

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN INDONESIA: A DOCUMENTATION STUDY ON PRIMAKARA UNIVERSITY STUDENT ARTICLES

Helmy Syakh Alam^{1*}, Ni Wayan Nanik Suaryani Taro Putri²,
Ni Kadek Yenni Ayundia³

^{1*,2,3} Primakara University, Denpasar, Indonesia

*helmy@primakara.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: May 24, 2025

Accepted: June 24, 2025

Published: August 5, 2025

Keywords:

Student Perspectives; Thematic
Analysis; Social Problems; Policy
Reform; Educational Policies

Corresponding Author:

Helmy Syakh Alam

Email: helmy@primakara.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Social problems in Indonesia, such as corruption, drug abuse, and bullying, remain significant challenges impacting national development and social integrity. This study explores students' perspectives on these issues through a documentation study of 86 reflective articles written by Primakara University students. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with thematic analysis, the study identifies dominant themes and validates findings with national data and academic literature. The results reveal that students are highly aware of social issues and propose solution-based recommendations emphasizing education, empathy, and policy reform. These insights align with successful practices from Finland, Portugal, and Denmark. The study underscores the importance of student participation in social development and the need for progressive educational policies to support social change.

INTRODUCTION

Social problems in Indonesia continue to pose significant barriers to national development, social cohesion, and the realization of social justice. Despite Indonesia's abundant natural and cultural resources, the country grapples with persistent issues such as unequal distribution of welfare, limited access to quality education, and high rates of legal violations and corruption (BPS, 2023). These challenges are deeply entrenched and impact economic

growth, public trust, and social well-being. Previous studies have primarily focused on quantitative assessments of social issues or policy evaluations at the governmental level (Degenhardt et al., 2019; Transparency International, 2023). However, a limited body of research still explores how university students, often regarded as critical agents of social change, perceive, interpret, and respond to these social problems (Jannah & Sulianti, 2021). Understanding students' perspectives is crucial, reflecting their awareness and readiness to contribute to societal transformation.

This study seeks to fill that gap by conducting a qualitative documentation analysis of 86 reflective articles written by students of Primakara University. These articles offer a rich, underutilized source of data that captures students' critical engagement with key social problems, namely corruption, drug abuse, bullying, and human trafficking. These issues are also prominently reported by national institutions such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK, 2021), the National Narcotics Board (BNN, 2022), and the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2024). Unlike previous research that often focuses on statistical prevalence or policy outcomes, this study emphasizes grassroots perspectives emerging from student reflections, a dimension that is largely absent in current literature.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to bridge the gap between academic discourse and civic awareness, contributing to educational strategies and policy considerations. By capturing students' voices, this study highlights how the younger generation perceives Indonesia's pressing social issues and examines their proposed solutions, which often combine elements of education, empathy, and systemic reform. Therefore, the objectives of this research are: (1) to identify the most dominant social issues perceived by students; (2) to analyse how these perceptions align with broader social realities in Indonesia; and (3) to provide recommendations derived from student perspectives that may inform educational policy and community-based interventions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, which is appropriate for exploring how individuals interpret and construct meaning around social issues (Moleong, 2017). The purpose is to capture and analyze students'

reflections on social problems in Indonesia within the context of their educational experience. As Yupita, Alam, and Artani (2025) emphasized, qualitative inquiry is essential in academic research to uncover learners' nuanced, subjective experiences, especially in contexts requiring critical thinking and reflexive engagement.

The primary data source comprises 86 reflective articles authored by undergraduate students enrolled in the Civic Education course at Primakara University during the 2024/2025 academic year. These reflections were collected as part of a structured assignment designed to engage students with real-world social issues such as corruption, drug abuse, bullying, and human trafficking. Reflective writing is a valid method for capturing authentic student perspectives on complex societal problems.

This study employs a documentation study method, a well-established qualitative technique for gathering and interpreting data from written records (Moleong, 2017; Rahmawati et al., 2025). This method is particularly effective in educational research where student-generated artifacts, such as essays, serve as rich data sources for understanding cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning (Yupita, Alam, and Artani, 2025).

The collected data were then analysed using thematic content analysis techniques to identify, analyze, and interpret essential patterns or themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps in this analysis process include:

1. Data Familiarization: Read all student articles thoroughly to gain an initial understanding.
2. Initial coding by marking relevant text parts and grouping them based on the social issues that arise.
3. Identify themes by organizing the codes into themes such as corruption, drugs, and bullying.
4. Theme review, by reviewing the suitability and depth of the theme for the overall data.
5. Naming and defining themes by compiling thematic descriptions that reflect the deep meaning of the students' perspectives.

To increase the validity of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing the findings of student documents with data from official institutions (such as BPS, BNN, KPK, and KPAI) and the latest

scientific literature. This triangulation aims to strengthen the validity of the research results by ensuring that the data obtained is not biased or one-sided (Patton, 1999; Ainin & Tabrin, 2024; Barmo & Yahaya, 2024). With this approach, the research not only represents students' perceptions descriptively, but also confirms the relevance of their views to social reality more objectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 86 student articles reveals the categorization of social problems frequently discussed. The most prevalent issues include corruption (24%), drug abuse (23%), bullying (19%), and human trafficking (15%). Other issues, such as online gambling, sexual violence, and tourism destruction, were mentioned less frequently but remain significant.

No	Case Name	Number of Articles	Percentage
1	Corruption	21	24%
2	Drugs	20	23%
3	Bullying	16	19%
4	Human Trafficking	13	15%
5	Online Gambling	4	5%
6	Sexual Violence	3	3%
7	Tourism Destroyer	2	2%
8	Program Transparency	2	2%
9	Dissemination of Prohibited Content	1	1%
10	Same-Sex Marriage	1	1%
11	High Unemployment	1	1%
12	Human Rights Violations	1	1%
13	Blasphemy	1	1%

The data above shows the discussion of social problems that occur in Indonesia that are the most trending topics among Primakara University students, which have a percentage of more than 10%, namely Corruption, Drugs, Bullying, and Human Trafficking. These topics are discussed in more detail as follows:

1. Corruption

Based on a documentation study of Primakara University students, corruption is the most frequently mentioned issue (24%) as the most damaging social problem. Students view corruption as the root of structural inequality in Indonesia, which hinders development, reduces the quality of public services, and weakens people's trust in the state.

In line with the reflections of Primakara University students, recent research provides valuable insights into how university students perceive corruption and its broader implications. Generally, students clearly understand corruption as a legal and moral violation, acknowledging its detrimental impact on society (Rahman et al., 2023; Harris & Merwe, 2012). However, a notable discrepancy remains between their ethical beliefs and behavioral intentions. Specific forms of corruption, particularly those perceived as minor or culturally normalized, are still regarded by some students as tolerable or justifiable (Rahman et al., 2023). This perception gap suggests that awareness does not always translate into integrity-driven behavior.

Furthermore, studies indicate that demographic factors such as gender and ethnicity can shape how students interpret and respond to corruption (Harris & Merwe, 2012). Another concerning finding is the link between corruption perception and academic motivation. Specifically, students experiencing amotivation, a lack of drive or purpose in their educational pursuits, are more likely to rationalize or engage in corrupt practices in future workplace settings (Llullaku & Bërxulli, 2017). This psychological dimension underscores that corruption is not merely a legal issue but also intertwined with personal values, academic experiences, and future professional conduct.

Despite understanding what constitutes corruption, many students inadvertently participate in corrupt behaviors daily, often unaware of their ethical implications (Azhar, 2014). These insights align closely with the concerns raised by students in this study, who recognize corruption as a deeply entrenched structural issue in Indonesia. They further advocate that addressing corruption requires more than punitive measures; it necessitates early intervention through values-based education, digital transparency tools, and the cultivation of ethical leadership skills within higher education. This approach resonates with the broader call for anti-corruption efforts that are both preventive and transformative, not merely reactive.

Nationally, Transparency International (2023) noted that Indonesia was ranked 110th out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Students highlighted cases such as the corruption of COVID-19 social assistance by high-ranking state officials as a form of betrayal of the principle of social justice.

Fisman & Golden (2017) explained that corruption thrives when there is impunity, weaknesses in law enforcement, and a lack of public oversight. In Indonesia, these factors are evident in bureaucratic complexity, low budget transparency, and a permissive culture in local government.

Countries like Denmark and Finland consistently rank in the top three of the CPI because they have successfully built digital oversight systems, early integrity education, and community participation mechanisms in fiscal policy (OECD, 2020). It means that solving corruption is not enough just by taking legal action, but also by transforming bureaucratic culture and the openness of public data.

The students in their article proposed a civic transparency platform model, where the public can access and monitor budget realization through a digital application. It shows their understanding of active citizen participation in government oversight, not just leaving it to legal institutions.

2. Drugs

The issue of drug abuse was mentioned by 23% of Primakara University students as a crucial problem that threatens the future of the younger generation. In their narratives, students not only blamed users but also criticized weak social control, minimal education, and an environment that is permissive of addictive substances.

In addition to concerns raised by Primakara University students, existing literature also reveals that complex attitudes and contextual risk factors shape students' perceptions of drug abuse. Adolescents frequently associate drug use with criminal behavior while recognizing vulnerabilities such as easy access to substances, peer and family influence, and school disengagement as significant contributors (Filho et al., 2015). Among university students, risk perception has a direct impact on both drug consumption patterns and the formation of peer relationships (Lins et al., 2020). Furthermore, students often adopt a binary classification of substances, labeling legal drugs as "good" and

illegal ones as "bad", which reflects a limited understanding of the broader complexities surrounding substance use (De Jesus et al., 2018). An emerging concern highlighted in recent research is the misuse of prescription medications among university students as a strategy to enhance academic performance, an issue that underscores the need for targeted preventive education and mental health support on campuses (Lins et al., 2020).

Data from BNN (2022) shows that the prevalence of drug users in Indonesia has reached 3.66 million people. Students also cited the increasing involvement of students and college students in drug distribution networks as a form of failure of character education and supportive communities. Globally, Degenhardt et al. (2019) noted that developing countries experience a high burden of disease due to drug addiction, especially among the productive age group. However, the repressive approach has proven ineffective in the long term. As a comparison, Portugal is a successful example. With a decriminalization policy since 2001 and a focus on community-based rehabilitation, overdose deaths and HIV infections have decreased drastically (EMCDDA, 2021). This model contrasts with Indonesia's approach, which is still predominantly repressive.

Students in their documentation offer a consistent approach, such as strengthening empathy-based school counseling, collaboration between health centers and educational institutions, and peer group-based education on campus. It indicates an understanding of the urgency of a multidisciplinary approach to drug prevention by placing perpetrators not only as objects of punishment, but also as subjects of recovery.

3. Bullying

As many as 19% of Primakara University students raised bullying as a social problem that is increasingly worrying. They did not only refer to physical violence, but also verbal, social, and digital bullying (cyberbullying), which is now common on social media.

In alignment with the reflections from Primakara University students, recent studies reveal that student perceptions of bullying are often nuanced and, at times, conflicted. While many students acknowledge that bullying is harmful, a significant proportion hold neutral or ambiguous attitudes, with some still perceiving certain bullying behaviors as acceptable or culturally normalized

(Ernawati et al., 2021; Pratiwi & Daharnis, 2019). Interestingly, research shows that bystanders, those who witness bullying, are generally less supportive of such actions, suggesting that passive disapproval exists even when active intervention is lacking (Lauren et al., 2019).

Further studies indicate that the perception and awareness of bullying often carry greater weight than the actual incidence itself, meaning that how students interpret and respond to bullying plays a critical role in either perpetuating or preventing it (Saniel et al., 2021). Bullying manifests in diverse forms, including physical, verbal, relational, psychological, and even sexual harassment, both offline and online (Pratiwi & Daharnis, 2019). Despite growing awareness campaigns and educational initiatives, a persistent challenge remains: some students struggle to accurately recognize what constitutes bullying, especially in more subtle or relational forms (Ernawati et al., 2021).

These findings are consistent with the narratives shared by Primakara students, who express concern about the normalization of both overt and covert forms of bullying in academic and digital spaces. Their reflections emphasize that addressing bullying requires more than disciplinary measures; it calls for a comprehensive educational approach that fosters empathy, emotional intelligence, and digital citizenship. Drawing inspiration from successful models like Finland's KiVa program, students advocate for embedding antibullying education into the broader curriculum, alongside creating safe, supportive environments that empower victims and equip bystanders with the tools to intervene effectively.

KPAI (2024) and Komisi Nasional Anak/ Children National Commission (2023) noted a significant increase in online bullying cases among students during distance learning. Students said that many victims did not report because they were afraid of being ostracized or did not trust the conflict resolution system at school. A study conducted by Kowalski et al. (2014) stated that the psychological effects of digital bullying can be long-lasting, increasing the risk of depression, isolation, and even suicide. The best solution is to punish the perpetrator and create an empathetic and inclusive school environment.

Countries such as Finland have successfully reduced bullying rates through the national KiVa program, which is based on character education,

involvement of the entire school community, and a confidential reporting system. Evaluation by Salmivalli & Poskiparta (2012) showed a 40% reduction in bullying in schools that implemented it. Primakara University students in their reflections mentioned the need to adopt a similar system in Indonesia, especially in the form of an antibullying curriculum that teaches digital empathy, media literacy, and a safe and victim-friendly reporting system.

4. Human trafficking

As many as 15% of Primakara University students raised the issue of human trafficking as a worrying social problem, especially in the context of labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and child trafficking in eastern Indonesia and tourist areas. Students viewed human trafficking as an organized crime that operates beneath the surface of the social structure, often invisible but targeting vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the poor.

Complementing the reflections from Primakara University students, recent research underscores that university students' perceptions of human trafficking are often shaped by misconceptions, biases, and a limited understanding of the issue's complexity. A study involving Portuguese university students revealed that socioeconomic vulnerability is widely perceived as the primary factor contributing to victimization, with traffickers frequently exploiting individuals through deceptive job offers and false promises (Fernandes et al., 2020). Similarly, research conducted in the United States found that gender and belief in human trafficking myths significantly influence how students interpret trafficking scenarios, with those holding stronger myth acceptance being more prone to victim-blaming attitudes (Cunningham & Cromer, 2016).

Notably, students specializing in criminal justice demonstrated perceptual biases, particularly in their ability and willingness to identify and assist victims. Specifically, there was a tendency to more readily recognize and show empathy toward female victims of sex trafficking. In contrast, victims of labour trafficking and male victims were more likely to be overlooked or dismissed (Salami et al., 2021). These patterns reveal that stereotypical portrayals of trafficking heavily influence students' perceptions, potentially undermining efforts to address the full spectrum of trafficking realities.

These insights resonate with the concerns raised by Primakara students,

who recognize that the invisibility of certain forms of trafficking, especially labour exploitation and domestic servitude, is compounded by public misinformation and limited community vigilance. Students argue that effectively combating human trafficking requires not only stronger legal frameworks but also robust educational interventions that dismantle myths, challenge gendered stereotypes, and promote a nuanced understanding of the various forms of exploitation. They emphasize integrating legal literacy, community-based surveillance, and victim-centered approaches into formal education and public awareness campaigns to foster a more informed and responsive society.

Data from UNODC (2022) in the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons shows that Indonesia is one of the primary sources and transit countries for human trafficking in Southeast Asia. In some cases, victims are even mobilized through online platforms disguised as job offers. From within the country, the report of the Ministry of PPPA (2023) stated that human trafficking increased significantly after the pandemic, primarily through unofficial migration routes and child marriage. Students also mentioned the involvement of certain officers and weak early detection at the village level as factors inhibiting the eradication of this case.

Internationally, countries like Belgium and Norway have implemented a strong victim-centered approach, placing victims as the primary subject of protection with ongoing psychosocial, legal, and economic support (European Commission, 2020). Law enforcement is carried out collaboratively between the police, NGOs, and immigration, accompanied by long-term social reintegration programs. In their article, students suggest increasing legal literacy among village and migrant communities about the dangers of trafficking; strengthening the function of the Child and Women Protection Task Force at the local level; and collaboration between the government, NGOs, and traditional leaders in detecting illegal recruitment patterns. It reflects that they understand the complexity of this issue as a multidimensional crime, which cannot be handled only with a legal approach, but also requires cross-sectoral community-based work.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of student perspectives in understanding and addressing major social issues in Indonesia. Through the analysis of reflective articles, it becomes evident that students possess critical awareness and the capacity to propose constructive solutions grounded in education, empathy, and community engagement. Their reflections reinforce the understanding that complex social problems, such as corruption, drug abuse, bullying, and human trafficking, require holistic, multidisciplinary approaches that integrate educational reform, policy improvement, and active civic participation. The broader implication of this study is that empowering young people through reflective learning can cultivate social responsibility and foster a generation capable of contributing meaningfully to societal transformation. While the study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its scope, which focuses solely on one institution, Primakara University, and utilizes a single type of data source, student-written reflections. It may constrain the generalizability of the findings across different educational, cultural, or geographical contexts in Indonesia. Additionally, as the analysis is based on written narratives, it does not capture real-life behavioural outcomes or the longitudinal development of student awareness.

Future research should expand the sample to include multiple universities, employ mixed methods, combine reflections with interviews or focus groups, and explore how student awareness translates into real-world civic actions over time. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into whether reflective learning leads to sustained civic engagement and behavioural change. In conclusion, fostering critical reflection and social advocacy among students is not merely an academic exercise but a strategic investment in building a more transparent, empathetic, and resilient society. Educational institutions, policymakers, and civil society organizations are encouraged to collaborate in developing learning environments and community programs that empower students as agents of sustainable social change.

REFERENCES

- Ainin, I. K., & Tabrin, N. N. I. (2024). Social Acceptance Among Children with Learning Difficulties. *ASANKA: Journal of Social Science and Education*, 5(2), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.21154/asanka.v5i2.9784>
- Badan Narkotika Nasional. (2022). *Laporan Tahunan BNN 2022*. Jakarta: BNN.
- Barmo, S. A., & Yahaya, A. G. (2024). Islamic Perspective and Socio-Cultural Aspects of Pre-Marital Medical Test in Sokoto Metropolis. *ASANKA: Journal of Social Science and Education*, 5(2), 205–220. <https://doi.org/10.21154/asanka.v5i2.9861>
- EMCDDA. (2021). *Portugal: Country drug report 2021*. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/country-drug-reports/2021/portugal_en
- Ernawati, R., Deliviana, E., Wigunawati, E., Hutabarat, L. E., & Intarti, E. R. (2021). Student Perceptions of Bullying. *Psychology and Education*, 58(2), 1140–1148. <https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i2.2253>
- European Commission. (2020). *The EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2021–2025)*. <https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking>
- Fernandes, Â., Gonçalves, M., & Matos, M. (2020). "Who are the Victims, Who are the Traffickers?" University Students' Portrayals of Human Trafficking. *Victims & Offenders*, 15, 243–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2019.1711276>
- Filho, E. A., Queiros, P. S., Medeiros, M., Rosso, C. F. W., & Souza, M. M. (2015). Perceptions of Adolescent Students About Drugs. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem*, 68(4), 457–463. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167.2015680320i>
- Harris, G., & Merwe, A. V. (2012). The Scope for Mobilising Public Opinion Against Corruption: The Attitudes of Kwazulu-Natal University Students. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 15(3), 282–293. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v15i3.301>
- Jannah, F., & Sulianti, A. (2021). Perspektif Mahasiswa Sebagai Agen of Change Melalui Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan. *ASANKA: Journal of Social Science and Education*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.21154/asanka.v2i2.3193>

- Kementerian PPPA. (2023). *Data Nasional TPPO dan Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak tahun 2022–2023*. Jakarta.
- Komnas Perlindungan Anak. (2023). *Laporan Tahunan Komnas Anak 2023*. Jakarta.
- Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in The Digital Age: A Critical Review and Meta-Analysis of Cyberbullying Research Among Youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073–1137. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035618>
- KPAI. (2024). *Data Kasus Anak tahun 2024*. Jakarta: Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia.
- Lauren, D. I., Daharnis, D., & Afdal, A. (2019). Bystander Students' Perception of Bullying Behaviour. *Jurnal Neo Konseling*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.24036/00181kons2019>
- Lins, E. F., Barbosa, K. G., & Ribeiro, M. C. (2020). Percepção Sobre Uso de Substâncias Psicoativas em Estudantes Universitários: Uma Revisão Integrativa. *Mudanças*, 28(2), <https://doi.org/10.15603/2176-1019/mud.v28n2p77-84>.
https://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-32692020000200010
- Llullaku, N., & Bërxulli, D. (2017). Student Perceptions of Workplace Corruption and Its Effect on Their Academic Motivation. *The European Journal of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 20, 2489–2507. <https://doi.org/10.15405/ejsbs.220>
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Edisi revisi). Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- OECD. (2020). *Public integrity for an effective COVID-19 response and recovery*. <https://www.oecd.org/corruption-integrity/reports/>
- Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Analysis. *Health Services Research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189–1208.
- Pratiwi, I., & Daharnis, D. (2019). Students' Perceptions about Bullying Behavior. *Jurnal Neo Konseling*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.24036/00145kons2019>
- Rahman, A. R., Hasan, H. C., Ahmad, A., & Wahab, R. A. (2023). Students' Perceptions Toward Corruption: Malaysian Evidence. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v13-i2/15081>

- Salami, T. K., Babu, J. M., & Hari, C. (2021). Criminal Justice Students' Perceptions of Human Trafficking Victims: Assessing Bias and Helping Behavior. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 33, 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2021.1952287>
- Salmivalli, C., & Poskiparta, E. (2012). KiVa Antibullying Program: Overview of Evaluation Studies Based on a Randomized Controlled Trial and National Rollout in Finland. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6, 293–301.
- Saniel, J. D. R., Opena, C. C., Balondo, J. B., Bunda, A. M., & Tambis, L. B. (2021). Perception and prevalence of bullying among junior high school students of Biliran Province State University. *Pedimaternel Nursing Journal*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.20473/pmnj.v7i1.22517>
- Transparency International. (2023). *Corruption Perceptions Index 2023*. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>
- UNODC. (2022). *Global report on trafficking in persons 2022*. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>
- UNODC. (2023). *World Drug Report 2023*. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2023.html>
- Yupita, L., Alam, H. S., & Artani, K. T. B. (2025). Team-based project learning (TBPL) catalyzes management skill development: A reflexive thematic study. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 6(2), 45–59. https://econeurasia.com/issue-2025-06/article_03.pdf