

Application of the Contextual Method as an Innovation in Elementary School Social Studies Learning

Kadek Desi Parayanti^{1*}, Gusti Ayu Kadek Dwi Puspayanti², Gusti Ngurah Arya Yudaparmita³

^{1,2,3} Institut Agama Hindu Negeri Mpu Kuturan Singaraja

*E-mail addresses: desipara44@gmail.com

ABSTRAK. Dalam pembelajaran IPS, pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis konten (CTL) memungkinkan siswa memahami konsep sosial secara lebih praktis dan relevan. Misalnya, guru dapat mengajak siswa untuk mengamati kegiatan pelayanan masyarakat di lingkungan mereka dan membahas prinsip-prinsip yang terlibat saat membahas topik interaksi sosial. Siswa dapat diminta untuk mewawancarai pedagang di pasar lokal saat membahas sistem ekonomi untuk memahami praktik jual beli dan tantangan ekonomi yang dihadapi masyarakat. CTL meningkatkan pemahaman siswa, keterampilan berpikir kritis, dan kesadaran akan isu-isu sosial di sekitar mereka dengan menghubungkan pelajaran dengan pengalaman langsung. Guru berperan sebagai fasilitator dan merancang tugas belajar berdasarkan masalah dunia nyata. Dengan demikian, studi sosial tidak hanya menjadi mata pelajaran yang harus dihafal, tetapi juga sarana untuk membangun karakter dan kesadaran sosial siswa. Metode ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan semua aspek pembelajaran, termasuk kognitif (pemahaman konsep dan analisis sosial), afektif (sikap peduli, toleransi, dan tanggung jawab), psikomotor (keterampilan observasi, wawancara, dan presentasi), serta budaya (penguatan nilai kebersamaan dan identitas lokal). Kurikulum Merdeka dan Profil Pelajar Pancasila mendukung CTL, yang menekankan pembelajaran kontekstual, kerja sama tim, dan refleksi. Namun, keterbatasan waktu, sumber belajar yang tidak kontekstual, dan kemampuan guru dalam menciptakan kegiatan yang sesuai dengan situasi lokal adalah isu-isu yang menghambat implementasinya di tingkat sekolah dasar. Akibatnya, pelatihan guru berkelanjutan, alat pengajaran yang fleksibel, dan dukungan kebijakan untuk inovasi pembelajaran berbasis CTL di sekolah dasar sangat dibutuhkan.

ABSTRACT. In social studies learning, the content based learning (CTL) approach enables students to understand social concepts in a more practical and relevant way. For example, teachers can invite students to observe community service activities in their neighborhood and discuss the principles involved when discussing the subject of social interaction. Students can be asked to interview vendors at the local market when discussing economic systems to understand buying and selling practices and the economic challenges faced by the community. CTL improves students' understanding, critical thinking skills, and awareness of social issues around them by linking lessons to direct experiences. Teachers act as facilitators and design learning tasks based on real-world problems. Thus, social studies becomes not only a subject to be memorized but also a means of building students' character and social awareness. This method aims to improve all aspects of learning, including cognitive (conceptual understanding and social analysis), affective (attitudes of care, tolerance, and responsibility), psychomotor (observation, interviewing, and presentation skills), and cultural (reinforcement of values of togetherness and local identity). The Merdeka Curriculum and Pancasila Student Profile support CTL, which emphasizes contextual learning, teamwork, and reflection. However, limited time, noncontextual learning resources, and teachers' ability to create activities appropriate to the local situation are issues that hinder its implementation at the elementary school level. As a result, continuous teacher training, flexible teaching tools, and policy support for CTLbased learning innovation in elementary schools are urgently needed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social studies is an integrative field that combines various disciplines, such as geography, history, economics, and sociology, in a comprehensive and contextual educational approach. Because the material taught is highly relevant to the dynamics of daily life and overall community development, social studies plays an important role in shaping the character and increasing the social awareness of students in Indonesia. Improving understanding of social structures, principles, and customs, as well as how individuals connect with their social, cultural, economic, and historical environments, is the main objective of SSE teaching (Msonde, 2023). However, many schools still face fundamental challenges when implementing SSE learning. The assumption that this subject is uninteresting and has no practical benefits is a major problem. This is exacerbated by a learning approach that is still dominated by lectures and memorization, which makes it difficult for students to understand concepts in depth (Erzen & Ozabaci, 2023). As a result of the conventional and one-way approach to social studies learning, the retention rate and relevance of the material to students' real lives is low, thereby hindering their critical and contextual thinking skills. The lack of active participation and the disconnect between the material and social conditions make students feel alienated from the lessons being taught (Siregar, 2023).

One effective solution is contextual teaching and learning (CTL), which links lesson material to real social and cultural situations in the students' environment, making the learning process more relevant and in-depth. Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) is a learning approach that emphasizes the relationship between lesson material and the students' real-life environment. CTL comes from the words 'contextual', which means relevant to the situation, 'teaching', which means instruction, and 'learning', which means education. CTL stems from the idea that students will better understand and appreciate lessons if they can relate them to their daily lives, their environment, and their local culture (Pilotti et al., 2021). CTL encourages teachers to facilitate active, collaborative, and reflective learning by using strategies such as modeling, inquiry, and authentic assessment. The contextual approach emphasizes that students must actively participate in the learning process by relating the subject matter to situations that occur in their daily lives. For example, in history lessons, students can learn stories about the struggle for independence in the area where they live. On the other hand, in economics lessons, students are asked to observe buying and selling activities in their local markets. In this way, students not only memorize information, but they also gain a deeper understanding through their own direct experiences (Leung & Yung, 2022).

Contextual learning (CTL) is a learning method that increases the relevance and understanding of concepts by combining learning material with students' real experiences. CTL is used in social studies learning through methods such as case study-based discussions, local economic simulations, and field trips to historical sites or social environments. Research by Santiani et al. shows that the use of CTL encourages teachers to develop activity-oriented (student-centered) learning and improves students' ability to solve real social problems. Numerous studies have shown that contextual learning strategies are effective in improving students' conceptual understanding of social studies subjects (Coleman, 2022). The CTL strategy, with its active, collaborative, and applicative approach, succeeded in increasing student motivation and learning outcomes, and students also showed improvement in their problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Bair et al., 2023). CTL has the ability to produce meaningful -based learning because students feel directly involved in the learning process. In addition, CTL allows for the application of a multiple intelligences approach, where students with verbal, kinesthetic, visualspatial, and interpersonal intelligences can participate to their respective strengths. This also reduces the dominance of a one-way approach and allows for different learning styles (Lombardi et al., 2024).

One of the advantages of the contextual learning approach is that it prioritizes learning in the real world, emphasizes real experiences, focuses on active, critical, and creative learners, prioritizes learning that is relevant to real life, produces changes in behavior, gives meaning to knowledge, and focuses on learning rather than teaching. In addition, there are other advantages, such as activities that focus on education rather than teaching, such as creating, problem solving, involving students as instructors, and measuring learning outcomes through various instruments, not just tests (Crutchley, 2023). However, one of the weaknesses of the CTL learning model is that classroom teachers must understand the concept of contextual learning thoroughly and comprehensively. Possible differences among individual learners in the classroom, various learning approaches that focus on learner activities, and learning resources, media, tools, and equipment that support learner activities (Zhang, 2022).

2. METHOD

In collecting and analyzing the data for this study, the main approach was a literature study or review. Literature research is a research approach that aims to find, review, and synthesize various literature related to the research subject. Sources that can be used include scientific journal articles, academic books, research reports, and other relevant documents. To gain a theoretical understanding and a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied, literature studies utilize secondary data rather than primary data. This method allows researchers to thoroughly investigate the application of contextual learning strategies (Contextual Teaching and Learning or CTL) in improving students' understanding of concepts in Social Sciences (IPS) subjects. CTL is a learning approach that connects subject matter to students' real-life situations, making learning more relevant and meaningful. By conducting a literature study,

researchers can summarize various empirical research findings, discover patterns, and analyze the theoretical and practical contributions of CTL.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

CTL method is carried out in a natural teaching and learning process. The purpose of the CTL (Contextual Teaching and Learning) method is to help educators connect the curriculum with the real conditions faced by students. This method encourages students to realize that the knowledge they acquire in class is directly beneficial to them and can be applied in their daily lives. As a result, learning has now become a process of understanding and applying information in social situations and the surrounding environment, rather than simply memorizing concepts (Ginsberg et al., 2023).

CTL highlights the importance of students actively participating in the learning process. Students are actively involved in seeking and developing their own understanding, not just listening to and taking notes on the teacher's explanations. Real experiences, conversations, and contextual activities are used to carry out the learning process, which makes learning more interesting and meaningful. Students gain holistic development through these direct experiences, encompassing not only cognitive (knowledge) development but also affective (attitudes and values) and psychomotor (skills) development. In this case, learning creates resources that can be applied in real life, not just knowledge that is temporarily stored in memory (McGrath, 2022). Ultimately, CTL enables students to think critically, creatively, and use their knowledge to solve various real-world problems.

Discussion

CTL Learning Methods and Benefits

Based on the data we found in the article, we found that the cognitive learning outcomes for the group of students applying the contextual learning model (78.03) were higher than the average score for the group of students applying the direct learning model (71.48). Therefore, it has been proven that the contextual learning model (CTL) has a greater influence on cognitive learning outcomes than the direct learning model. Students actively participate in solving problems mentioned through CTL, which increases their motivation to learn both individually and in groups (Linville et al., 2024).

Students' ability to find relevant information and analyze it to choose the best answer is enhanced through this practical involvement. In addition, contextual learning increases students' motivation to learn, resulting in them becoming more enthusiastic, responsible, and disciplined in completing tasks on time. Therefore, even though the teaching resources and facilities are the same, the learning model used has a major influence on student learning outcomes. The contextual approach involves several key components of contextual learning, namely: constructivism, inquiry, questioning, and learning community (Cassidy et al., 2022).

Constructivism

According to this theory, students construct their own knowledge based on their previous experiences and information. This means that the learning process is not merely about receiving knowledge from the teacher, but also involves the creation or development of new understanding based on previous experiences.

Inquiry

The process of learning through exploration begins with observation and ends with understanding. Students are encouraged to learn, research, and form their own opinions during this process. Students' critical thinking skills and curiosity will develop as a result of these exercises.

Questioning

Questioning is an important aspect of education. Students' thinking skills are evaluated and encouraged by teachers through the use of questions. On the other hand, to gain a deeper understanding, students must also actively ask questions. Questioning makes the learning experience more interesting and meaningful.

Learning Community

According to this theory, learning occurs in groups or with friends rather than alone. Students can help each other understand the subject matter and exchange ideas and experiences through cooperation. Group learning also encourages collaboration and social attitudes.

According to Crawford, there are five main methods or steps in contextual learning known as REACT (Relating, Experiencing, Applying, Cooperating, and Transferring), each of which plays an important role in creating an effective, enjoyable, and relevant learning process (Domokos & Huey, 2023).

Relating

The significance of connecting the material to the students' everyday life is emphasized at this point. Teachers have a part to play in assisting students in making connections between the ideas they study and their everyday circumstances or experiences. Teachers can, for instance, integrate economics-related content to local purchasing and selling in social studies classes. Students get the impression that what they are learning is immediately useful and applicable to their daily life in this way. Because they can relate what they learn in school to real-world situations, pupils become more motivated and interested in learning as a result of this process.

Experiencing

Students acquire knowledge from firsthand experience during the experiencing stage, which is the center of contextual learning. Instructors urge students to participate actively in exercises including simulations, experiments, interviews, and observation. Students may be asked to make social observations in the classroom or community setting as part of the social studies curriculum. Through these activities, kids develop their own knowledge based on their observations and experiences in addition to passively absorbing information. Students have a deeper and more profound understanding of the subject matter as a result of this process.

Applying

At this point, students are urged to use what they have learned in practical settings. Teachers provide pupils a variety of contextual challenges to solve, which demand for critical and creative thinking. Students get an understanding of how to use the principles they have learned to overcome obstacles in the actual world. For instance, students might attempt to apply the principles they have learned about the economic function of society in a basic market simulation in class. This application demonstrates that learning is not limited to theory but can also be applied in real world situations.

Cooperating

The collaborating stage highlights how crucial student cooperation is to the learning process. Teachers provide their pupils the chance to collaborate in groups, have discussions, share ideas, and work through issues as a team. Through collaboration, students enhance their communication abilities, cultivate healthy social attitudes, and learn to respect others' viewpoints. Activities like role-playing or group conversations on social issues can boost student engagement and excitement for learning in social studies classes. The learning process is also more pleasurable and significant in a collaborative learning setting.

Transferring

This last phase shows how well students can apply or transfer their newly acquired information and abilities to scenarios outside of the classroom. It is required of students to be able to comprehend and resolve new issues in their everyday life by using the principles they have learnt. For instance, students might use mutual cooperation in neighborhood social events after learning how important it is to community life. This transfer process demonstrates that students comprehend the subject matter well and can use it on their own in a variety of settings.

Furthermore, there are five learning impressions in contextual learning, which are often used as a basis in teaching subjects (Anderson et al., 2023), such as:

Activating Knowledge

At this stage, teachers help students remember and connect the material to be learned with the knowledge they already have. The goal is for students to have a solid foundation and be better prepared to absorb new information. For example, teachers ask students to share their experiences using electricity at home before teaching them about energy.

Acquiring Knowledge

During this phase, students learn new information through various activities, including reading, listening to the teacher's explanations, conducting experiments, or discussing. Students actively seek and understand new knowledge relevant to the subject they are studying.

Understanding Knowledge

Students try to understand the meaning of the material they have learned. They begin to analyze, connect ideas, and draw conclusions about the main points. Students understand not only "what", but also "why" and "how".

Applying Knowledge

At this stage, students apply what they have learned to solve real problems or complete activities relevant to everyday life. For example, using the concepts of area and perimeter to determine the dimensions of the school garden.

Reflecting Knowledge

In the final step, reflection, students review what they have learned, how they learned it, and how the information has improved their lives. Through reflection, students realize their progress and the value of their educational experience.

4. CONCLUSION

In social studies learning in elementary school, the contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach aims to create meaningful learning experiences for students by relating the subject matter to real life. CTL allows students to understand social concepts theoretically and also participate in hands-on activities such as talking to local merchants, observing community service, or solving social problems in their environment. Understanding social concepts and analysis, caring and tolerant attitudes, observation and presentation skills, and strengthening the values of togetherness and local identity are all cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and cultural aspects instilled in this learning. However, the use of CTL at the elementary school level faces several problems. These include time constraints, learning resources that lack context, and teachers' ability to create activities that are appropriate for the local situation. Therefore, for CTL-based social studies learning to be successful and useful, ongoing teacher training, the development of flexible teaching tools, and policy support are necessary. By applying the contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach in social studies learning in elementary schools, there is a great opportunity to create meaningful, relevant, and real-life oriented learning for students. Through the five learning impressions: activation, collection, understanding, application, and reflection of knowledge, CTL not only improves students' understanding of concepts but also shapes their character, social skills, and cultural awareness from an early age. CTL remains a potential approach to building a generation that is critical, caring, and rooted in the values of togetherness. This is despite facing problems such as limited time and learning resources.

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