals (Nucci et al., 2018).

Strengthening values has become an integral part of the educational process, which can consider objects and viewpoints of moral or non-moral, aesthetics, and personal tastes, as well as ethics, namely judging right or wrong in relationships between individuals (Gamage et al., 2021; Hakam, 2007; Zidny et al, 2020). Learning with value reinforcement is expected to have an impact on students, enabling them to acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enhance their understanding of their environment in accordance with the competencies outlined in Social Sciences Education (Wiyanarti et al., 2017). Exploring and understanding the values that are strengthened in the educational process can certainly also enhance the quality of thinking, including reflective thinking. The strengthening of universal values is, in principle, supported by all individuals from various backgrounds, including religious, belief,

social, and cultural, which can be achieved through the process of character education (Komalasari et al., 2022). This is because strengthening values in education is an effort to instill and integrate moral and ethical values into the learning process. Reinforcing ethical values in education will enable learners to prepare for moral challenges in everyday life, allowing them to make informed, ethical, and responsible decisions (Head, 2020; Obizue et al., 2025; Rest, 1986).

It differs slightly from the strengthening of values in that the strengthening of ethics in education refers explicitly to the reinforcement of moral principles and rules that help students distinguish between right and wrong (i.e., ethical and unethical). Within this context, a reflective learning model enables students to navigate ethical dilemmas by critically examining their assumptions, evaluating alternative courses of action, and making informed moral judgments grounded in empathy, fairness, and social responsibility (Lehnert et al., 2016; Setiawan, 2024; Zhu, 2018). Strengthening ethics in education can encourage students to understand and appreciate their social responsibilities, learn to contribute positively to society and the environment around them (Noddings, 2002). Strengthening ethics in education is not only related to the education of moral values, but also forms a mindset and behavior of students that reflects integrity and ethics in every aspect of life. Integrity and ethics can be the primary keys to building a just and harmonious society. There is a view that a gap exists between the instillation of good and correct values in the educational process; however, society, as an educational field where education is practiced, has not fully provided the correct ethical values as the basis for education (Annur et al., 2021).

For this reason, strengthening ethics is viewed as a sustainability challenge in higher education, with a focus on assessing both ethical and unethical behavior to increase students' ethical

awareness and encourage more ethical behavior (Tormo-Carbó et al., 2018). In addition, in understanding students' perceptions of problems and ethical values, it is also essential to design lecture strategies to develop students' reflective competencies (Arries, 2020). The process of strengthening ethics in students cannot be accomplished instantly but requires a continuous approach, starting from the introduction of values to the behavior they exhibit (Tas'adi, 2016). Strengthening values and ethics in education can be done with various approaches, such as: 1) integration of ethical values in lectures; 2) character-based learning approach; 3) the integration of technology in learning values and ethics; 4) exemplary educators. These various approaches can be understood in the following description:

Integration of ethical values in learning

The integration of values in the learning process is an important approach that can shape the character of students. Values can be integrated into various learning, especially Social Studies Education. This is particularly relevant, as noted by Banks (2016), who emphasizes the importance of an inclusive and responsive approach to cultural differences and values in social studies education, aiming to cultivate qualified and ethical citizens in a multicultural society. Social studies education that integrates values can help students understand the importance of moral and ethical values in the social context of society (Stoddard, 2013). Furthermore, the integration of ethical values can also be incorporated into Social Sciences Education, which encourages students to develop integrity and social responsibility. Westheimer et al. (2004) highlighted the need for social studies education that not only emphasizes the understanding of concepts but also encourages the strengthening of moral ethics. Davis (2017) also emphasizes the importance of social studies education that challenges students to reflect on moral and ethical values in every decision make.

Character-based learning approach

The character-based learning approach emphasizes the development of student character through learning that involves moral and ethical values. Character-based learning approaches can be realized through various forms of learning, such as project-based and experiential learning, which help students internalize values through direct experience (Thomas, 2000). For this reason, learning that is relevant to current learning approaches can be implemented, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, direct experience, collaborative learning, and others. Ryan et al. (1999) also highlighted the importance of a learning environment that supports the development of students' character through an active learning approach and direct experience.

Integration of technology in learning values and ethics

The integration of technology in strengthening values and ethics in education is also an important step in utilizing the positive potential of technology to support the development of students' character and skills. This approach can utilize digital simulations and online platforms that enable students to explore and reflect on issues related to ethical values (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). In this technological era, educators must be creative with online or technology-based learning (Wiyanarti et al., 2020). In addition, during the process of learning values and ethics, digital teaching media such as e-books, interactive multimedia, social media, and virtual reality are used to facilitate discussions, share views, and promote self-reflection, thereby facilitating the internalization of ethical values among students.

Educator's role model

Strengthening values and ethics in students is inseparable from the exemplary behavior (role model) of educators who set examples, such as the word "guru," which means "digugu" and "ditiru". In this Javanese philosophy, "digugu"

refers to the educator's accountability. At the same time, "ditiru" is the attitude and actions of educators can be an example for their students. Educators act as role models for their students, and educator behavior can significantly influence the moral and ethical development of students (Lickona, 1992). When educators practice what they say, they have set a strong example of integrity and honesty for their students (Khon, 1999; Pradesa et al., 2021). In addition, Avci (2017) and Ryan et al. (1999) also noted that educators who integrate moral and ethical values into their learning practices can help students see the relevance of these values in their own lives. By serving as a good role model, educators can have a significant impact on strengthening students' values and ethics (Jumatullailah et al., 2024; Pongpalilu & Aslan, 2025). This educator's example not only integrates values important to students but also inspires them to apply these values in their lives and society. Educators in social studies must possess advanced reflective facilitation competencies, encompassing ethical sensitivity, pedagogical skill, socio-emotional intelligence, and critical inquiry to guide students in connecting personal reflection with values and ethical responsibilities (Cleovoulou & Beach, 2019; Loeffen, 2021; Maharjan, 2023; Rajendran, 2020; Sasere & Matashu, 2025). Consequently, lecturer professional development in Indonesia should shift toward cultivating reflective pedagogical competence through ethical facilitation, dialogic instruction, and experiential learning design, aligning with Indonesia's educational framework to foster ethically grounded and socially responsible students.

In the context of social studies education, the development of critical thinking can encourage the strengthening of values and ethics in students at this university, thereby shaping their character in accordance with the study of Social Studies Education in higher education, which covers topics related to ethical values, human rights,

social justice, and civic responsibility (being a good citizen). Social studies education is also part of learning whose main responsibility is to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to participate in community life, both at the local, national, and global levels (Al-Maamari, 2016; Wahyuni et al., 2023). In addition, integrating ethical issues and themes of social justice into education helps students understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens of society (Banks, 2006; Schulze et al., 2017).

Reflective Thinking Skills for Strengthening Values and Ethics

Strengthening values and ethics through the development of reflective thinking is one alternative approach to instilling character values in students, including in Social Sciences Education. Through Social Studies Education, reflective thinking skills enable students to connect knowledge to personal experiences and broader social values (Kohlberg, 1981). Reflective thinking skills, which are fundamental in the education profession, have also become essential for social studies education students. Several previous researches have proven that education that prioritizes reflective thinking skills in the process is able to create reflective learning for students to learn the things they are facing, assume, assess, behave, and apply their understanding which is considered very good, because if this takes place continuously, in the end the thinking activity will lead to a change in thinking and a deeper understanding until finally solving problems in supporting Education for Sustainable Development (Gül et al., 2021; Jessa, 2023; Ningrum et al., 2021; Schijf et al., 2023; Widiansyah, 2021).

Learning that involves reflective thinking is believed to be effective in instilling students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Muhammad et al., 2015). The importance of developing reflective thinking in social studies

education is also strengthened by Barr et al. (1977), revealing three traditions related to social studies, namely: a) social studies as a transfer of citizenship; b) social studies as social sciences; and c) social studies as reflective thinking. Strengthening reflective thinking skills will help social studies students better understand their values, ethics, and behavior, enabling them to comprehend the social context of society.

Dewey (1933) asserted that individuals do not learn merely from experience, but through reflection on that experience. This epistemological stance underscores that reflection is central to meaningful learning. In the context of social studies education, reflective learning offers a pedagogical pathway to strengthen students' ethical awareness and value orientation through systematic engagement with experiences. Reflective learning

emphasizes the dynamic process of interpreting experience to produce deeper understanding and transformative insight. David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, since 1984, provides a foundational structure for reflective learning through four interrelated stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation, thereby forming a continuous learning cycle. When combined with the reflective thinking theory of Choy et al. (2017), these stages provide a conceptual foundation for developing reflective thinking as a medium for ethical and value formation in social studies education. The integration of these frameworks is represented in the Reflective Thinking for Ethical and Value Formation (RT-EVF) model (Figure 2).

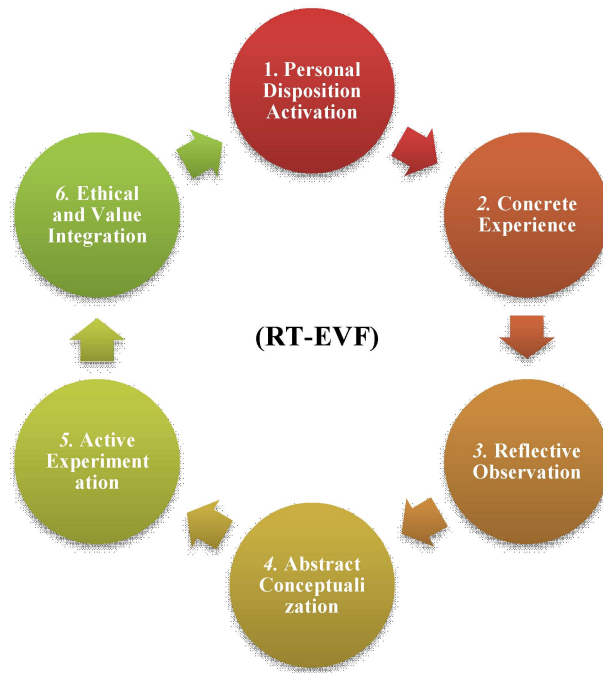


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of reflective thinking for ethical and value formation (RT-EVF)

The implementation of the RT-EVF conceptual framework in social studies education involves a series of concrete activities designed to integrate experiential learning, reflective thinking, and ethical formation. This framework synthesizes ideas from Kolb (2014), Choy et al.

(2017), and the principles of values in social studies education. Each stage of the model facilitates students' reflective engagement with social realities and promotes the internalization of ethical values through iterative learning processes, as can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Implementation framework of RT–EVF in social studies education

No	Stage of learning	Learning process
1	Personal Disposition Activation	<p>This initial stage develops students' reflective readiness through the reinforcement of lifelong learning, self-assessment, self-belief, and teaching awareness. Learning activities emphasize reflective preparation through value discussions, personal value mapping, and self-assessment exercises that help students recognize their strengths, weaknesses, and ethical tendencies. These activities cultivate self-belief, continuous learning orientation, and pedagogical awareness in interpreting social realities.</p> <p>Reflective questions: What values do you consider important in your social life? How do you assess yourself and relate it to current social conditions?</p>
2	Concrete Experience	<p>This stage provides authentic learning experiences as the foundation for reflection. Students may conduct field visits to traditional markets, social institutions, or historical sites to observe social interactions, economic activities, and cooperative practices. These experiences serve as tangible contexts for subsequent reflection.</p> <p>Reflective questions: What real-life experiences were most meaningful to you? What lessons and reflections can you derive from your observations?</p>
3	Reflective Observation	<p>Students revisit their experiences to identify and analyze emerging values. Reflective journals, group discussions, or gallery walks of field observations can be employed to encourage students to evaluate ethical aspects of their experiences. This process sharpens moral reasoning and reflective awareness toward social issues.</p> <p>Reflective questions: What ethical or social values can you identify from your experiences? How would you evaluate these actions from an ethical standpoint?</p>
4	Abstract Conceptualization	<p>At this stage, students connect their reflections with theoretical perspectives in social studies. Teachers may facilitate this through literature review, academic debates, or critical discourse sessions. Students develop theoretical generalizations that explain social phenomena through reflective reasoning, thereby reinforcing ethical and intellectual reasoning.</p> <p>Reflective questions: Which social theory best explains the issue you examined? How can critical theories help you understand current social problems?</p>
5	Active Experimentation	<p>Students apply their reflections and conceptual understanding to real or simulated social contexts. Activities include designing social projects, participating in ethical decision-</p>

making simulations, or implementing community service initiatives. Through these practices, reflection is transformed into ethical action, fostering collaborative skills and civic responsibility.

Reflective questions: How can you ensure that your actions align with your ethical values? Which ethical principles guide your decision-making in real social contexts?

6	<p>Ethical and Value Integration</p> <p>The final stage internalizes the values and ethical insights developed throughout the reflective process. Peer feedback and guided discussions help students articulate how reflection shapes their character and civic identity. This stage consolidates reflective thinking as a foundation for ethical citizenship and moral integrity.</p> <p>Reflective questions: How will you sustain the ethical and moral values you have learned in daily life?</p>
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The implementation of Kolb’s reflective learning cycle within the RT–EVF model provides a systematic pedagogical structure that connects experiential learning to ethical reasoning in social studies education. This model not only enables students to acquire conceptual knowledge but also cultivates reflective competence essential for analyzing values, social issues, and moral dilemmas. Empirical studies have demonstrated that reflective learning promotes students’ ethical sensitivity, empathy, and civic engagement, reinforcing the transformative potential of experiential-reflective learning (Henríquez et al., 2025; Morris, 2020; Pamungkas et al., 2019).

The present framework further confirms that reflective thinking serves as a central mechanism in fostering ethical awareness and moral reasoning in higher education. Integrating Dewey’s reflective phases with Kolb’s experiential cycle enables learners not only to learn from experience but also to transform that experience into ethical consciousness and responsible social behavior. This finding aligns with Choy et al. (2017), who emphasized that lifelong learning skills, self-assessment, and self-belief significantly contribute to the development of reflective thinking. In contrast with earlier studies that framed social studies mainly as a vehicle for civic knowledge

and multicultural understanding (Banks, 2006; Rosenberg, 2020; Stoddard, 2013), this research shows that reflective thinking adds a transformative dimension that deepens ethical internalization and moral reasoning.

Theoretically, this study extends Barr et al.’s (1977) three traditions of social studies by positioning reflective thinking as a core pedagogical paradigm for 21st-century citizenship education. Practically, it advocates for the intentional design of learning experiences that foster reflection, such as reflective journals, dialogic discussions, simulations, and digital portfolios to bridge disciplinary knowledge with ethical and civic formation. Educators are also encouraged to act as ethical role models (Lickona, 1992) and to leverage digital technologies (Garrison & Anderson, 2003) to provide continuous feedback and sustain reflective engagement. By systematically integrating reflective stages into lesson design, implementing project- and problem-based learning centered on ethical reasoning, and documenting reflections through digital platforms, educators can nurture both critical and moral dimensions of learning. Constructive feedback that explicitly links reflection with character formation and civic responsibility further enhances the ethical impact

of social studies education. Consequently, the RT–EVF model positions social studies learning not merely as knowledge acquisition, but as a transformative process of ethical and civic cultivation, preparing graduates who are intellectually competent, socially responsible, and ethically grounded.

Accordingly, lecturers are encouraged to systematically integrate reflective stages into lesson design, implement project- and problem-based learning that emphasizes ethical reasoning, and use digital platforms to document, review, and assess student reflections. Providing constructive feedback that explicitly links reflection to character and civic formation can further strengthen the ethical dimension of learning. These strategies collectively enable higher education institutions to produce graduates who are not only intellectually competent but also socially responsible and ethically grounded. However, this study remains limited to conceptual exploration within the context of social studies education and lacks empirical validation in real classroom settings. Future research should employ empirical and longitudinal designs to examine how reflective thinking enhances values and ethics across disciplines and to compare the relative effectiveness of diverse reflective learning models.

■ CONCLUSION

The development of reflective thinking skills can be effectively fostered through contemporary pedagogical approaches such as problem-based, project-based, and collaborative learning, as well as through the integration of digital technologies that enable students to document and continuously reflect on their learning experiences. Strengthening values and ethics represents an essential and ongoing dimension of education that cannot be achieved instantaneously but requires sustained effort through various strategies, including the integration of ethical values into course content, character-based learning approaches,

technology-enhanced ethical reflection, and the exemplary conduct of educators. Within social studies education, cultivating reflective thinking serves as a powerful approach for internalizing character values and fostering ethical awareness, ensuring that learning remains both reflective and meaningful. In the Indonesian higher education context, embedding reflective thinking within the educational framework aligns with the national emphasis on experiential-based learning by linking theoretical understanding with real-world ethical reflection. Although implementation challenges persist, such as limited lecturer capacity for reflective facilitation and the dominance of rote learning, strengthening reflective pedagogy and ethical dialogue can significantly enhance educational quality and contribute to the formation of ethically grounded, socially responsible, and critically reflective graduates. Theoretically, this study advances character education by framing reflective thinking as a mediating construct that links cognitive learning with the development of ethical values, extending Dewey's and Kolb's models to higher education. Practically, it provides a framework for integrating reflection into teaching and learning, especially within the MBKM framework, to foster students' ethical awareness and responsibility.

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