



Gender Analysis of Students' Motivation to Learn in Social Studies Classes in Elementary School

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Abstract

Gender representation in instructional materials has the potential to shape students' learning experiences, yet its relationship with learning motivation in elementary social studies education remains underexplored. This study aimed to examine gender differences in students' learning motivation and explore how gender representation in social studies instruction relates to motivational experiences in elementary classrooms. A qualitative case study was conducted at a public elementary school in Purwakarta Regency, Indonesia, involving two fifth-grade teachers and four fifth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, a learning motivation questionnaire, and document analysis, and were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña supported by source and method triangulation. The findings indicate that students generally demonstrated positive learning motivation; however, female students exhibited greater consistency in perseverance and responsibility, whereas male students responded more positively to interactive and varied instructional approaches. Analysis of instructional materials further revealed an imbalance in gender representation, with male characters predominantly portrayed in public roles and female characters more frequently depicted in domestic contexts. These patterns suggest that instructional representations contribute to students' motivational experiences alongside classroom practices. The study extends the application of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory by highlighting the role of curriculum content in shaping learning motivation and underscores the importance of developing gender-responsive instructional materials and inclusive teaching practices to promote equitable learning environments in elementary social studies education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is expected not only to develop students' academic competencies but also to cultivate equitable learning environments that enable all learners to participate and achieve according to their potential. Among the many factors that shape educational quality, learning motivation has consistently been recognized as one of the strongest determinants of students' engagement, persistence, and academic success across different educational levels (Asadpour et al., 2025; Ishida & Sekiyama, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Motivated learners are more likely to invest effort in classroom activities, respond positively to instructional challenges, and develop higher-order thinking skills that support lifelong learning. However, learning motivation does not emerge solely from students' personal characteristics. It is continuously shaped by the interaction between individual beliefs and the social contexts in which learning occurs, including classroom practices, instructional materials, and teacher-student interactions (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Vo & Ho, 2024; Wolff et al., 2025). As educational systems increasingly emphasize inclusive and equitable learning, greater attention has been directed toward how classroom environments communicate social values and identities through curriculum content. One important yet frequently overlooked aspect of this environment is the way gender is represented in teaching and learning materials. Because students

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encounter these representations repeatedly throughout their schooling, instructional content has the potential to influence not only their understanding of social roles but also their enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to engage in learning activities.

The issue of gender representation in educational materials has attracted increasing international attention because many studies continue to document persistent gender imbalances across school curricula. Large-scale analyses of textbooks from different countries indicate that male characters remain more visible in leadership, professional, and public roles, whereas female characters are disproportionately portrayed in domestic or supportive roles, reinforcing traditional stereotypes rather than reflecting contemporary social realities (Gjylbegaj & Radwan, 2025). Similar patterns have also been reported in Indonesian elementary school textbooks, where unequal representation continues to appear in narratives, illustrations, and contextual learning examples used in classroom instruction (Fawaid & Handayani, 2025; Fithriani, 2022b; Tyarakanita et al., 2021). Although these portrayals may appear subtle, repeated exposure to stereotypical representations can gradually shape students' perceptions of gender roles, influence their sense of belonging, and affect how they value learning experiences associated with particular subjects (Grimshaw et al., 2024; Lemieux, 2024). Social studies education deserves particular attention because it introduces students to social institutions, citizenship, community participation, and the roles individuals perform within society. Consequently, the messages embedded in social studies learning materials extend beyond factual knowledge and contribute to the formation of students' perspectives regarding equality, participation, and identity. Considering the central role of social studies in character and citizenship education, examining how gender representation relates to elementary students' learning motivation has become an increasingly important issue for both educational researchers and curriculum developers.

Despite growing recognition of inclusive education, understanding the factors that shape students' learning motivation remains a complex challenge because motivation develops through continuous interactions between personal beliefs and environmental influences. Contemporary motivational theories emphasize that students' expectations of success and the value they assign to learning activities are socially constructed rather than determined solely by individual ability (Lo, 2024; Skinner et al., 2022; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). From this perspective, classroom experiences become powerful sources of motivational development because they communicate messages about competence, opportunity, and social identity. Learning resources that present balanced and inclusive representations may strengthen students' confidence and encourage active participation, whereas materials that repeatedly reinforce stereotypical roles may unintentionally limit students' perceptions of their own potential. These influences are particularly important during elementary education, when children are actively constructing their understanding of themselves and the society around them (Master, 2021). At this developmental stage, students tend to internalize recurring social messages encountered through textbooks, classroom discussions, and teacher explanations, making the quality of instructional representation especially significant (Kumar, 2021; Majadly & Haj Yahya, 2024). Therefore, investigating learning motivation without considering the broader instructional context may provide only a partial explanation of why students engage differently with the same learning experiences.

The importance of examining gender representation becomes even more evident within social studies education because this subject introduces students to social structures, citizenship values, and human interactions that influence their understanding of equality and social participation. Unlike subjects that primarily emphasize procedural or technical knowledge, social studies integrates narratives, historical figures, occupations, family life, and community activities that inevitably reflect particular social perspectives (Levy et al., 2023; Roqib, 2021). Consequently, instructional materials do more than transmit academic content; they also communicate implicit assumptions regarding the roles and contributions of different social groups. When these representations remain unbalanced, students may develop unequal perceptions of participation and achievement that extend beyond the classroom into their broader social expectations (Boonsuk & Waelateh, n.d.; Fawaid & Handayani, 2025; Martin & Fisher-Ari, 2021). At the same time, teachers play an essential role in mediating these messages through instructional strategies that either reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes (Adams et al., 2021; Egitim, 2022; Vu & Pham, 2025a). This interaction between curriculum content and classroom practice suggests that learning

motivation should be understood as the product of both pedagogical experiences and students' interpretation of the social meanings embedded within learning materials (Crookes & Ziegler, 2021; Hossain, 2024). Accordingly, examining the relationship between gender representation in elementary social studies instruction and students' learning motivation is not only educationally relevant but also necessary for supporting more inclusive curriculum development and equitable classroom practices.

Recent studies have considerably expanded the understanding of learning motivation and gender representation in educational contexts, yet these topics have largely developed along separate lines of inquiry. Research on learning motivation has predominantly examined psychological determinants such as self-efficacy, expectancy beliefs, task value, classroom engagement, and instructional practices (Acosta-Gonzaga & Ramirez-Arellano, 2022; Schunk et al., 2022). Other studies have demonstrated that active learning strategies, interactive technologies, and supportive classroom environments can substantially enhance students' motivation and academic participation (Córdova-Esparza et al., 2024; Costa et al., 2024; Daniel et al., 2024). Meanwhile, investigations into gender representation have primarily focused on identifying gender bias and stereotypes embedded in textbooks and other instructional resources. Comparative analyses across different countries consistently reveal that males are more frequently portrayed in leadership, professional, scientific, and decision-making roles, whereas females continue to be associated with domestic responsibilities and caregiving activities (Borger et al., 2025; Coratella, 2022; Smith et al., 2022). Similar findings have also been reported in Indonesian educational settings, where elementary school textbooks continue to exhibit unequal gender portrayals despite ongoing curriculum reforms (Fawaid & Handayani, 2025; Fithriani, 2022). Collectively, these studies provide valuable evidence regarding motivational processes and gender representation; however, they generally examine each issue independently rather than considering how they may interact within authentic classroom learning experiences.

Although previous research has generated important insights, several conceptual and contextual limitations remain unresolved. First, studies investigating learning motivation have concentrated primarily on students' psychological characteristics and instructional strategies while giving relatively limited attention to how curriculum content itself may shape motivational development (Hennebry-Leung & Xiao, 2023; Rosenzweig, 2025). Second, research examining gender representation has largely emphasized descriptive analyses of textbook content without exploring its potential influence on students' learning behaviours, engagement, or motivational patterns during classroom instruction (Rosenzweig, 2025; Vu & Pham, 2025). Third, empirical evidence connecting gender representation with learning motivation at the elementary school level remains scarce, particularly within Indonesian social studies education, where discussions of citizenship, social participation, and community roles make issues of gender representation especially relevant. Furthermore, many existing studies have relied either on large-scale quantitative surveys or document analyses, offering limited insight into how teachers and students interpret gender representations during everyday learning activities (Erdogdu & Erdogdu, 2025; Sandoval-Hernández & Rutkowski, 2025). Consequently, the interaction between instructional representation, classroom experiences, and students' motivation remains insufficiently understood. Addressing this gap is important because a more integrated perspective may explain not only whether gender representation exists within instructional materials, but also how such representation influences students' motivational experiences and participation in elementary social studies classrooms.

Building upon these considerations, this study aims to examine gender differences in elementary school students' learning motivation and to explore how gender representation in social studies instruction relates to students' motivational experiences during classroom learning. Unlike previous studies that have predominantly investigated learning motivation and gender representation as separate issues, this research integrates both perspectives within a single analytical framework informed by Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT). By combining classroom observations, interviews, questionnaire data, and document analysis, the study seeks to provide a richer understanding of how instructional representations interact with students' motivational responses in authentic educational settings. Theoretically, the findings are expected to extend the application of SEVT by demonstrating that motivational beliefs are shaped not only by instructional strategies and individual characteristics but also by the social meanings embedded in

curriculum content and classroom learning materials. Practically, the study offers evidence that may assist teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers in designing more inclusive and gender-responsive social studies instruction capable of supporting equitable learning opportunities for all students. The findings are also expected to encourage greater critical reflection on the role of instructional materials in promoting students' engagement, participation, and positive academic identities from the early years of schooling. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing international discourse on inclusive education by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian elementary school context, where investigations into the relationship between gender representation and learning motivation remain limited despite increasing attention to educational equity.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach using a case study design to investigate the relationship between gender representation in social studies instruction and elementary school students' learning motivation. A qualitative case study was selected because the research sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of a contemporary educational phenomenon situated within its real-life context rather than to establish statistical relationships or causal inferences. Gender representation in classroom instruction is inherently embedded in social interactions, teaching practices, and instructional materials, making it difficult to isolate from the educational environment in which it occurs. Consequently, a case study approach enables the researcher to explore the complexity of participants' experiences by integrating multiple sources of evidence and interpreting them holistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was conceptually informed by the Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT), which argues that students' motivation develops through the interaction between individual beliefs and contextual learning experiences (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Within this framework, instructional materials are not merely vehicles for delivering knowledge but also social artifacts capable of shaping students' perceptions, expectations, and task values. Therefore, the qualitative case study design provided an appropriate methodological framework for examining how gender representation within elementary social studies classrooms may influence students' motivational experiences while simultaneously capturing the contextual dynamics of classroom interaction.

Research Setting and Duration

The research was conducted at a public elementary school located in Purwakarta Regency, West Java, Indonesia, from April to May 2026. The research site was selected purposively because it represents an educational environment in which traditional sociocultural values coexist with contemporary educational practices, making it relevant for examining gender representation within classroom instruction. The study focused specifically on fifth-grade social studies classes because this subject introduces students to citizenship, occupations, social institutions, family roles, and community participation, all of which provide meaningful contexts for analysing gender representation. Conducting the study during regular classroom activities allowed the researcher to observe naturally occurring teaching practices and authentic student responses without manipulating instructional conditions. Data collection was scheduled according to the school's instructional timetable to minimise disruption to teaching activities while ensuring sufficient opportunities for prolonged classroom engagement. Throughout the research period, observations, interviews, questionnaire administration, and document collection were conducted sequentially to capture a comprehensive picture of classroom practices and students' learning experiences.

Participants

The participants consisted of six individuals, including two fifth-grade social studies teachers and four fifth-grade students, comprising two male and two female students. Participants were selected through purposive sampling because qualitative case studies emphasise information-rich participants capable of providing meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). Student participants met several inclusion criteria, namely active participation during classroom learning, regular attendance throughout the

observation period, willingness to participate voluntarily, and the ability to communicate their learning experiences during interviews. Teachers were included because they were directly responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating social studies instruction, including selecting instructional materials used in the classroom. The relatively small number of participants is consistent with qualitative case study methodology, which prioritises depth of understanding rather than statistical representativeness. Instead of seeking broad generalisation, this study aimed to obtain detailed contextual evidence regarding the interaction between instructional practices, gender representation, and students' learning motivation. Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the school principal, while written informed consent was secured from participating teachers and the parents or legal guardians of all student participants. Students were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the confidentiality of all information collected throughout the research process.

Research Instruments

To obtain comprehensive and credible evidence, this study employed four complementary data collection instruments that enabled methodological triangulation. The first instrument was a non-participant classroom observation guide designed to document teacher–student interactions, instructional strategies, classroom participation, learning behaviours, and manifestations of gender representation throughout the teaching and learning process. Observations focused on students' behavioural engagement, verbal participation, responsiveness to instructional activities, and the contextual presentation of gender roles within classroom discourse. The second instrument consisted of semi-structured interview protocols developed separately for teachers and students. Teacher interviews explored instructional planning, perceptions of students' learning motivation, classroom practices, and awareness of gender representation in instructional materials. Student interviews investigated learning experiences, perceptions of classroom activities, responses to social studies materials, and factors that influenced their motivation to participate in learning. The third instrument was a learning motivation questionnaire comprising ten Likert-scale statements representing five motivational dimensions: learning interest, classroom participation, perseverance in completing academic tasks, responsibility for learning, and perceived gender fairness during classroom instruction.

Each statement was rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was adapted from the Elementary School Motivation Scale developed by Ramos et al. (2022) and was used to complement qualitative findings by providing descriptive information regarding students' motivational tendencies rather than serving as an independent quantitative measure. The fourth instrument involved document analysis of social studies textbooks, teacher-prepared instructional materials, classroom worksheets, and visual learning resources. Document analysis focused on identifying patterns of gender representation through textual narratives, illustrations, occupational portrayals, family roles, leadership positions, and contextual examples embedded within learning materials. The integration of these four instruments enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives and strengthen the comprehensiveness of the collected evidence.

Instrument Validity and Trustworthiness

The quality of the research instruments was established through content validation and multiple strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative findings. Before field implementation, all observation sheets, interview protocols, questionnaire items, and document analysis indicators were evaluated through expert judgment involving specialists in elementary education, gender studies, educational psychology, and educational assessment. The experts assessed each instrument in terms of relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness, linguistic appropriateness, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Suggestions provided during the validation process were incorporated through revisions to several interview questions, observation indicators, and questionnaire wording to improve clarity and contextual relevance.

Because the questionnaire functioned as a supporting instrument within a qualitative case study rather than as the primary basis for statistical inference, internal consistency testing such as Cronbach's alpha was not considered necessary. Instead, the credibility of the study was

strengthened through prolonged classroom engagement, methodological triangulation, source triangulation, member checking, researcher reflexivity, and the maintenance of a detailed audit trail documenting every stage of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bingham, 2023). Triangulation was achieved by comparing evidence obtained from classroom observations, teacher interviews, student interviews, questionnaire responses, and document analysis to identify convergent and divergent patterns across different sources of information. Member checking was conducted by providing participating teachers with opportunities to review interview summaries and confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. In addition, researcher reflexive notes were maintained throughout the study to minimise subjective bias during data interpretation and to ensure that analytical decisions remained grounded in empirical evidence. Collectively, these procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings, thereby strengthening the methodological rigour of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted systematically through several sequential stages to ensure that comprehensive evidence was obtained from multiple sources while maintaining consistency with the qualitative case study design. Prior to fieldwork, administrative approval was obtained from the school principal, followed by written informed consent from participating teachers and the parents or legal guardians of all student participants. Ethical considerations were explained to every participant, including the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of personal information, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without academic consequences. Once ethical approval had been secured, the researcher conducted preliminary visits to the research site to become familiar with the classroom environment, establish rapport with participants, and observe routine instructional activities without formal data recording. The primary phase of data collection began with non-participant classroom observations during regular social studies lessons. Throughout these observations, the researcher documented instructional practices, teacher-student interactions, student participation, classroom engagement, and visible forms of gender representation occurring during learning activities. Detailed field notes were prepared immediately after each observation session to preserve contextual information that could support subsequent analysis. Following classroom observations, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted separately with teachers and students. Interviews with teachers focused on instructional planning, classroom management, perceptions of students' learning motivation, and awareness of gender representation within teaching materials.

Student interviews explored learning experiences, classroom participation, perceptions of social studies lessons, and personal responses toward instructional materials presented during classroom learning. After the interview sessions had been completed, participating students responded to the learning motivation questionnaire under teacher supervision. The questionnaire was administered individually to encourage honest responses while minimizing peer influence during completion. Although questionnaire results were recorded numerically, they were used descriptively to complement qualitative findings rather than to generate inferential statistical conclusions. Finally, document analysis was undertaken by reviewing social studies textbooks, lesson plans, student worksheets, instructional media, and classroom learning resources used throughout the observation period. These documents were examined to identify recurring patterns of gender representation reflected in textual narratives, illustrations, occupational portrayals, leadership roles, family responsibilities, and contextual learning examples. Throughout all stages of data collection, observational records, interview transcripts, questionnaire summaries, documentary evidence, and researcher field notes were systematically organised using a structured data management system to facilitate subsequent qualitative analysis.

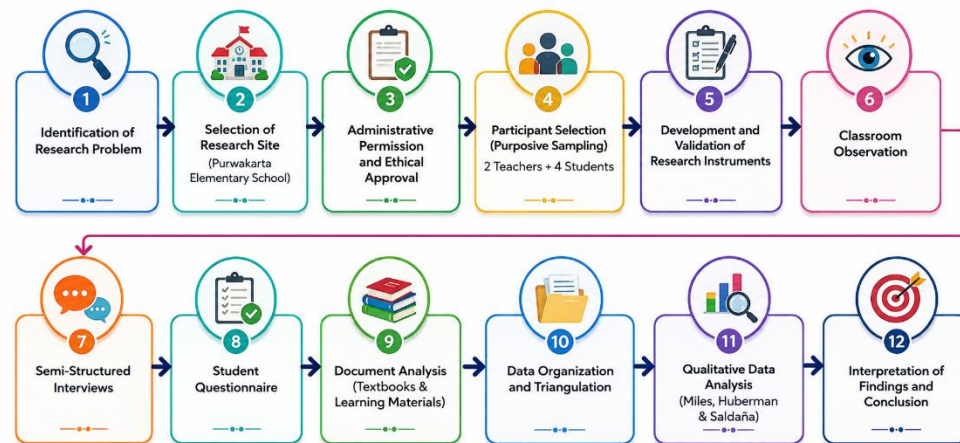


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

Figure 1 illustrates the overall research procedure adopted in this study, beginning with the identification of the research problem and continuing through participant recruitment, instrument preparation, data collection, qualitative data analysis, and the interpretation of findings. The sequential structure of the procedure reflects the iterative nature of qualitative case study research, in which evidence obtained from different sources is continuously compared and verified before drawing final conclusions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which emphasises continuous interaction between data collection, analysis, verification, and interpretation throughout the research process. Rather than treating analysis as a separate stage conducted after all data had been collected, analytical activities were undertaken iteratively during every phase of fieldwork. This approach enabled emerging findings to inform subsequent observations, interviews, and document analysis, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of the investigation. The first analytical stage involved data management and familiarisation, during which all field notes, interview recordings, questionnaire summaries, and documentary evidence were transcribed, organised, and reviewed repeatedly to ensure data completeness and accuracy. During this stage, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, observation notes were expanded into detailed descriptive narratives, and documentary materials were catalogued according to their relevance to the research objectives. Repeated reading of all data sources enabled the researcher to become immersed in the dataset and identify preliminary analytical patterns before formal coding commenced.

The second stage consisted of data reduction, whereby information not directly related to the research questions was removed while maintaining the contextual richness of participants' experiences. Significant statements describing classroom interactions, instructional practices, students' motivational behaviours, and forms of gender representation were retained as meaningful analytical units. This process reduced data complexity while preserving information necessary for subsequent interpretation. Following data reduction, the researcher undertook coding and category development using a combination of deductive and inductive analytical strategies. Deductive coding was guided by the conceptual dimensions of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT), particularly constructs related to expectancy beliefs, task value, classroom experiences, and motivational development. Simultaneously, inductive coding allowed new concepts and contextual patterns emerging directly from participants' responses to be incorporated into the analysis without imposing predetermined interpretations. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader conceptual categories representing students' learning motivation, classroom engagement, instructional strategies, gender representation within instructional materials, and perceived relationships between these phenomena.

The next analytical stage involved source and method triangulation to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Evidence obtained through classroom observations, teacher interviews, student interviews, learning motivation questionnaires, and document analysis was continuously

compared to identify convergent and divergent patterns across multiple data sources. Triangulation enabled the researcher to verify interpretations by examining whether similar themes consistently appeared across different forms of evidence rather than relying upon a single source of information. Where inconsistencies emerged, the researcher revisited original field records and interview transcripts to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected participants' perspectives and classroom realities. After triangulation had been completed, related categories were synthesised into broader interpretative themes through an iterative process of theme development and verification. Theme construction involved examining conceptual relationships among categories while ensuring that each theme remained strongly supported by empirical evidence. Throughout this process, the researcher maintained reflexive analytical notes documenting emerging interpretations, alternative explanations, and analytical decisions. Member checking was also undertaken by discussing selected interpretations with participating teachers to confirm the credibility of the findings and minimise researcher bias. Finally, conclusions were developed through an ongoing process of interpretation and verification. Rather than presenting descriptive summaries alone, the researcher interpreted the findings within the conceptual framework of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory to explain how gender representation embedded in social studies instruction may contribute to students' motivational experiences. Questionnaire findings were interpreted descriptively to support qualitative evidence rather than functioning as independent statistical results, thereby maintaining methodological consistency with the qualitative case study design. The integration of multiple analytical procedures, triangulation techniques, and continuous verification enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study while providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gender representation and elementary students' learning motivation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research findings were obtained through triangulation of sources from three main informants teachers, female students, and male students and were further supported through triangulation of methods using nonparticipatory observation, semi-structured interviews, Likert-scale questionnaires, and documentation. Triangulation was conducted across four areas of focus: students' general learning motivation; differences in motivation based on gender; gender representation in social studies instruction; and the relationship between gender representation and learning motivation.

Table 1. Triangulation of Data on Student Motivation to Learn

No	Data Sources	Triangulation Results
1	Teachers	According to teachers, students' motivation to learn will increase dramatically if the learning process incorporates interactive visual media, as students will be more focused, ask more questions, and participate more actively in the learning process.
2	Female Students	Female students' motivation to learn tends to be stable, as evidenced by their earnest attitude toward completing assignments, their discipline, and their high sense of responsibility during the learning process.
3	Male Students	Male students' motivation to learn tends to fluctuate, and their motivation is greatly influenced by the teaching methods used; they tend to be more active learners when instruction involves interaction rather than one-way teaching.

4	Observations & questionnaires	Based on the results of observational studies and questionnaires, it was found that learning approaches that incorporate context and interactive activities can improve students' concentration, participation, and engagement in the learning process.
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Table 2. Data Triangulation of Differences in Motivation Based on Gender

No	Data Sources	Triangulation Results
1	Teachers	Teachers stated that female students exhibit better discipline and consistency than male students in terms of engaging in the learning process, including completing their assignments on time. However, male students are considered more active and interactive in the learning process, while female students are assessed as more verbally active. Nevertheless, their levels of consistency and focus still depend on the specific learning situation.
2	Female Students	Female students' learning behavior is characterized by concentration and responsibility, as they can focus, persevere, and take responsibility during the learning process. They are generally able to maintain their focus throughout the learning process.
3	Male Students	Male students exhibit situational motivation in learning; they become more active in interactive and varied learning processes, but lose interest when the learning process becomes monotonous. They are also easily distracted, but are more willing to ask questions and express their opinions.
4	Observations & questionnaires	The observations and questionnaires conducted clarify that there are differences in motivational patterns: female students demonstrate consistency in terms of discipline and focus during learning, while male students are more influenced by their teacher's teaching style.

Table 3. Triangulation of Data on Gender Representation in Social Studies Education

No	Data Sources	Triangulation Results
1	Teachers	During the lecture, the teacher explained that social studies curriculum content still focuses on portraying men in public roles—such as working in the formal sector and engaging in social activities—while women are more frequently depicted in domestic roles. This is evident in the various stories and examples used in the lessons.
2	Female Students	Female students showed greater interest in contextual materials that were closer to their daily lives, particularly those that depicted their varied social roles.
3	Male Students	Male students tended to have a strong preference for material presented clearly and simply. They were more interested in practical examples without overly complex elements in their presentation.
4	Observations & questionnaires	Based on the results of observations and questionnaires, it can be concluded that the learning materials used contain certain elements of gender representation that

influence students' perceptions of the social roles of men and women and may also reinforce gender stereotypes.

Table 4. Data Triangulation on the Relationship Between Gender Representation and Learning Motivation

No	Data Sources	Triangulation Results
1	Teachers	According to teachers, students' motivation to learn stems not only from their learning styles but also from how the material is taught and the representations presented during the learning process. When the material is contextual, interactive, and free of gender bias, students tend to be more active and motivated.
2	Female Students	Female students exhibit a fairly consistent and stable level of motivation across different learning situations. They can maintain their focus on the learning process, whether through contextual learning or a variety of teaching methods.
3	Male Students	Motivation among male students increases when learning is conducted interactively and incorporates visual aids and engaging material, rather than being merely boring. In fact, male students' motivation decreases when learning takes place.
4	Observations & questionnaires	Based on the results of observations and questionnaires, it can be concluded that presenting material with more relevant, inclusive, and contextual representations can help increase student engagement in the learning process, in terms of attention, participation, and enthusiasm for learning.

In addition to the qualitative triangulation data, the results of the Likert-scale questionnaire administered to four students provided a more quantifiable picture of learning motivation. The questionnaire consisted of 10 statements across five dimensions of learning motivation. Table 5 below presents the questionnaire results by dimension based on the average scores (on a scale of 1–5) from all respondents.

Table 5. Results of the Student Learning Motivation Survey

No	Dimensions of Motivation	Average Female Students	Average Male Students	Category
1	Interest in social studies	4,5	4,0	Good
2	Active participation in the learning process	4,0	4,0	Good
3	Perseverance in completing assignments	4,5	4,0	Good / Fair
4	Responsibility for one's own learning	4,5	4,0	Good
5	Perception of gender equity in learning	4,0	4,0	Good

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that elementary students generally exhibited positive learning motivation; however, the factors sustaining that motivation extended beyond individual dispositions and were closely associated with the quality of classroom experiences and the characteristics of

instructional materials. Rather than functioning as a fixed psychological attribute, students' motivation appeared to emerge through continuous interactions between personal beliefs and contextual learning conditions. This pattern aligns closely with Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT), which argues that learners develop motivation by interpreting the opportunities, expectations, and values embedded within their educational environments (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). Classroom observations and interviews further indicated that students became more attentive and actively engaged when teachers incorporated interactive activities and contextual examples into social studies lessons, suggesting that instructional design influenced not only cognitive engagement but also students' perceptions of the relevance and meaningfulness of learning. These findings reinforce recent evidence indicating that supportive learning environments and meaningful classroom interactions strengthen students' expectancy beliefs and task values, thereby encouraging sustained participation and academic persistence (Asadpour et al., 2025; Ishida & Sekiyama, 2024; Vo & Ho, 2024). Unlike studies that primarily conceptualise motivation as the product of instructional strategies alone, the present research demonstrates that curriculum content itself contributes to shaping motivational experiences. This broader interpretation extends the application of SEVT by illustrating that motivation is influenced simultaneously by pedagogical practices and by the social meanings communicated through instructional materials, thereby offering a more comprehensive perspective on motivational development within elementary social studies education.

A second important finding concerns the distinct motivational patterns observed between female and male students. Female students consistently demonstrated stronger perseverance, responsibility, and sustained attention throughout classroom activities, whereas male students displayed greater responsiveness to interactive, visually engaging, and participatory instructional approaches. These differences should not be interpreted as evidence of inherent motivational disparities between genders but rather as indications that students respond differently to specific learning contexts and instructional conditions. Contemporary motivational theories emphasise that engagement develops through dynamic interactions between learners and their environments rather than through stable individual characteristics alone (Skinner et al., 2022; Lo, 2024). From this perspective, the greater consistency shown by female students may reflect stronger self-regulatory learning behaviours, while the situational responsiveness of male students suggests that their motivation is more dependent on instructional stimulation and classroom interaction. Similar tendencies have been reported in recent educational research showing that active learning environments, collaborative activities, and varied instructional media enhance students' behavioural engagement, particularly among learners who exhibit fluctuating motivational patterns (Costa et al., 2024; Córdova-Esparza et al., 2024; Daniel et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the present findings also extend previous research by demonstrating that motivational differences are not adequately explained through gender alone. Instead, they emerge from the interaction between learner characteristics and pedagogical practices, indicating that instructional flexibility may be more important than gender-specific assumptions when designing equitable classroom environments.

Beyond instructional strategies, the analysis of learning materials revealed that gender representation constitutes another contextual factor shaping students' motivational experiences. Document analysis showed that male characters continued to be portrayed predominantly in occupational, leadership, and public roles, whereas female characters appeared more frequently in domestic and supportive contexts. Although these representations may appear subtle when viewed individually, their repeated presence throughout instructional materials has the potential to influence students' interpretations of social expectations and their perceived relevance of classroom content. This interpretation is consistent with research suggesting that repeated exposure to stereotypical representations contributes to the construction of children's beliefs regarding social participation, competence, and future aspirations (Master, 2021; Lemieux, 2024). Similar patterns have also been documented in recent analyses of Indonesian and international educational materials, which continue to report persistent gender imbalances despite curriculum reforms intended to promote educational equity (Fawaid & Handayani, 2025; Gjylbegaj & Radwan, 2025; Vu & Pham, 2025a). However, the present study advances this body of literature by moving beyond descriptive textbook analysis to demonstrate how instructional representation may influence students' motivational experiences within authentic classroom settings. Consequently, gender representation

should not be regarded merely as a curriculum issue but as an educational factor that interacts with classroom practice to shape students' engagement, sense of belonging, and perceived value of learning, thereby reinforcing the need for more inclusive and gender-responsive social studies instruction.

Another significant finding is that students' motivational responses were influenced not only by the presence of gender representation in instructional materials but also by teachers' ability to mediate those representations through pedagogical practices. Classroom observations and interviews consistently indicated that students became more engaged when teachers contextualised textbook content, encouraged classroom interaction, and presented examples that reflected students' everyday experiences rather than relying solely on textbook narratives. This finding suggests that teachers function as active interpreters of the curriculum rather than passive transmitters of instructional content. From the perspective of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory, teachers shape motivational beliefs by influencing how students perceive the value, relevance, and attainability of learning tasks within particular social contexts (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Consequently, even when instructional materials contain gendered portrayals, effective pedagogical mediation can reduce their potentially limiting effects by encouraging critical discussion and presenting more inclusive perspectives. This interpretation is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that culturally responsive and inclusive teaching practices strengthen students' engagement by creating learning environments in which diverse identities are recognised and valued (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Hossain, 2024; Vu & Pham, 2025a). However, the present study extends these findings by showing that the motivational influence of teachers cannot be separated from the curriculum itself. Instead, classroom motivation emerges from the continuous interaction between instructional content and pedagogical practice, highlighting that curriculum reform and teacher professional development should be viewed as complementary rather than independent strategies for promoting educational equity.

The findings also indicate that contextual and inclusive instructional representations contribute to students' perceptions of learning relevance, which in turn strengthens classroom participation and sustained engagement. Teachers reported that students became more motivated when learning materials reflected familiar social situations and avoided rigid gender stereotypes, while observations confirmed greater attention and participation during lessons that incorporated contextual examples and interactive discussion. These patterns suggest that motivational development is closely associated with students' opportunities to recognise themselves and their lived experiences within the curriculum. SEVT proposes that students assign greater value to learning activities when they perceive them as personally meaningful and socially relevant, thereby increasing both engagement and persistence (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). Accordingly, balanced gender representation may enhance motivation not because it directly changes students' abilities, but because it broadens the range of identities and future roles with which learners can meaningfully identify. Similar conclusions have been reported in recent research demonstrating that inclusive learning environments foster stronger academic engagement, greater psychological belonging, and more positive educational experiences among diverse groups of students (Levy et al., 2023; Grimshaw et al., 2024; Wolff et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the present study contributes a new perspective by positioning instructional representation as an integral component of the motivational environment rather than as a peripheral issue of curriculum fairness. This conceptual shift broadens current motivational research by emphasising that students' task values are shaped not only by instructional methods but also by the social narratives embedded within educational resources.

Although the findings consistently support the importance of inclusive instructional practices, they should also be interpreted within the specific context of this qualitative case study. The research was conducted in a single elementary school involving a limited number of teachers and students, allowing rich contextual understanding but not statistical generalisation. Consequently, the motivational patterns identified should be understood as context-dependent rather than universally applicable across all educational settings. Cultural expectations regarding gender roles, school climate, teacher beliefs, and local curriculum implementation may all influence how students interpret instructional representations and respond motivationally to classroom experiences. This contextual sensitivity helps explain why some previous studies have reported stronger gender differences, whereas others have found only modest or inconsistent relationships between gender

and learning motivation (Master, 2021; Lo, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Rather than viewing these variations as contradictory, the present findings suggest that motivation should be conceptualised as a dynamic and contextually situated phenomenon shaped by multiple interacting influences. Such an interpretation provides a more nuanced understanding of gender and motivation by moving beyond essentialist explanations and recognising that educational experiences are constructed through the reciprocal relationships among learners, teachers, instructional materials, and broader sociocultural contexts. In this respect, the study contributes to the international discourse on inclusive education by demonstrating that improving students' motivation requires not only effective pedagogy but also greater attention to the representational messages communicated through everyday classroom resources.

Taken together, the findings offer an important theoretical contribution by extending the explanatory scope of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT) within elementary social studies education. Previous applications of SEVT have predominantly focused on the influence of psychological factors, instructional strategies, and classroom interactions on students' expectancy beliefs and task values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). The present study demonstrates that these motivational processes are also shaped by the social meanings embedded in curriculum content, particularly through patterns of gender representation encountered during everyday learning experiences. This finding suggests that instructional materials should not be viewed as neutral vehicles for delivering knowledge, but rather as contextual resources that influence how students interpret opportunities for participation, competence, and social contribution. Consequently, the study expands the conceptual boundaries of SEVT by incorporating curriculum representation as an additional contextual mechanism influencing motivational development. This perspective complements contemporary motivational research by highlighting that students' learning motivation is constructed through the reciprocal interaction of pedagogical practice, classroom experience, and representational messages rather than through isolated psychological variables. Positioning curriculum content within motivational theory therefore provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding how equitable educational environments can be developed during the formative years of schooling.

The practical implications of these findings extend beyond improving classroom instruction and point toward the need for more systemic curriculum development. The evidence indicates that increasing students' motivation cannot rely solely on adopting interactive teaching strategies if instructional resources continue to reproduce narrow and stereotypical portrayals of gender roles. Instead, sustainable improvements require collaboration among teachers, curriculum developers, textbook authors, and educational policymakers to ensure that learning materials present diverse and balanced representations of social participation. Such an approach would enable students to encounter broader examples of leadership, citizenship, family responsibilities, and professional roles that reflect contemporary social realities rather than traditional assumptions. At the classroom level, teachers should also be encouraged to critically evaluate textbook content and enrich lessons with contextual examples that challenge stereotypes and promote inclusive participation. These recommendations are consistent with recent international discussions emphasising that equitable education depends not only on instructional quality but also on the inclusiveness of curriculum content and classroom discourse (Levy et al., 2023; Fawaid & Handayani, 2025; Vu & Pham, 2025a). Therefore, strengthening students' motivation should be understood as a multidimensional educational objective requiring simultaneous attention to pedagogy, curriculum, and representational equity.

Overall, this study contributes to the global literature by addressing an important gap that has received relatively limited empirical attention, particularly within elementary social studies education in Indonesia. While previous studies have generally investigated learning motivation and gender representation as separate areas of inquiry, the present research integrates both dimensions within a single qualitative framework informed by SEVT. This integrated perspective demonstrates that students' motivational experiences cannot be fully understood without considering how instructional materials communicate social meanings alongside academic content. Rather than treating gender representation solely as an issue of curriculum fairness, the findings position it as a factor with implications for students' engagement, participation, and perceived value of learning. In doing so, the study provides a conceptual contribution by illustrating that representational equity

functions as part of the broader motivational ecology of the classroom, where curriculum, pedagogy, and learner experiences continuously interact. Although additional research involving larger and more diverse educational settings is needed to examine the transferability of these findings, the present study establishes an important foundation for future investigations into the relationship between inclusive curriculum design and motivational development. Ultimately, the findings reinforce the view that achieving equitable and meaningful learning requires attention not only to how teachers teach but also to the messages that students repeatedly encounter through the instructional materials that shape their understanding of themselves and the society in which they participate.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that elementary school students' learning motivation in social studies is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by the learning environment, particularly the ways in which gender is represented through instructional practices and teaching materials. Although students generally demonstrated positive levels of motivation, female students showed greater consistency in perseverance, responsibility, and engagement, whereas male students responded more strongly to interactive and varied instructional approaches. The analysis further indicates that social studies learning materials continue to portray men predominantly in public roles and women mainly in domestic contexts, reflecting an imbalance that may shape students' perceptions of social roles and influence their motivational experiences. These findings support the view of Situated Expectancy-Value Theory that students' motivation develops through the interaction between personal beliefs and contextual learning experiences, including the social meanings embedded in curriculum content. By integrating evidence from classroom observations, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how gender representation may affect learning motivation in elementary social studies education. The findings also highlight the importance of developing more inclusive instructional materials and implementing gender-responsive teaching practices to create equitable learning environments that encourage meaningful participation and sustained motivation among all students.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Nasha Indri Fazila Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, visualization, writing original draft, and corresponding author. Nurdiansyah Methodology, validation, formal analysis, writing review and editing, and supervision. Jennyta Caturiasari Supervision, methodology, validation, project administration, writing review and editing. All authors contributed to the interpretation of the findings, critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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