



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION-BASED PBL LEARNING MODEL TO IMPROVE STUDENT CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AND ACTIVE LEARNING IN SOCIAL STUDIES AT SMPN 03 KOLAKA

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the effect of the implementation of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) learning model based on Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on improving students' critical thinking skills and activeness in Social Sciences (IPS) learning at SMPN 03 Kolaka. This type of research is a quasi-experimental study with a non-equivalent control group design. The research subjects consisted of two classes, namely class VIII A as the experimental class using the PBL model based on FGD and class VIII B as the control class using the conventional learning model. Data were collected through critical thinking ability tests and student activeness observation sheets. The results showed that the implementation of the PBL model based on FGD did not have a significant difference in improving students' critical thinking skills and activeness compared to conventional learning. The reasons for this result were due to the relatively short duration of the implementation of the learning model, diverse critical thinking and communication skills, and the teacher's role as a facilitator of the discussion process that had not run optimally.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Focus Group Discussion, Student Activity, Problem Based Learning

A. Introduction

According to Law Number 20 of 2003, education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and process so that students actively develop their potential to possess spiritual and religious strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed for themselves, society, the nation, and the state. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, education must be able to cultivate the inherent nature and the inherent nature of the times within each student to ensure their safety and well-being (Priyambodo et al., 2023).

The term Social Sciences refers to subjects taught in elementary and secondary schools, as well as in institutions offering Social Sciences study programs. Social Sciences is a branch of knowledge that specifically studies society, culture, ethics, morals, norms, participation, including the impact of social dynamics and change on society (Ardiansyah et al., 2024; Divan, 2018). The emphasis of social studies learning is on education rather than concept transfer, where students are expected to understand ideas such as attitudes, values, morality, and everyday skills. Social studies is known for its integrated, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and even cross-disciplinary approaches to solving complex social problems. The goal of social studies education is to prepare citizens who can socialize well and be responsible in both social and physical life. According to Jean Piaget's theory, social studies teaching requires an integrated strategy that accommodates the cognitive abilities of students who are already at the concrete operational stage konkret (Harianto et al., 2019; Sejati et al., 2021; Sugiarto et al., 2023). In the context of social studies learning, critical thinking skills and student engagement are crucial aspects for a deeper understanding of social phenomena. The reality on the ground shows that social studies learning at SMPN 03 Kolaka is still dominated by lecture methods, resulting in students being passive and less engaged in the learning process.

Learning tools can facilitate and assist teachers in preparing and implementing teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Learning success depends heavily on learning tools. In classroom learning, using appropriate methods and media, or utilizing the surrounding environment as a learning resource relevant to the material, will stimulate students' interest in learning, which will ultimately lead to the achievement of learning objectives. One recommended learning model for implementing classroom learning is Problem-Based Learning (HL et al., 2023; Miftachurohmah et al., 2022). Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is an innovative educational approach that engages students in active, multidisciplinary learning through solving real-world problems. This approach emphasizes independent learning, encouraging students to seek information and present it routinely. PBL has become popular in medical education since its introduction by McMaster University in the 1960s, offering benefits such as increased motivation and integration of knowledge across disciplines (Yadav et al., 2011).

The problem-based learning model is a learning model that uses real-world problems in learning as a context for students to learn about critical thinking and problem-solving skills and to acquire essential concepts from the subject matter. The PBL learning model will increase curiosity, independence, concern, creativity, and systematic thinking to find solutions to problems that arise both in the context of specific and general problems in students. This PBL model will also create a student-centered learning atmosphere so that students can utilize various resources available in their surroundings (Faqiroh, 2020). PBL is a learning model that can help students to be active and independent in developing problem-solving thinking skills through data search to obtain rational and authentic solutions. Using the PBL learning model, students will be faced with problems in the learning process, thus making students active because they feel challenged to collaborate and hone their problem-solving skills by collecting and analyzing data to solve problems and find solutions (HL et al., 2022). The application of the PjBL model has been proven effective in honing critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and communication skills. In the application of PBL, students collaborate on projects that utilize various learning resources to build knowledge both independently and collaboratively (Shofiyah & Wulandari, 2018). According to Barrett, the syntax of the PBL model is: 1) Orienting students to the problem; 2) Organizing students; 3) Guiding individual and group investigations; 4) Developing and presenting results; 5) Analyzing and evaluating the problem-solving process and outcomes.

The PBL model is a student-centered approach that emphasizes solving real-world problems. When combined with Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), this model can create an interactive, collaborative, and reflective learning environment. Through focus group discussions, students can develop critical thinking skills while increasing their engagement in the learning

process. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are an exploratory discussion method conducted to explore an issue in depth. FGDs aim to deepen understanding of a given topic. Through structured discussions, FGDs explore participants' diverse perspectives, beliefs, and experiences on the issue at hand (Golightly, 2018).

A focus group discussion (FGD) can be understood as a systematic and directed discussion about an issue or problem. This method was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1936, limited to the process within a group during the discussion. FGD is a process of systematically collecting data and information about a very specific problem through group discussion (Leary et al., 2019). As the name suggests, the definition of a focus group discussion contains three key words: 1) Discussion (not interviews or chats); 2) Group (not individual); 3) Focused/Directed (not free). This means that although essentially a discussion, FGD is not the same as an interview, meeting, or chat among several people in cafes. FGDs can also be used in various domains and purposes, for example, decision-making, needs assessment, product or program development, knowing customer satisfaction, and so on (Retnawati et al., 2018).

Strengthening critical thinking skills is also expected to help students prepare for increasingly complex global changes in Indonesia. Educational evaluations, such as the PISAS Program for International Student Assessment, indicate that Indonesia still faces significant challenges in developing social studies literacy, which is closely related to critical thinking skills. Strengthening critical thinking skills is also expected to help students prepare for increasingly complex global changes in Indonesia. Educational evaluations, such as the PISAS Program for International Student Assessment, indicate that Indonesia still faces significant challenges in developing social studies literacy, which is closely related to students' critical thinking skills (Sejati, Ikhsan, et al., 2023).

The importance of innovation in the social studies learning process is clearly evident in the need to develop critical thinking skills. One learning model that can improve students' critical thinking skills is the problem-based learning model. This model encourages students to be active in the learning process by posing real-life problems that must be solved through critical thinking. Strong critical thinking skills will enable students to better understand social studies material and relate it to everyday life, so that social studies learning is not merely theoretical but also provides real benefits for students. While the objectives of social studies learning are clear, many students struggle to develop their critical thinking skills. The underlying issue in this research, identified by initial observations and learning evaluations, is the low critical thinking skills and student engagement. Initial indications suggest that the social studies learning process tends to emphasize procedural memorization without involving in-depth reasoning (Sejati, Nasarudin, et al., 2023).

This study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the FGD-based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) learning model in improving students' critical thinking skills and engagement in social studies learning at SMPN 03 Kolaka. The objective of the study was to determine the effect of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD)-based Problem-Based Learning (PBL) learning model on improving students' critical thinking skills and engagement in social studies learning at SMPN 03 Kolaka.

B. Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method. The research design employed a non-equivalent control group design, with two groups: the experimental class (VIII A) using the FGD-based PBL model and the control class (VIII B) using the conventional learning model. The study population was all eighth-grade students of SMPN 03 Kolaka in the 2022/2023 academic year. The sample was taken purposively, namely classes VIII A and VIII B, which have relatively balanced academic abilities.

2. Instruments

The research instruments used a critical thinking skills test and a student activity observation sheet. The research instrument used a critical thinking skills test in the form of descriptive questions that measured analytical, evaluation, and conclusion-drawing abilities. The student activity observation sheet was used to assess student participation during the learning process. The test question developed by researchers and validity with the one validator that have the background geography education. The data collected by test and direct observation with the kind of primary data.

3. Technique of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using parametric inferential statistics. The analysis was conducted after the data were declared normally distributed and homogeneous. Hypothesis testing used ANOVA. Normality, homogeneity, and hypothesis testing were assisted by SPSS for Windows 23. Hypothesis testing H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected if $F\text{-Count} < F\text{-Table}$. H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected if $F\text{-Count} > F\text{-Table}$.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

Comparison of pre-test and post-test scores for the same group is shown in Table 1. The purpose of comparing the data is to determine whether there are differences in students' critical thinking skills and activeness before and after the implementation of the FGD-based PBL model. The results of the pre-test and post-test score analysis can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic

No	Aspect	Score
1	Average	86,5625
2	Standart Deviation	5,977388
3	μ_0	75

Source: Research Results, 2023

Based on the analysis of pre-test and post-test scores, the average student score was greater than the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) of 75, with an average of 86. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test yielded a significance value of 0.057. A significance value >0.05 indicates normal data. The homogeneity test showed a value of 0.061. A significance value >0.05 indicates homogeneous data.

ANOVA test (X against Y1 and Y2) on the application of the FGD-based PBL learning model on critical thinking skills (Y1) and student engagement (Y2). The ANOVA test was used to determine whether there were differences in average learning outcomes (Y1 and Y2) between two or more groups based on treatment (X). The results of the ANOVA analysis (X against Y1 and Y2) can be seen in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2. Anova Single Factor Summary

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
X	16	1380	86,25	28,333
Y1	16	1320	82,5	63,333
Y2	16	1385	86,563	35,729

Table 3. ANOVA Result

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	163,542	2	81,771	1,926	0,158	3,204
Within Groups	1910,938	45	42,465			
Total	2074,479	47				

Based on the results of the ANOVA test analysis (X against Y1 and Y2), the F-Calculation was obtained at 1.926 and the F-Table was 3.204. It can be said that H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected because $F\text{-Calculation} < F\text{-Table}$. Then the P-Value was obtained at 0.158 so it is said that there is no significant difference between groups (the learning model has an effect on Y_1 and/or Y_2). The relationship between variables $X \rightarrow Y_1$: The implementation of FGD-based PBL has no significant difference in increasing students' critical thinking skills and $X \rightarrow Y_2$: The implementation of FGD-based PBL has no significant difference in increasing students' activeness in social studies learning. Thus, it can be concluded that the FGD-based PBL learning model has no significant difference in both dependent variables simultaneously.

2. Discussion

This research was conducted in early December 2023 during the odd semester and was successfully implemented. The learning process was considered successful, as evidenced by the

implementation of each syntax in the FGD-based problem-based learning model. This was evident through the interaction between teachers and students during the learning process, ensuring that the learning time met the target for each syntax. The research was conducted using ANOVA (X1 versus Y1 and Y2). The results showed that the implementation of the FGD-based PBL learning model did not significantly impact students' critical thinking skills and activeness in social studies learning. Based on the data analysis, although there was an increase in the average scores of critical thinking skills and student activeness in the experimental class compared to the control class, the statistical test results showed that the differences were not simultaneously significant.

These findings indicate that the implementation of the FGD-based PBL model has not been able to provide a strong impact on improving both dependent variables simultaneously. Several factors influencing this result include: 1) The relatively short duration of the learning model, which prevented students from fully adapting to the problem-based learning pattern and group discussions. PBL takes a long time (Arifah et al., 2021). 2) Students' varying initial abilities, particularly in critical thinking and communication skills, lead to uneven learning outcomes. Communication and critical thinking complement each other (Istiqomah et al., 2019). 3) The teacher's role as a facilitator is still adapting to the FGD-based PBL approach, resulting in suboptimal discussion processes. The teacher's role as facilitator and coach is crucial for the success of PBL (Syaifulloh, 2016).

Descriptive data demonstrates an increase in student learning activity in the experimental class. Students were more frequently involved in discussions, asking questions, and expressing opinions. This indicates that the FGD-based PBL model has the potential to foster active and critical thinking skills when implemented consistently and sustainably. The PBL model is an innovation in learning because it optimizes student abilities through a systematic group learning process (Kamauko et al., 2020). This allows students to empower, hone, and develop their critical thinking skills sustainably. The effectiveness of PBL depends heavily on the readiness of students and teachers to implement the problem-based learning process (Putri et al., 2022). The study did not show statistically significant differences, but the implementation of the FGD-based PBL model still made a positive contribution to the dynamics of social studies learning at SMPN 03 Kolaka.

The non-significant statistical findings regarding the simultaneous impact of the FGD-based PBL model on critical thinking skills and student activeness warrant careful interpretation within the broader context of educational intervention research. While ANOVA results indicated that improvements in the experimental class did not reach statistical significance compared to the control group, the consistent upward trend in descriptive scores, particularly in participation indicators such as questioning, responding, and collaborative problem-solving suggests meaningful pedagogical progress that may not be fully captured by quantitative measures alone. This aligns with the perspective that short-term interventions in complex classroom settings often yield incremental gains requiring longitudinal observation to manifest as statistically detectable effects. In the context of Social Studies education on flood disaster mitigation, where conceptual understanding is intertwined with affective engagement and contextual reasoning, the observed behavioral shifts may represent foundational steps toward deeper critical thinking that unfold over extended instructional periods (Alberida et al., 2022; Hunaidah et al., 2020). The contextual challenges identified, limited implementation time, heterogeneous student readiness, and the teacher's evolving facilitation role reflect common barriers in scaling innovative pedagogies within resource-constrained educational environments in Indonesia, emphasizing that the success of PBL hinges not only on model fidelity but also on systemic support, including professional development and curriculum alignment (Inna Pagampa et al., 2023).

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing discourse on participatory pedagogies in disaster education by highlighting both the promise and practical complexities of implementing FGD-based PBL in Indonesian junior high schools. While statistical outcomes may not have confirmed strong simultaneous effects, the qualitative shifts in classroom dynamics, increased student voice, collaborative inquiry, and contextual problem framing signal a valuable trajectory toward more resilient and responsive Social Studies instruction. In disaster-prone regions like Kolaka, integrating FGD-based PBL with local flood case studies, community narratives, and place-based learning resources could enhance both cognitive engagement and practical applicability. Future iterations might benefit from blended approaches combining structured FGD protocols with formative assessment cycles, alongside mixed-methods evaluation to capture nuanced learning processes. As climate-related hazards become increasingly urgent, education systems must prioritize approaches that cultivate not only content mastery but also adaptive reasoning and solution-oriented mindsets; the FGD-based PBL model, when supported by adequate time, teacher capacity building, and contextually grounded materials, holds significant

potential to advance these goals and strengthen the evidence base for scalable, student-centered strategies in disaster risk reduction education (Kagawa & Selby, 2012; Radhiyah & Hariyono, 2022; Santyo – Andal, 2022).

D. Conclusion

The conclusion of the study is that the FGD-based PBL learning model does not have a significant difference on both dependent variables simultaneously. The research results related to the relatively short duration of the learning model implementation, diverse critical thinking and communication skills, and the teacher's role as a facilitator of the discussion process has not been optimally implemented. There was an increase in student learning activities in the experimental class. Students were more often involved in discussions, asking questions, and trying to express opinions. The FGD-based PBL model has the potential to foster activeness and critical thinking skills if implemented consistently and continuously. The FGD-based PBL model continues to make a positive contribution to the dynamics of social studies learning at SMPN 03 Kolaka.

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