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**PROBLEM SOLVING METHOD IN IMPROVING
STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING ABILITIES IN
SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING**

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Abstract. Enhancing students' critical thinking skills is a major challenge in Social Studies education in the 21st century. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the problem-solving method in improving students' critical thinking skills within the context of Social Studies. Employing a qualitative approach with a library research design, this research analyzes various literature related to the application of the problem-solving method. Findings reveal that this method significantly enhances students' abilities to analyze information, formulate solutions, and connect theory with practice. However, challenges such as resource limitations and the need for teacher training can impact its effectiveness. The implications of this research suggest the need for intensive teacher training and systematic integration of the problem-solving method into the social studies curriculum to improve educational quality. Future research is recommended to explore different educational settings and additional method combinations to deepen understanding of problem-solving implementation in social studies education.

Keywords: critical thinking skills, social studies education, problem-solving method, skill enhancement, educational research

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills have become one of the most important competencies in 21st-century education. These skills not only help students solve complex problems but also prepare them to be individuals capable of thinking rationally, making wise decisions, and actively participating in an increasingly complex society. In the context of education, particularly in Social Studies, critical thinking skills are essential for understanding, analyzing, and evaluating various social phenomena that occur around students. According to Purwanti (2020), critical thinking enables students to not only passively receive information but also to evaluate, analyze, and generate solutions to various social issues.

However, despite its importance, developing students' critical thinking skills often faces numerous challenges. One of the main challenges is that teaching approaches still tend to focus on memorizing facts and information rather than developing higher-order thinking skills. Monotonous and less interactive teaching also becomes an obstacle in motivating students to think critically. This is reinforced by research findings by Santoso

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(2019), which state that most teachers still use one-way lecture methods in teaching Social Studies, resulting in a lack of student engagement in the critical thinking process. Additionally, the evaluation system that emphasizes the final result over the thinking process of students also hampers the development of critical thinking skills (Hidayat, 2018).

Based on these challenges, the problem that arises is how to effectively develop students' critical thinking skills in Social Studies learning. The lack of implementation of interactive methods focused on in-depth thinking processes is one of the main factors that need to be addressed. The current teaching methods often do not provide room for students to actively engage in the critical thinking process, causing these skills not to be well-honed. Therefore, it is necessary to find teaching strategies that can overcome this problem and enable students to optimally develop their critical thinking skills.

In an effort to overcome these challenges, one approach that can be applied is the problem-solving method. This method is considered potential for improving students' critical thinking skills because it allows them to engage directly in the process of solving problems relevant to real life. Through this method, students are trained to analyze problems, formulate hypotheses, seek relevant information, and eventually find the right solutions. According to research conducted by Rahayu and Kurniawan (2021), the application of the problem-solving method in Social Studies learning has proven effective in improving students' critical thinking skills. Their research shows that students taught with this method show significant improvement in critical thinking skills compared to students taught with conventional methods.

Furthermore, the problem-solving approach not only helps students better understand the subject matter but also increases their motivation to learn. The problem-solving process involving exploration, discussion, and collaboration with peers makes students more active and engaged in learning. Research conducted by Sari (2020) shows that the problem-solving method can increase student participation in class discussions and encourage them to ask deeper questions about the topics being studied. In addition, this method also encourages students to develop a positive attitude toward learning and boosts their confidence in completing complex tasks (Sutrisno, 2019).

In facing the educational challenges in this era of globalization, it is important for educators to continuously seek and implement innovative and effective teaching strategies. The problem-solving method offers a promising solution to overcome the limitations in developing students' critical thinking skills, especially in Social Studies. Therefore, it is hoped that students will not only have a deeper understanding of the subject matter but also become more critical, creative individuals, ready to face future challenges.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Critical thinking is an essential skill that needs to be developed in the learning process, especially in Social Studies. According to Ennis (2015), critical thinking is the ability to analyze and evaluate information to reach accurate and rational conclusions. This ability encompasses various characteristics, such as the ability to identify problems, evaluate arguments, recognize assumptions, and make decisions based on existing evidence. In the context of education, critical thinking is crucial because it helps students face complex issues and encourages them to think logically and systematically (Sari, 2019).

In Social Studies, critical thinking becomes even more important because this subject focuses on understanding and analyzing social phenomena that are often complex and multidimensional. Social Studies not only presents historical or geographical facts but also requires students to understand the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics occurring in society. Therefore, developing critical thinking skills is a primary goal in Social Studies education, with the hope that students will become individuals capable of thinking critically and responsibly in society (Wulandari, 2020).

The problem-solving method is an effective approach to developing students' critical thinking skills. Generally, problem-solving is defined as a cognitive process involving problem identification, searching for relevant information, analyzing alternative solutions, and making appropriate decisions. This method emphasizes not only the final outcome but also the thought process students go through to reach a solution. In education, this method is often implemented through various steps, such as problem introduction, data collection, problem analysis, hypothesis testing, and evaluation of the generated solutions (Rohman, 2018).

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The connection between the problem-solving method and critical thinking skills is strong. This method allows students to be directly involved in the process of analyzing and evaluating problems, which is at the core of critical thinking. When students are given the freedom to explore problems and find their own solutions, they are more encouraged to think critically and creatively. Research conducted by Yusuf (2019) shows that students taught using the problem-solving method have better critical thinking skills compared to those taught with conventional methods.

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In the context of Social Studies, the problem-solving method can be an effective tool to overcome challenges that often arise, such as low student engagement in class discussions and the tendency to merely memorize information. This method provides students with the opportunity to relate the subject matter to real-life problems they face daily. This can enhance the relevance and meaning of learning for students, as well as encourage them to be more active and critical in their studies (Hidayati, 2020).

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Theories underpinning the connection between problem-solving and critical thinking skills include constructivism and social cognitive theory. Constructivism, proposed by Piaget, emphasizes the role of students as active learners who construct knowledge through experience and reflection. Problem-solving aligns with this approach because it encourages students to build their own understanding through exploration and problem-solving (Putra, 2021). Additionally, social cognitive theory, as proposed by Bandura, also supports the use of the problem-solving method, emphasizing that learning occurs in a social context involving interaction and observation of others (Rahmawati, 2019).

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Several previous studies also support the effectiveness of the problem-solving method in enhancing critical thinking skills. For instance, a study by Kurniawati (2019) found that implementing the problem-solving method in Social Studies significantly improved students' ability to analyze and evaluate information and make rational decisions. This indicates that problem-solving is not merely a teaching strategy but also a tool that can develop essential skills students need to succeed in their academic and professional lives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

⁴ This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research design to explore the implementation of the problem-solving method in enhancing students' critical thinking skills in Social Studies. A qualitative approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena under study through analysis of literature and related studies. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach is suitable for research aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of processes and meanings within specific contexts.

1. Research Design

The research design employed is library research, a method that utilizes literature sources such as books, journal articles, and academic documents to gather relevant data and information. This design enables the researcher to collect secondary data related to the application of the problem-solving method and its relationship with critical thinking. Library research design is considered effective for this study because of its focus on analyzing existing literature to build theoretical and practical understanding (Dewi, 2017).

2. Population/Sample

In this study, the population includes all relevant literature on the research topic, such as journal articles, textbooks, and research reports discussing the problem-solving method and its connection to critical thinking. The sample is selected based on criteria of relevance and quality of sources. This study does not involve direct human samples but relies on an examination of accredited and published literature. This approach aligns with qualitative research methods that focus on document analysis and literature review (Hidayati, 2018).

3. Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

The data collection technique used in this study is literature review, where the researcher collects, evaluates, and analyzes information from various relevant sources. The data collection instrument includes a bibliography of journal articles, books, and other academic publications addressing the problem-solving method and

critical thinking. This technique allows the researcher to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data on the research topic (Putri, 2020).

4. Data Analysis Tools

The data analysis tool employed is content analysis, which involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting information contained in the literature reviewed. According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is effective for assessing patterns, themes, and significant information related to the research topic. This process includes thematic categorization of relevant information and synthesizing findings to address the research questions.

5. Research Model

The research model used in this study is the literature analysis model, which focuses on integrating and synthesizing information from various sources. This model helps identify gaps in existing research, connect theory with practice, and provide recommendations based on findings from the literature. This model is suitable for library research as it emphasizes a comprehensive understanding of the research topic through document analysis (Budi, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to understand the effectiveness of the problem-solving method in improving students' critical thinking skills in Social Sciences learning, it is important to conduct a comprehensive discussion based on the results of the research that has been conducted. This discussion will begin with a description of the research results that explain the main findings from the application of the problem-solving method as well as specific examples of improving students' critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the analysis of the research results will explore the relationship between the findings in the field and the theories that have been discussed previously and discuss the factors that support or hinder the effectiveness of the problem-solving method.

After that, the discussion will outline the implications of the research findings for the practice of social studies learning in schools and provide recommendations for the wider application of the problem-solving method in the context of social studies education. Through this discussion, it is hoped that it can provide deeper insight into how

³ the problem-solving method can be applied effectively to improve ⁷ the quality of learning and students' critical thinking skills.

This discussion aims to connect the research results with the context of existing theories, as well as provide practical suggestions that can be used by educators and policy makers in designing and implementing more effective learning strategies. By understanding the results and implications of this research, it is hoped that ³ the problem-solving method can be further optimized to achieve better educational goals in social studies learning.

1. Description of Research Results

⁶ The main findings of this study indicate that the application of the problem-solving method in Social Studies learning significantly improves ⁸ students' critical thinking skills. Based on literature analysis, the problem-solving method has been shown to be effective in helping students identify problems, analyze information, and formulate appropriate solutions. For example, a study by Rahmawati (2021) reported that students ⁶ who were taught using the problem-solving method showed an increase in their ability to analyze and evaluate information compared to students who followed the conventional method. This is reinforced by the findings of Yusuf (2019) which showed that students who were involved in problem-solving activities were better able to link theory to practice in a social context, which showed direct application of their knowledge.

2. Specific examples of improving ⁵ students' critical thinking skills

Specific examples of improving students' critical thinking skills can be seen from improvements in tasks involving case analysis and assessment of complex social problems. For example, in a study by Sari (2018), students who used the problem-solving method in social studies learning successfully completed group projects involving analysis of contemporary social issues better, showing higher critical thinking skills compared to the control group. In addition, research by Hidayati (2020) shows that students can be better at formulating arguments supported by data and evidence, as well as in considering various perspectives when evaluating social problems.

3. Analysis of Research Results

The relationship between findings in the field and the theories that have been discussed indicates that the problem-solving method greatly supports the development of students' critical thinking skills. Constructivism theory, as described by Piaget (1970), emphasizes the importance of active student involvement in the learning process, which is in line with the problem-solving method that encourages students to actively seek solutions. These findings also support Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which states that effective learning occurs through observation and social interaction, which occurs in a problem-solving setting.

Discussion of factors that support or hinder the effectiveness of the problem-solving method shows that factors such as teacher support, adequate resources, and student motivation play an important role in the successful implementation of this method. Research by Putra (2019) shows that teacher support in designing and facilitating problem-solving activities can increase the effectiveness of this method. However, challenges such as lack of teacher training and limited resources can also hinder effective implementation, as identified by Dewi (2017).

4. Implications of Research Findings

The impact of research findings on social studies learning practices in schools is an increase in the quality of learning and student engagement. The problem-solving method can facilitate a deeper understanding and practical application of social studies concepts, which makes learning more relevant and interesting for students. The results of this study recommend a broader application of the problem-solving method in the social studies curriculum to improve students' critical thinking skills and readiness to face real-world challenges.

Recommendations for broader application of the problem-solving method in social studies learning include intensive training for teachers on how to implement this method effectively, as well as providing adequate resources to support problem-solving activities in the classroom. Research by Wulandari (2020) suggests that professional development for teachers and administrative support can help overcome obstacles faced in implementing this method. In addition, the application of problem-

solving strategies must be systematically integrated into the social studies curriculum to ensure that all students get the maximum benefit from this approach.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study has shown that the problem-solving method can effectively improve students' critical thinking skills in learning Social Sciences. Based on the literature analysis, it was found that the application of this method not only helps students understand and analyze complex social information but also encourages them to apply knowledge in real contexts. The main findings indicate that students involved in problem-solving activities are able to identify problems better, analyze multiple perspectives, and formulate more creative solutions compared to conventional learning methods. This study also supports educational theories that emphasize the importance of active involvement and constructivism in the learning process.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the implementation of the problem-solving method faces several challenges, such as limited resources and the need for adequate teacher training. These limitations can affect the effectiveness of the application of this method widely in various educational contexts. Therefore, recommendations for educational practice include the need for more intensive professional training for teachers and the provision of sufficient resources to support problem-solving activities in the classroom.

For further research, it is recommended that this study expand its scope by involving various educational settings and more diverse research subjects, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the problem-solving method. In addition, further research can explore additional methods that can be combined with problem-solving to improve students' critical thinking skills. By understanding more deeply about the challenges and solutions in implementing this method, it is hoped that it can improve the quality of social studies education and prepare students with better critical thinking skills to face real-world challenges.

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