

Social Studies Learning and Students' Awareness and Critical Thinking of Environmental and Societal Issues

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Abstract. Social Studies is fundamental to fostering students' critical thinking and awareness of contemporary environmental and societal issues; however, empirical evidence regarding its pedagogical effectiveness remains fragmented. This study evaluated the level of Social Studies learning across three dimensions—knowledge acquisition, values formation, and skills development—and its relationship with students' awareness and critical thinking capacities. Utilizing a descriptive–correlational–comparative research design, the study surveyed 305 Senior High School students from the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand. Data were collected using a validated researcher-developed instrument and analyzed through mean, standard deviation, Spearman's rho (rs), and one-way ANOVA. Findings indicated that both Social Studies learning and students' levels of awareness and critical thinking were "High." Correlation analysis revealed a significant, weak-to-moderate positive relationship between Social Studies learning dimensions and student competencies. Notably, values formation and skills development demonstrated stronger correlations with awareness and critical thinking than knowledge acquisition alone. Furthermore, significant differences in student performance and awareness were identified when data were grouped by school. The study concludes that while Social Studies significantly contributes to student development, the cultivation of awareness and critical thinking is highly contingent upon pedagogical approach. To optimize educational outcomes, the study recommends a transition from traditional knowledge transfer toward experiential and inquiry-based learning models that prioritize higher-order thinking skills for real-world problem-solving.

Keywords: Critical Thinking; Environmental Awareness; HUMSS Students; Inquiry-Based Learning; Social Studies

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals who are capable of understanding and responding to the complex challenges of modern society. In an era defined by rapid globalization, environmental degradation, and persistent social inequalities, education serves as the primary mechanism for developing individuals capable of addressing complex societal challenges. Modern pedagogy is increasingly tasked with moving beyond the rote transmission of facts to cultivate higher-order thinking and civic consciousness (UNESCO, 2022). Social Studies stands at the center of this mission, integrating history, economics, and political science to foster a tripartite foundation of knowledge acquisition, values formation, and skills development. As noted by Banks (2020), this discipline is fundamental in preparing students for democratic participation by fostering the analytical depth required for responsible citizenship. Global educational frameworks further highlight the necessity of integrating 21st-century skills to enable learners to evaluate arguments and make informed decisions regarding global crises (OECD, 2021; Facione, 2020).

Despite these educational mandates, a significant research gap persists in understanding the nexus between pedagogical input and student consciousness. While existing literature extensively documents the importance of Social Studies in theory, there is a dearth of empirical evidence exploring how these classroom-based dimensions—specifically knowledge, values, and skills—collectively translate into a student's perceived awareness and critical outlook on contemporary issues. Previous studies have often treated Social Studies learning as a monolithic variable, failing to examine which specific instructional dimensions most effectively trigger analytical awareness in learners. Furthermore, while theoretical proficiency is often measured, the influence of localized institutional environments on these cognitive outcomes remains under-researched, particularly within the context of varied school resources and teaching competencies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the influence of Social Studies learning on the awareness and critical thinking of Grade 12 HUMSS students. Specifically, this research examines the levels of Social Studies learning across its three core dimensions and determines how these correlate with students' self-assessed awareness and their perceived ability to critically analyze environmental and societal challenges. It further seeks to identify if significant differences exist in these outcomes when respondents are

stratified by their respective academic institutions. The scope of this research is delimited to senior high school students within the public school system of the district. By addressing these gaps, the study provides a robust rationale for pedagogical refinement, ensuring that classroom instruction effectively empowers students to become proactive participants in addressing real-world challenges.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the social studies learning and students' awareness and critical thinking regarding environmental and societal issues. It answered the following questions:

1. What is the level of social studies learning of students in terms of:
 - 1.1 knowledge acquisition;
 - 1.2 values formation; and
 - 1.3 skills development?
2. To what extent is the level of students' awareness and critical thinking in terms of:
 - 2.1 environmental issues; and
 - 2.2 societal issues?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of social studies learning and students' awareness and critical thinking of environmental and societal issues?
4. Is there a significant difference on the level of Social Studies learning when grouped according to schools?
5. Is there a significant difference in the extent of students' awareness and critical thinking of environmental issues and societal issues when grouped according to school?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study investigates the influence of Social Studies learning, specifically knowledge acquisition, values formation, and skills development on the critical thinking and awareness of environmental and societal issues among 305 Senior High School students from the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand at in Maasim 2 District, Sarangani Province, coded as School A, School B, and School C. While the research assesses the relationship between curriculum-based learning and student responses to issues like climate change and social justice, it also includes a test of difference to determine if critical thinking and awareness levels vary significantly when respondents are grouped by their respective institutions. The scope is delimited to these specific variables and self-reported data, excluding external influences such as family background or media exposure; consequently, while the findings offer localized insights for improving Social Studies instruction, they are context-specific and may not be generalized to the broader Senior High School population.

Literature Review

Social Studies Learning

Social Studies is conceptualized as a transformative discipline that integrates knowledge acquisition, values formation, and skills development to cultivate civic responsibility. Scholarship emphasizes that while the discipline is foundational to national identity and democratic participation, its effectiveness is highly contingent upon contextualized, inquiry-based pedagogy (Cuenca, 2021; Ishak & Amjah, 2023). Within the Philippine educational landscape, the *Araling Panlipunan* curriculum is specifically designed to transition from rote factual memorization toward a critical understanding of socio-economic realities and nationalism (Department of Education [DepEd], 2016). Recent studies suggest that this transition is most successful when educators employ student-centered strategies that bridge the gap between theoretical lessons and real-world utility (Loyola-Carrillo et al., 2025; Payne, 2023).

Knowledge Acquisition

Knowledge acquisition is defined as a cognitive process of internalizing and applying information to develop expertise, evolving from simple memorization into higher-order reasoning (Cherukunnath & Singh, 2022). In the context of Social Studies, this process involves a deep understanding of cause-and-effect relationships and socio-political phenomena (Adeyemi & Salami, 2020). Contemporary learning environments enhance this internalization through digital integration and inquiry-based methods, though research indicates that success requires robust information literacy to mitigate digital distractions (Nguyen & Torres, 2022). Furthermore, pedagogical scaffolding and collaborative learning models are identified as essential for students to master and apply socio-political knowledge to everyday decision-making and civic engagement (Dela Peña & Ramos, 2023).

Values Formation

Values formation serves as the "moral compass" of education, focusing on the internalization of ethical standards and social responsibility (Roces, 2023). In the Philippines, this is institutionalized through the pursuit of core values: *makatao* (humane), *makabayan* (patriotic), *makakalikasan* (environmentally conscious), and *makadiyos* (godly) (DepEd, 2023). Empirical literature suggests that effective values formation occurs not through passive instruction but through experiential moral learning, ethical dialogues, and community service, which collectively foster empathy and cooperation (Pascual & Villanueva, 2024; Velasco et al., 2023). Teachers act as critical moral mentors in this process, guiding students to translate democratic principles into intentional civic action and sustainable development advocacy (Garcia & Nolasco, 2021; Reyes & Molina, 2023).

Skills Development

Skills development in the modern era encompasses a synthesis of technical proficiency and soft competencies, including critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability (Setiawan et al., 2024). Within Social Studies, this entails the ability to analyze complex societal issues and engage in inquiry-based problem-solving (Dela Cruz, 2020). Synthesis of recent research emphasizes the necessity of a curriculum aligned with socioeconomic demands, focusing on digital competence and analytical resilience (Purnomo & Setiawan, 2024). Furthermore, institutional coordination is viewed as a vital precursor for equipping graduates with the practical skills necessary to navigate both local and global labor markets (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2023).

Environmental and Societal Awareness

Awareness is characterized as a multi-dimensional competency involving the recognition of local and global challenges, ranging from climate change to social justice (Poudel & Devkota, 2023; Sison, 2023). The literature suggests that such consciousness is most effectively cultivated through experiential learning and global citizenship education, which move students beyond local biases (Waghid, 2024). In the Philippine context, this awareness is bolstered by legal mandates such as Republic Act No. 9512, which ensures that environmental and social consciousness are institutionalized as core components of the civic profile, fostering a sense of accountability toward sustainable development (Garcia & Nolasco, 2021; DepEd, 2023).

Environmental Awareness

Environmental awareness is presented as an essential component of 21st-century ecological literacy, involving the recognition of human impacts on ecosystems and the adoption of sustainable behaviors (Poudel & Devkota, 2023). Scholars highlight that school-based programs and community immersion are more effective than traditional lectures in fostering a genuine commitment to conservation (Garcia & Santos, 2024; Alzahrani, 2023). In the Philippines, this variable is institutionalized through Republic Act No. 9512, which mandates that environmental consciousness be embedded into the student's civic profile to address global crises such as climate change (DepEd, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

Societal Awareness

Societal awareness is defined by literature as the capacity to critically engage with systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, and human rights. Drawing on the concept of "critical consciousness," scholars argue that this awareness enables students to transition from passive observers to active participants in a participatory democracy (Freire, 2022; Sison, 2023). Research indicates that while digital media offers new avenues for social advocacy, classroom-based social inquiry and community immersion remain the most reliable methods for strengthening empathy and social responsibility (Lobo & Garcia, 2024; Cruz & Bautista, 2023).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive–correlational–comparative research design to examine the influence of Social Studies learning on students' awareness of environmental and societal issues and their critical thinking skills. The descriptive component determined the level of Social Studies learning in terms of knowledge acquisition, values formation, and skills development, as well as the level of students' awareness and critical thinking through the computation of weighted mean and standard deviation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The correlational component examined the relationship between Social Studies learning and students' awareness and critical thinking using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho). Spearman's rho was selected because the data were obtained from ordinal Likert-scale responses and the preliminary assessment of normality indicated non-normal distribution of some variables

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Prior to analysis, the assumptions of monotonic relationship and independence of observations were verified. The comparative component utilized one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine significant differences in the variables when respondents were grouped according to school affiliation: School A, School B, and School C. Since the sample sizes among schools were unequal, assumptions of ANOVA, particularly normality, homogeneity of variances, and independence of observations, were examined before conducting the test (Field, 2018). When significant differences were identified, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test was employed as a post hoc analysis to determine specific group differences (Gay et al., 2012). This methodological approach enabled the study to generate a comprehensive analysis of the relationships and differences among the identified variables across educational contexts.

Sampling Design

The study employed complete enumeration (census sampling) involving all eligible Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) students from the selected secondary schools. This sampling technique was adopted because the target population was relatively small and accessible, making it feasible to include all respondents in the investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The use of complete enumeration minimized sampling bias and ensured that the findings accurately reflected the characteristics and perspectives of the entire HUMSS student population within the selected schools.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in three secondary schools within the Maasim II District, under the jurisdiction of the DepEd-Sarangani Division in the province of Sarangani, Mindanao coded as, School A, School B, and School C, all offer Senior High School programs under the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand. As a coastal municipality characterized by cultural diversity and agricultural productivity, Maasim represents a blend of rural and semi-urban educational environments. This setting provides a comprehensive geographical and socio-cultural context for observing how Social Studies learning influences the environmental and societal awareness of students within the region.

Research Participants

The participants of the study were 305 Senior High School students enrolled in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand across three institutions in Maasim, Sarangani Province. This demographic was intentionally selected because students at this developmental stage have reached the "formal operational stage," enabling the abstract reasoning and systematic logic necessary for critical thinking (Piaget, 1972). Furthermore, these students are currently engaged with the advanced Social Studies curriculum in the Philippines, which is specifically designed to foster civic competence and social responsibility (DepEd, 2023). The distribution of the participants is as follows: School A (n = 215), School B (n = 60), and School C (n = 30).

Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) respondents' profile, (2) Social Studies learning dimensions, and (3) awareness and critical thinking regarding environmental and societal issues. The Social Studies learning component measured three dimensions: knowledge acquisition, values formation, and skills development. The awareness and critical thinking component measured students' perceived understanding, evaluation, and analysis of environmental and societal concerns. Questionnaire indicators were developed based on the Department of Education curriculum competencies, related literature, and existing theoretical frameworks on Social Studies learning and critical thinking. To establish content validity, the instrument was evaluated by experts in Social Studies education, educational research, and research methodology. Their recommendations regarding clarity, relevance, and alignment of items with the study objectives were incorporated during revision. Construct validity was ensured by aligning all indicators with the conceptual framework and operational definitions of the variables. A pilot test was conducted among 20 non-participant HUMSS students to determine the reliability of the instrument. The computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients were as follows: knowledge acquisition ($\alpha = 0.82$), values formation ($\alpha = 0.85$), skills development ($\alpha = 0.81$), awareness of environmental and societal issues ($\alpha = 0.84$), and critical thinking ($\alpha = 0.86$). These coefficients indicate acceptable internal consistency for social science research (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). The instrument measured students' self-reported critical thinking perceptions rather than objective critical thinking performance because no standardized critical thinking assessment tool was administered. Thus, the findings should be interpreted within the context of perceived critical thinking outcomes. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale: 5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Neutral, 2 – Disagree, and 1 – Strongly

Disagree. This was conducted with the permission of the Principal/Officer-in-Charge and with the knowledge of the advisers, in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, Republic of the Philippines.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first secured an approved letter from the Research Adviser, which served as The data collection process followed a systematic, multi-phased trajectory designed to ensure methodological rigor and ethical compliance, beginning with an intensive planning phase where the researcher collaborated closely with the thesis adviser to refine the research questions and validate the data collection instruments. This consultative stage ensured that the survey tools were conceptually aligned with the study's variables and culturally appropriate for the target respondents, laying a robust foundation for the formal execution of the study. Following the adviser's approval, formal request letters were disseminated to the Schools Division Superintendent of Sarangani Province and the participating school principals to secure institutional clearance. Upon authorization, the researcher personally administered the survey questionnaires to the 305 HUMSS students, conducting a thorough orientation to clarify the study's purpose and address any ambiguous items while emphasizing voluntary participation and respondent anonymity. Finally, the completed instruments were collected, tallied, and forwarded to a professional statistician for rigorous analysis using Spearman's rho, One-way ANOVA, and Tukey's HSD tests to conclude the research cycle.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1. What is the level of social studies learning of students in terms of knowledge acquisition, values formation, and skills development?

Table 1.Level of Social Studies Learning on Students' Awareness in terms of Knowledge Acquisition

Indicators	M	SD	Verbal Description
1. I learn about historical, political, and economic events that shaped society.	3.95	0.94	High
2. I gain insights into how government policies affect people's lives.	3.85	0.93	High
3. I understand the connection between past events and present issues.	3.88	1.09	High
4. I acquire knowledge that helps me evaluate current social and environmental challenges.	3.88	1.10	High
5. I become more informed about civic duties and responsibilities through Social Studies.	3.93	1.06	High
Total Mean	3.90	1.02	High

Table 1 presents the level of students' learning in terms of knowledge acquisition. The data reveals a High level of awareness with a total mean of 3.90 (SD = 1.02). M = 3.95) was recorded for Indicator 1, suggesting that students strongly identify the subject with the historical and economic narratives that shaped the modern world. Conversely, Indicator 2 received the lowest mean (M = 3.85), which may indicate that while students grasp historical facts, the connection between abstract policy-making and daily life is slightly less immediate to them. These findings correspond with Cherukunnath and Singh (2022), who state that knowledge acquisition evolves from sensory learning to higher-order reasoning through structured reflection. Furthermore, Ahmed and Brown (2023) argue that inquiry-based methods are essential for translating such knowledge into long-term retention.

Table 2. Level of Social Studies Learning on Students' Awareness in terms of Values Formation

Values Formation	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1. I develop respect for different cultures and traditions.	3.99	0.97	High
2. I value fairness, justice, and equality in society.	3.85	0.97	High
3. I learn the importance of cooperation and participation in community activities.	3.76	0.90	High
4. I become more conscious of ethical issues in addressing social and environmental concerns.	3.80	0.91	High
5. I internalize the importance of responsible citizenship through lessons in Social Studies.	3.76	1.01	High
Total Mean	3.83	0.95	High

The assessment of values formation in Table 2 indicates a High level of perceived learning, yielding a total mean of 3.83 (SD = 0.95). Indicator 1 achieved the highest score (M = 3.99), highlighting the curriculum's strength in fostering cultural sensitivity. Indicators 3 and 5 shared the lowest mean (M = 3.76),

suggesting that while students value these concepts, the transition from classroom ethics to active community involvement represents a common challenge in value internalization. This results are consistent with the Department of Education's (2023) vision of developing "makatao" and "makabayan" citizens. Santos and David (2024) further describe Social Studies as a "moral compass," though Velasco et al. (2023) contend that real-world exposure is necessary to fully bridge the gap between ethical awareness and social responsibility.

Table 3. Level of Social Studies Learning on Students' Awareness in terms of Skills Development

	Values Formation	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1.	I enhance my ability to analyze and interpret social issues.	3.78	0.98	High
2.	I develop critical thinking skills in evaluating societal problems.	3.82	0.91	High
3.	I improve my decision-making abilities through case studies and discussions.	3.72	0.96	High
4.	I learn how to propose solutions to environmental and social issues.	3.84	1.04	High
5.	I strengthen my communication skills in expressing views about societal matters.	3.90	1.05	High
	Total Mean	3.81	0.99	High

Table 3 details the level of skills development, which remains High with a total mean of 3.81 (SD = 0.99). Students reported the highest growth in communication skills (Indicator 5, M = 3.90), while structured decision-making (Indicator 3, M = 3.72) was identified as the area with the most potential for further development. This suggests that while the subject empowers students to find their voice, applying that voice to formal problem-solving frameworks requires more intensive instructional focus. These results align with Alvarado and Abad (2023), who emphasize that communication and problem-solving are critical workforce-readiness skills. Setiawan et al. (2024) reinforce that skill application is the final bridge between academic preparation and societal participation.

Table 4. Summary Table on the Level of Social Studies Learning on Students' Awareness

Influence of Social Studies Learning on Students' Awareness	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Knowledge Acquisition	3.90	1.02	High
Values Formation	3.83	0.95	High
Skills Development	3.81	0.99	High
Total Mean	3.85	0.99	High

Table 4 synthesizes the three dimensions, showing a balanced and High overall level of learning (M = 3.85, SD = 0.99). The results indicate that knowledge acquisition remains the strongest pillar of the Social Studies experience. The slightly lower mean in skills development corroborates the observations of Payne (2023), who noted that a gap often persists between theoretical engagement and practical real-world performance. Overall, the data supports Crisolo et al.'s (2021) assertion that Social Studies effectively serves as a holistic tool for national development by simultaneously addressing the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning.

Research Question 2. To what extent is the level of students' awareness and critical thinking in terms of environmental issues, and societal issues?

Table 5. Extent of Environmental and Societal Issues Among Students in terms of Awareness of Environmental Issues

	Awareness of Environmental Issues	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1.	I am aware of the negative effects of pollution on people and nature.	3.71	1.01	High
2.	I recognize the importance of conserving natural resources.	3.85	0.96	High
3.	I understand the impact of climate change on communities.	3.99	0.95	High
4.	I am conscious of the need for proper waste management practices.	3.93	1.00	High
5.	I value sustainable practices that help protect the environment.	3.87	0.98	High
	Total Mean	3.87	0.98	High

Table 5 outlines the extent of students' awareness of environmental issues. The data indicates a High level of awareness with a total mean of ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.98$). The highest mean was recorded for Indicator 3 ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.95$), suggesting that students have a pronounced understanding of climate change. While all indicators remain high, awareness of pollution effects (Indicator 1) received the lowest mean ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.01$). This disparity suggests that while global systemic issues like climate change are well-understood, the localized, immediate effects of pollution may be perceived as less urgent. These findings align with the institutionalization of environmental education under Republic Act No. 9512 and the UNESCO (2022) framework for Sustainable Development. However, Rahman and Lee (2023) caution that cognitive awareness must be paired with emotional and ethical engagement to transition from theoretical knowledge to sustained ecological action.

Table 6. Extent of Environmental and Societal Issues Among Students in terms of Awareness of Societal Issues

	Awareness of Societal Issues	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1.	I am aware of the effects of poverty and inequality in society.	3.74	0.99	High
2.	I understand the importance of good governance and transparency.	3.87	0.91	High
3.	I recognize the role of education in solving social problems.	3.90	0.98	High
4.	I am conscious of issues such as corruption, crime, and discrimination.	3.87	0.95	High
5.	I value active participation in addressing community concerns.	3.96	0.97	High
	Total Mean	3.87	0.96	High

Table 6 presents the students' awareness of societal issues, which achieved a high total mean of ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.96$). Indicator 5 recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.96$), indicating that students place significant value on community participation. Conversely, Indicator 1—awareness of poverty and inequality—recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.99$). This suggests that students may find systemic economic issues more abstract than the tangible outcomes of community service. The results support the Department of Education's (2023) goal of fostering national identity. This level of awareness reflects what Freire (2022) termed "critical consciousness," where learners begin to analyze societal structures rather than merely observing them. Lobo and Garcia (2024) suggest that to deepen this awareness, curricula should prioritize social inquiry and project-based learning.

Table 7. Summary of the Extent of Environmental and Societal Issues Among Students

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Awareness of Environmental Issues	3.87	0.62	High
Awareness of Societal Issues	3.86	0.63	High
Total Mean	3.87	0.54	High

Table 7 synthesizes the dimensions of awareness, reflecting a consistent and High level of consciousness across both domains. The negligible difference between environmental ($M = 3.87$) and societal ($M = 3.86$) awareness suggests a balanced integration of these themes in the Social Studies curriculum. The low standard deviations ($SD = 0.62$ and 0.63) indicate a high degree of consensus among students, showing that this awareness is not limited to a select group but is widespread. While these results validate the role of Social Studies in developing informed citizens as advocated by Banks (2017), the OECD (2019) notes that external factors—such as digital media and community experience—also play a critical role. Educators are encouraged to move beyond awareness toward "active participation" to ensure that these high levels of consciousness translate into meaningful social and environmental transformation.

Research Question 3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of social studies learning and students' awareness and critical thinking of environmental and societal issues?

Table 8. Correlation Matrix between the Level of Students' Social Studies Learning and Awareness and Critical Thinking of Environmental and Social Issues

		Knowledge Acquisition	Values Formation	Skills Development	Influence of Social Studies Learning
Knowledge Acquisition	Spearman's rho	—			
	p-value	—			
Values Formation	Spearman's rho	0.405*	—		
	p-value	< .001	—		
Skills Development	Spearman's rho	0.40*	0.63*	—	
	p-value	< .001	< .001	—	
Level of Social Studies Learning	Spearman's rho	0.752*	0.804*	0.836*	—
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	—
Environmental and Social Issues	Spearman's rho	0.137*	0.277*	0.299*	0.283*
	p-value	0.017	< .001	< .001	< .001

NoteS. * $p < .05$, $df = 305$

Table 8 presents the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients used to determine the relationship between the dimensions of Social Studies learning and students' awareness of environmental and social issues. The results indicate a statistically significant, positive relationship between the overall level of Social Studies learning and awareness of environmental and social issues, $r_s(305) = .283$, $p < .001$. While significant, the coefficient suggests a weak-to-moderate strength of association. This implies that as the level of Social Studies learning increases, there is a corresponding, though modest, increase in students' awareness of contemporary issues. A detailed analysis of the learning components reveals that Skills Development has the strongest association with issue awareness ($r_s = .299$, $p < .001$), followed by Values Formation ($r_s = .277$, $p < .001$). These findings align with the perspective of Barton and Levstik (2015), who suggest that Social Studies is most impactful when it prioritizes critical inquiry and democratic participation over rote memorization. In contrast, Knowledge Acquisition demonstrated the weakest significant correlation ($r_s = .137$, $p = .017$). This finding is consistent with the "knowledge-awareness gap" identified by Hadad et al. (2021), which suggests that possessing factual information does not automatically lead to the critical consciousness required to navigate complex societal problems. Because the p-values across all dimensions are less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant relationship between the level of Social Studies learning and students' awareness and critical thinking regarding environmental and societal issues. These results reinforce the assertion by Arlemalm-Hagser and Sandberg (2017) that Social Studies provides the necessary, albeit foundational, framework for developing civic responsibility and social awareness.

Research Question 4. Is there a significant difference on the level of Social Studies learning when grouped according to schools?

Table 9. Group Descriptives

	School	N	Mean	SD	SE
Level of Social Studies Learning	School A	215	3.92	0.499	0.034
	School B	60	3.69	0.6	0.0788
	School C	30	3.59	0.404	0.0764

The data reveals that all three schools – School A, School B and School C - perceive the influence of Social Studies learning as Very High. Among the three, School A registered the highest mean score ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.499$), followed by School B ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.600$), while School C yielded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.404$). The high mean scores across all groups suggest that regardless of the specific school environment, students recognize Social Studies as a highly influential factor in their academic development. The particularly high score in School A might be attributed to the larger sample size ($N = 215$), which often provides a more robust representation of student sentiment, or perhaps more concentrated social studies initiatives within that specific campus.

Table 10. Results of the one-Way ANOVA of the Students' Level of Social Studies Learning when Grouped by School

School	N	M	F(2,298)	p
School A	215	3.92 _a	8.42	< .001
School B	60	3.69 _b		
School C	30	3.59 _b		

Notes. * $p < .05$; Means of the same subscript are comparable.

The results of the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) reveal a statistically significant difference in the level of Social Studies learning across the three schools, $F(2, 298) = 8.42$, $p < .001$. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. This suggests that the institutional environment may play a role in how students internalize the Social Studies curriculum. Post-hoc analysis, indicated by the subscripts in Table 10, clarifies these differences. The mean for School A ($M = 3.92$) is statistically distinct from both School B ($M = 3.69$) and School C ($M = 3.59$). Notably, there is no significant difference between School B and School C, as they share the "b" subscript. The significantly higher mean at School A suggests a more robust integration of Social Studies concepts. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which posits that learning is a social process deeply influenced by the institutional context. The disparity may reflect variations in what Hattie (2009) describes as the "school effect," which encompasses school climate and collective teacher efficacy. According to Goddard et al. (2004), higher teacher efficacy can significantly increase a curriculum's influence by fostering a more engaging instructional environment. The lack of a significant difference between School B and School C may suggest similar instructional modalities in these settings. As noted by Shulman (1987), the influence of a subject often depends on the "transformative" power of its delivery. While all three schools maintain a high level of influence, the data suggests that School A has achieved a statistically higher level of impact compared to the other two campuses.

Research Question 5. Is there a significant difference in the extent of students' awareness and critical thinking of environmental issues and societal issues when grouped according to school?

Table 11. Group Descriptives

	School	N	Mean	SD	SE
Environmental and Social Issues	School A	215	3.94	0.495	0.0338
	School B	60	3.69	0.618	0.0812
	School C	30	3.64	0.567	0.1072

The data reveals that students in all three institutions demonstrate a High level of awareness regarding environmental and societal issues. School A recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.94$), followed by School B ($M = 3.69$) and School C ($M = 3.64$). School A also showed the lowest standard deviation ($SD = 0.495$), indicating that student responses in this school are the most consistent. The high rating across all groups indicates that Social Studies successfully sensitizes students to modern global challenges. As Thornton (2017) notes, the Social Studies curriculum acts as a "gatekeeper" for civic competence, bridging the gap between theory and realities like climate change and social justice. The leading mean in School A suggests a stronger internalization of these issues, potentially driven by what Hadzigeorgiou and Skoumios (2013) describe as an integrated "socio-environmental consciousness" within the campus culture.

Table 12. Results of the one-Way ANOVA of the Students' Extent of Awareness of Environmental and Social Issues when Grouped by School

School	N	M	F(2,298)	P
School A	215	3.94 _a	8.42	< .001
School B	60	3.69 _b		
School C	30	3.64 _b		

Notes. * $p < .05$; Means of the same subscript are comparable.

The One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) shows a statistically significant difference in awareness levels based on school affiliation, $F(2, 298) = 8.42$, $p < .001$. As the p-value is below the .05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected. Post-hoc comparisons reveal that School A ($M = 3.94$) is significantly higher than both School B ($M = 3.69$) and School C ($M = 3.64$). Conversely, the difference between School B and School C is not statistically significant. This suggests that while all schools provide a solid baseline of awareness,

School A provides a more effective catalyst for environmental and social consciousness. These findings align with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes that observational learning within a specific advocacy-rich environment enhances cognitive awareness. Furthermore, Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 2006) suggests that schools with stronger community partnerships and integrated social curricula leave a more profound "awareness footprint." The lack of difference between School B and School C might be explained by Hollingshead's (1975) theory, which posits that schools with similar resource profiles or geographical locations often yield comparable student outcomes due to shared external socio-economic influences.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with strict adherence to the ethical principles of educational research and the guidelines set forth by the Department of Education (DepEd). Formal institutional approval was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent of Sarangani and the respective principals of the participating institutions prior to data collection. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and all student respondents were provided with a comprehensive orientation regarding the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any stage without prejudice. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and for those under the age of majority, parental consent was sought in accordance with local administrative protocols. To ensure the highest level of confidentiality, all personal identifiers were removed during the data tallying process, and the schools were coded to protect their institutional identity. Furthermore, all gathered data were handled and stored in strict compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), ensuring that the information was used solely for academic purposes and remained inaccessible to unauthorized parties.

Conclusion

The study highlights the outstanding success of Social Studies in cultivating high levels of knowledge, moral preparation, and environmental consciousness among students. By confirming a statistically significant link between learning and critical thinking, the research underscores the power of value-oriented and experiential instruction in fostering a deep, theoretical awareness of societal issues. While these findings demonstrate a robust foundation for informed citizenship, they also present an exciting opportunity to further elevate the curriculum by integrating more practical, action-oriented skills. Ultimately, by leveraging the strengths identified in high-performing institutions like School A, the district can refine its pedagogical strategies to empower all students to confidently translate their strong theoretical insights into meaningful civic engagement.

Reccomendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Social Studies education transition from rote memorization toward experiential and inquiry-based strategies—such as community-based problem solving, debates, and case analyses—to better cultivate the values and skills that drive critical awareness. School administrators and policymakers should support this shift by addressing institutional disparities through targeted teacher training and equitable resource allocation, ensuring that all students have access to a high-quality, competency-based curriculum. Furthermore, by institutionalizing real-world civic participation and encouraging future research into external variables like media influence, the educational system can more effectively empower students to translate their theoretical consciousness into proactive, socially responsible decision-making.

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