



IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTEXTUAL LEARNING APPROACH IN STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

In the learning process in the classroom, many students have not been able to relate the material they are learning to its application in everyday life. Therefore, a learning method is needed that emphasizes student involvement in finding and connecting material with real situations around them. This study aims to explore the application of a contextual learning approach in strengthening character education for students in elementary schools. The method used in this study is a literature study, by collecting secondary data from various reading sources. The results of the study show that the contextual learning approach has a positive impact on strengthening the character of students at the elementary school level. This approach helps students to relate the material they are learning to its application in everyday life. In addition, the use of a contextual learning approach also supports the achievement of the "Independent Learning" program carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud). This approach plays an important role in realizing learning independence that is in line with the objectives of developing the program.

Keywords : Character Education, Contextual learning approach

Introduction

Education is an effort made to develop the potential of each individual, especially for students, so that they can achieve high self-quality, have broad knowledge, and have noble morals. With the foundation of faith and piety, education plays an important role in forming a good personality and preparing students to live life with strong knowledge and morals. In addition, education also functions to develop character, create individuals who have achievements, and produce quality human resources in accordance with the goals of education itself (Herliana & Anugraheni, 2020). The progress of a nation is not only measured by the wealth of its natural resources, but also by the quality of its human resources. A nation can be considered great if it is supported by individuals with strong character and morals, both personally and socially. Therefore, education has a major role in shaping the character of students. The main goal of education is to help students have high intelligence and become good human beings. Although creating intelligent individuals may be easier to achieve, forming good and wise character is often much more difficult, because moral problems in humans can be very complex and ongoing. Students are the next generation of the nation who will become future leaders, and educational institutions play a central role in instilling good character in them. In schools, they are taught about manners, a sense of responsibility, honesty, hard work, integrity, discipline, and solidarity. Schools must be places that educate character, where future leaders of the nation are prepared to have superior character and be ready to face the challenges of development. Although many schools have succeeded in transferring knowledge to students, the transfer of values is often not optimal. Although students can achieve high scores in religious subjects or civics, their characters are not necessarily strongly formed. Therefore, character education is very important and must be implemented at all levels of education, from

elementary school to college, as part of a government program that began in 2010. The application of character education in learning requires the right approach and method, one of which is contextual learning.

This approach places teachers as facilitators who are tasked with providing encouragement, motivation, and understanding the difficulties experienced by students in the learning process. Teachers must be able to provide experiences that can foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter and relate it to everyday life. Herliana (2020) emphasized that the role of teachers as the spearhead in learning greatly influences the overall quality of education. Therefore, teachers are needed who have the competence and ability to apply the right learning approach, including in the formation of student character. However, there are still many teachers who have not been able to apply an interesting and varied learning approach, which is appropriate to the age and needs of students. In implementing learning, teachers need to master the material well in order to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process. A contextual learning approach can help connect lesson material with real-life situations, so that students can apply the knowledge gained in their daily lives. This approach is very important because many students have difficulty linking what they learn with benefits in their real lives (Wahyu Bagja, 2019: 17). Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) learning method is an approach that emphasizes student involvement in the learning process to find and connect the material learned with real situations. Previous research (Novialita, 2022) shows that learning with a contextual approach can improve students' ability to write descriptions that describe their real experiences. This is also in line with the findings of Arsyad *et al.* (2020) which states that the use of a contextual approach can strengthen students' character, because they can relate the knowledge gained to everyday life and feel the benefits directly. In addition, Suhartoyo *et al.* (2020) showed that contextual learning not only improves understanding of the material but also helps students learn more independently and increases their self-confidence in learning activities. Ondé *et al.* (2020) argue that effective character education can be realized by instilling values that shape the next generation of the nation that are qualified and reliable. From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the contextual learning approach is very effective in strengthening character education in elementary schools. Character education is not only about transferring knowledge, but also how students apply that knowledge in their real lives. Therefore, the application of a contextual approach in learning is expected to have a significant impact on the formation of students' character, so that they can become the next generation of the nation who have noble morals and reliable qualities.

Research Methodology

Research is a process carried out to obtain new knowledge or to find solutions to problems faced by using systematic and logical scientific procedures. Research is carried out through a series of steps or stages that are carried out sequentially and in a structured manner. This research is a type of analytical study that focuses on the habits applied in elementary schools, especially those related to the behavior and attitudes of students who contain character education values. To achieve this goal, researchers use the literature study method or library research, which involves searching for and reading various relevant reference sources. Literature study is a method used to dig up information from written sources that can provide the data needed in compiling research (Arikunto, 2013). In this study, the data collected is secondary, namely from various sources such as textbooks, scientific journals, e-books, and other references that are considered relevant to the topic being studied (Nazir, 2014). After the data is collected, the researcher then conducts a qualitative data analysis using the analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman. According to Miles and Huberman (Sugiyono, 2010), qualitative data analysis is carried out through an interactive and ongoing process until a clear conclusion is reached. This process consists of four main steps, namely: first, data collection, which involves collecting information from various sources; second, data reduction, which is the process of filtering and simplifying the data obtained to ensure the relevance and quality of the data; third, data display, which involves organizing the data systematically to facilitate understanding and further analysis; and fourth, drawing conclusions and verification (data conclusion drawing/verification), which is the final step in the analysis, where researchers draw conclusions based on the data that has been analyzed and verify the findings. Furthermore, to strengthen the validity of the research results, researchers will also conduct data triangulation, namely by checking the consistency of the results from various sources and techniques used. This aims to ensure that the findings obtained are reliable and accountable. This process is very important in qualitative research because it allows researchers to get a deeper and more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied, especially regarding the influence of character values instillation in basic education.

Result & Discussion

Character Education

Character refers to traits or behaviors that are inherent in an individual since birth and develop over time, influenced by various life experiences. The process of character formation can develop in a positive or negative direction depending on the experiences and environment in which the individual is located. Education plays a very important role in character formation. Character education in Indonesia, in essence, is an effort to instill noble values that are the culture of the nation and foster the personality of the younger generation so that they can live these values in their daily lives (Dalyono & Enny Dwi Lestariningsih, 2017). The main goal of character education is to form a young generation that has good behavior. In elementary schools, character education is often integrated with Religious Education and Civic Education lessons (Ramdani, 2017). However, character education in elementary schools is not taught as a separate subject, but rather as part of a broader educational goal and integrated with other relevant subjects. Here, character education is expected to create a positive learning environment and support the development of students. Although often considered equivalent to civic education, character education in the national curriculum is not explicitly mentioned. However, both have similarities in emphasizing the importance of morals and the role of schools in character formation (Revell & Arthur, 2007). Character education is more than just teaching skills or transferring knowledge; it emphasizes an ongoing process, through role models, habits, and acculturation in the school environment, family, community, and mass media. Character education aims to improve the quality of learning which in turn forms noble morals in students as a whole. To achieve this goal, cooperation between families, schools, and communities is essential in monitoring the development of children's character. Character education aims to instill positive values that will form individuals who behave in accordance with the values contained in Pancasila (Mulyasa, 2011).

Contextual Learning

In classroom learning practices, teachers have a variety of learning models that can be applied according to the material to be delivered. One effective model is contextual learning. Contextual learning focuses on connecting the knowledge taught with students' real lives. In this approach, learning becomes more meaningful because students not only know information, but also experience it directly (Putri, 2021). Learning does not only focus on the transfer of knowledge from teachers to students, but more on how students interpret and apply this knowledge in their lives. According to Muslich (2007), contextual learning directs teachers to create a learning environment that connects the knowledge that students have learned with their daily lives. Berns and Erickson (2001) explain five approaches in contextual learning, namely: 1) problem-based learning; 2) cooperative learning; 3) project-based learning; 4) service-based learning; and 5) work-based learning. With a contextual approach, it is expected that students can gain knowledge that is not only useful in theory but also relevant to their real lives. This learning can shape students into creative, independent, active, and innovative individuals, and are able to connect the knowledge they learn with the real world.

Strengthening Character Education Through Contextual Learning Approaches in Elementary Schools

The use of the right learning model greatly influences the results obtained by students. Contextual learning is one approach that can improve the strengthening of students' character in elementary schools. In order for the goal of strengthening character to be achieved, several factors must be considered, including the role of the teacher and the learning approach used in the classroom. According to Arsyad and Salahudin (2018), learning outcomes will be more optimal if two supporting factors, namely internal motivation of students and programs designed by teachers, can work well. The role of teachers is crucial in this process. Teachers who are able to provide examples and moral support can help students understand and internalize the values taught, both inside and outside the classroom. The involvement of teachers in providing useful learning and being good examples will motivate students to apply what they learn in their daily lives. Thus, character education through contextual learning can improve students' morals, such as honesty, respect, and empathy for others. Success in learning depends on the teacher's ability to choose the right learning model, which also includes the use of a contextual approach. This approach can increase students' awareness that the knowledge gained in class is not only valuable for exams but can also be applied in their real lives (Marta et al., 2020). Context-based learning allows students to understand character values in everyday life and form individuals with positive attitudes. In the context of elementary school education, the application of a contextual approach is in line with the objectives of the "Merdeka Belajar" program initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. This program prioritizes enjoyable learning and allows students to actively participate in learning, which is in line with the contextual learning approach (Makarim, 2020). Although there are

challenges in implementing this approach, such as the time required to implement it optimally and the very large role of teachers in supervision, the results achieved can have a positive impact on strengthening students' character. Overall, the use of contextual learning in strengthening character education in elementary schools has proven effective. This allows students to be more active in learning, connecting the knowledge gained to their lives, and developing good character. With this approach, it is hoped that students will not only gain knowledge, but also skills and attitudes that can help them become better individuals, in accordance with the values of Pancasila.

Conclusion

From the explanation that has been given, it can be concluded that efforts to build national civilization through character education are highly dependent on three main educational environments, namely family, school, and society. In schools, the role of teachers as educators has a great responsibility in forming a young generation that is not only intelligent, but also has a strong, cultured, and moral character. The use of a contextual learning approach in efforts to strengthen character education in elementary schools can provide significant benefits, because this approach allows students to better understand, appreciate, and apply what they learn in everyday life. Thus, students can feel the direct benefits of the learning they undergo, which is reflected in increased honest behavior, respect, obedience to parents and teachers, and showing empathy towards others. Through a contextual approach, students can more easily distinguish between behaviors that have positive and negative impacts on their lives at home, school, and in the community. This approach also supports the achievement of the goals of the Merdeka Belajar program initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), which provides space for students to learn in a freer and more participatory way. However, every learning approach certainly has challenges, including contextual learning which requires a longer time to implement. Therefore, the role of teachers is very important in supervising and ensuring that the learning materials provided are in accordance with national education goals, especially in terms of strengthening student character.

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