

READING AS AN ART OF THINKING: IMPLEMENTING THE CONCEPT OF HOW TO READ A BOOK IN SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Reading literacy is a fundamental competence in elementary education, particularly in Integrated Social Studies learning, which requires students to understand not only textual information but also the social meanings embedded in texts. Reading should therefore be positioned as an art of thinking that involves comprehension, analysis, and reflection. This study aims to describe the implementation of the *"How to Read a Book"* concept as an art of thinking in Integrated Social Studies instruction for fifth-grade elementary students. The background of this study is the tendency in Social Studies learning to emphasize memorization, leading to Reading activities that do not optimally develop students' analytical and reflective abilities. This research employed a descriptive, qualitative method with a field study approach, using classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The results indicate that Reading activities in Integrated Social Studies learning have been systematically integrated through guided Reading practices, including initial Reading, analytical Reading, and reflective discussion. Teachers guided students in identifying key ideas, interpreting social concepts, and relating Reading content to real-life contexts. Reading activities were not limited to understanding factual information; they also aimed to develop reasoning, critical thinking, and social awareness. The study concludes that the implementation of Reading as an art of thinking through the *How to Read a Book* concept contributes to meaningful literacy practices and supports the development of critical and reflective thinking skills in elementary school students.

Keywords: Reading, Art of Thinking, Read a Book, Integrated Social Studies

INTRODUCTION

Reading ability and Reading comprehension are fundamental competencies that determine students' success in elementary education, particularly in text-based subjects such as Social Studies. (Snow, 2018). Reading functions not only as a means of acquiring information but also as a cognitive process for constructing understanding, reasoning relationships among concepts, and reflecting on social realities (OECD, 2019). Numerous studies indicate that strong Reading skills are positively correlated with the development of students' critical and analytical thinking abilities. (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Therefore, efforts to strengthen Reading skills should focus on meaning-making and reasoning, rather than merely on technical decoding.

Integrated Social Studies learning in elementary schools encompasses abstract, contextual social, cultural, economic, and historical concepts. (Trianto, 2021). These materials are presented through various types of texts that require higher-level Reading comprehension

skills so that students can grasp the social meanings embedded within them. (Sari & Utami, 2021). However, Social Studies instruction often remains oriented toward memorization, which can cause Reading activities to fall short of encouraging analysis and reflection. (Hanifah & Abdullah, 2022). This condition highlights the need for a more meaningful approach to Reading in Social Studies learning.

Reading, by its very nature, is an intellectual activity that involves higher-order thinking processes rather than merely recognizing linguistic symbols. (Snow, 2018). Reading, as an art of thinking, demands active engagement by readers in understanding, interpreting, and evaluating textual content. (Bruner, 1996). Research shows that reflective and analytical Reading instruction can significantly enhance students' conceptual understanding. (Anderson, 2021). Thus, a Reading approach that emphasizes thinking processes is essential to Integrated Social Studies learning.

The concept of *How to Read a Book* proposed (Adler & Van Doren, 1972) Offers a systematic framework for Reading that is oriented toward cognitive processes. This concept consists of four levels of Reading: elementary Reading, inspectional Reading, analytical Reading, and syntopical Reading. Each level has complementary cognitive objectives in building deep comprehension of texts. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972). Therefore, this concept is highly relevant for Social Studies learning, which requires conceptual understanding and critical interpretation.

Reading as an art of thinking aligns with constructivist theory, which views learning as an active process of knowledge construction through interaction with texts and the social environment. (Vygotsky, 1978). In Social Studies learning, students are not only expected to understand information literally but also to construct social meaning based on their experiences and prior knowledge. (Bruner, 1996). Empirical studies indicate that analytical and reflective Reading can enhance students' critical thinking and social understanding. (Rosenblatt, 2019). Thus, this approach has a strong theoretical foundation.

The implementation of *How to Read a Book* is also relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes strengthening literacy and critical reasoning as essential 21st-century competencies. (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This curriculum encourages student-centered learning and provides opportunities for reflective and contextual Reading activities. The concept of critical literacy likewise stresses the importance of Reading as a means of consciously

understanding social realities. (Freire, 2020). Therefore, this Reading approach aligns with national education policy directions.

Despite its importance, the implementation of Reading as an art of thinking in elementary Social Studies learning has rarely been examined in depth through descriptive qualitative approaches. Most literacy studies focus on learning outcomes, while Reading processes and teachers' pedagogical practices receive limited attention. (Snow, 2018). In fact, process-oriented studies are necessary to understand how Reading strategies are implemented in authentic classroom contexts. (Creswell, 2018). Consequently, a descriptive study on the implementation of *How to Read a Book* is highly relevant.

Fifth-grade elementary students are at a cognitive developmental stage that enables them to begin thinking logically and reflectively about texts. (Piaget, 1972). However, without appropriate guidance on Reading strategies, this potential does not continually develop optimally. (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Teachers play a strategic role in guiding students through the stages of Reading toward understanding the social meanings of texts. (Anderson, 2021). Therefore, the fifth-grade classroom provides an appropriate context for examining the implementation of Reading as an art of thinking.

Based on the above considerations, this study aims to describe the implementation of the "*How to Read a Book*" concept as an art of thinking in Integrated Social Studies instruction in fifth-grade elementary classrooms. This study focuses on the application of Reading stages, teachers' instructional strategies, and students' responses to Reading activities. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study seeks to provide an in-depth and contextual empirical description. (Creswell, 2018). The findings are expected to contribute to the development of reflective and meaningful Reading literacy strategies in Social Studies learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension is a core literacy skill that plays a crucial role in elementary students' academic achievement, particularly in text-based subjects such as Integrated Social Studies. Reading is not merely a decoding activity but a cognitive process that involves constructing meaning, making inferences, and evaluating information presented in texts. (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Snow, 2018). (OECD, 2019) Emphasizes that Reading literacy includes the ability to understand, use, and reflect on texts to participate effectively in social contexts.

Integrated Social Studies requires students to comprehend abstract and contextual social concepts presented through expository and narrative texts. Studies indicate that Social Studies instruction at the elementary level often emphasizes memorization, resulting in limited development of students' analytical Reading skills. (Hanifah & Abdullah, 2022; Sari & Utami, 2021). Therefore, Reading approaches that encourage reasoning and reflection are needed to support meaningful learning in Social Studies.

Reading as an intellectual activity aligns with constructivist learning theory, which views learners as active constructors of knowledge through interaction with texts and prior experiences. (Anderson, 2021). Analytical and reflective Reading practices have been shown to improve students' conceptual understanding and critical thinking. This perspective supports the view of Reading as an art of thinking in elementary education.

The concept of *How to Read a Book*, proposed by Adler and Van Doren, provides a structured Reading framework consisting of progressive Reading levels that foster deeper comprehension. Although the work is classical, its staged-reading principles remain relevant to contemporary literacy instruction, particularly in guiding students from a basic understanding toward analytical Reading. (Anderson, 2021). This framework is appropriate for Integrated Social Studies learning, which demands interpretation and critical engagement with texts.

Furthermore, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes literacy and critical reasoning as essential competencies in elementary education. It encourages student-centered and reflective Reading activities that align with thinking-oriented Reading approaches. (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). However, studies examining how such Reading frameworks are implemented in classroom practice, particularly in Social Studies learning at the elementary level, remain limited. (Snow, 2018). This gap justifies a descriptive qualitative study of the implementation of Reading as an art of thinking in fifth-grade Integrated Social Studies classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the implementation of the "How to Read a Book" concept in Integrated Social Studies instruction in elementary schools. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand learning processes contextually, based on classroom practices. (Creswell, 2018).

The research subjects included fifth-grade teachers and students, selected purposively based on their direct involvement in Integrated Social Studies learning. This selection aimed to obtain data relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine the learning process and the application of Reading stages; interviews were used to explore teachers' and students' perspectives on Reading strategies; and documentation included teaching modules, Reading materials, and students' assignments. (Patton, 2015). Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, comprising data reduction, data display, and continuous drawing of conclusions. (Miles et al., 2019). Data credibility was ensured through source and technique triangulation and member checking to confirm the trustworthiness of the findings. (Creswell, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Integrated Social Studies learning in the fifth grade has incorporated Reading activities as an essential component of the learning process. However, it has not been explicitly labeled as the *How to Read a Book* concept. Observations revealed that teachers consistently directed students to read Social Studies texts before discussion and assignment activities, positioning Reading as the primary entry point for understanding the materials. This practice demonstrates that Reading is viewed as an initial means of building students' conceptual understanding of Social Studies topics.

The first finding shows that teachers implemented Reading stages reflecting the principles of elementary Reading and systematic inspectional Reading. At the initial stage, students were guided to read the text comprehensively to gain a general overview of the content. Teachers then assisted students in identifying important information, such as main ideas and keywords, through orally delivered guiding questions. This approach helped students understand the structure of Social Studies texts before progressing to deeper comprehension.

The second finding reveals that analytical Reading activities emerged through classroom questioning and discussions. Teachers encouraged students to restate the text's content in their own words and relate textual information to examples from daily life. In this process, students were not only required to find factual answers but also to explain the reasons and meanings behind the social events discussed in the text. This activity demonstrates that Reading was directed toward thinking processes rather than mere information acquisition.

Additionally, the study identified reflective Reading practices that approximated the characteristics of syntopical Reading. Students were given opportunities to compare the content of Social Studies texts with their personal experiences or prior knowledge. In some learning activities, teachers linked textual content to simple social issues familiar to students, such as cooperation, responsibility, and individual roles within society. This practice helped students develop a more contextualized understanding of Social Studies materials.

Interview results with teachers revealed that Reading strategies were deliberately implemented to help students understand Social Studies texts perceived as dense and challenging. Teachers recognized that without guided Reading strategies, students tended to read passively and struggled to comprehend the meaning of texts. Therefore, teachers intentionally used guiding questions and brief discussions after Reading to ensure students' understanding. This strategy was considered effective in increasing student engagement during Social Studies lessons.

From the students' perspective, interviews indicated that most students felt supported by the Reading guidance provided before and after Reading Social Studies texts. Students stated that teachers' questions helped them identify important parts of the text. Several students also expressed greater confidence in expressing their opinions after Reading, as they had informational grounding in the text. These findings suggest that systematically guided Reading can enhance students' confidence in Social Studies learning.

Documentation analysis of teaching modules, Reading materials, and students' assignments reinforced observation and interview findings. Learning documents showed that Reading activities were consistently followed by comprehension tasks, such as answering questions, summarizing texts, or expressing opinions orally. Students' assignments demonstrated their ability to identify the main ideas and explain the text's content in simple sentences. This indicates that Reading activities were integrated with thinking processes rather than treated as isolated tasks.

Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of Reading in Integrated Social Studies learning has progressed toward the concept of Reading as an art of thinking. Although not formally designed using the How to Read a Book framework, teachers' instructional practices reflected the stages of elementary Reading, inspectional Reading, analytical Reading, and reflective Reading. Social Studies learning positioned Reading not only as a preliminary

activity but also as a process of understanding, reasoning, and reflecting on the social meanings of the texts students studied.

The findings demonstrate that Reading practices in Integrated Social Studies learning have moved beyond mechanical activities toward structured thinking processes. This condition aligns with Adler and Van Doren's (1972) conception of Reading as an intellectual activity involving comprehension, analysis, and reflection. Although teachers did not explicitly reference the *How to Read a Book* framework, the Reading stages implemented in classrooms reflected the principles of Reading as an art of thinking. This indicates that deep Reading concepts can be applied in context to elementary Social Studies learning.

The implementation of elementary and systematic instructional Reading found in this study reflects teachers' efforts to build students' initial comprehension of Social Studies texts. Adler and Van Doren (1972) emphasize that elementary Reading aims to help readers grasp the literal meaning before entering analytical stages. In the context of Social Studies learning, this strategy is essential given the density of concepts, terminology, and social information embedded in the texts. Thus, guided initial Reading serves as a bridge between the text and students' conceptual understanding.

Findings from analytical Reading indicate that students engaged in higher-order thinking activities, such as explaining content, connecting information, and expressing opinions. This practice aligns with constructivist perspectives that emphasize knowledge construction through active and reflective processes (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). In Social Studies learning, analytical Reading enables students not only to comprehend information but also to interpret the social meanings embedded in texts, reinforcing Reading as a tool for developing critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, the emergence of reflective Reading practices that approximate the characteristics of syntopical Reading indicates a potential for higher-level literacy development. Adler and Van Doren (1972) describe syntopical Reading as involving comparison, connection, and reflection across multiple sources. Although still simple, teachers' efforts to link texts with students' experiences and real-life contexts represent early steps toward meaningful Social Studies learning. This practice supports the goals of Social Studies as a medium for fostering social awareness and understanding of societal realities (NCSS, 2013).

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of teachers' roles as literacy facilitators. Teachers function not only as content deliverers but also as guides in students' Reading and thinking processes. This aligns with Duke and Pearson's (2002) assertion that effective Reading strategies must be modeled and guided by teachers to develop students' deep comprehension of texts. In Integrated Social Studies learning, guided Reading is crucial for helping students navigate complex informational texts.

The findings also indicate that guided Reading instruction positively influences student engagement and confidence in Social Studies learning. This supports previous research suggesting that systematic Reading strategies enhance students' participation and comprehension of academic texts. (Guthrie et al., 2004). Thus, Reading serves not merely as a language skill but as a cognitive tool for learning across disciplines, including Social Studies.

Overall, this discussion confirms that the "*How to Read a Book*" concept is relevant and applicable to elementary-level Integrated Social Studies learning. Implementing Reading as an art of thinking enables students to develop conceptual understanding, analytical abilities, and reflective awareness of social meanings within texts. These findings reinforce the urgency of integrating deep Reading strategies into Social Studies instruction to strengthen literacy and 21st-century thinking skills in elementary education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Integrated Social Studies learning in elementary schools has incorporated Reading activities as a fundamental component of students' thinking processes. The Reading practices implemented by teachers demonstrate characteristics of elementary Reading, systematic inspectional Reading, analytical Reading, and reflective Reading. However, they were not explicitly designed based on the *How to Read a Book* framework. These findings affirm that Reading in Social Studies learning functions not merely as a preliminary activity but as a means of developing students' conceptual understanding and reasoning about social phenomena.

Furthermore, the study reveals that guided Reading instruction significantly enhances students' engagement and confidence in Social Studies learning. Reading strategies, accompanied by guiding questions and discussions, enable students to comprehend texts more deeply and connect information to personal experiences and real-life contexts. Consequently,

Reading can be positioned as an art of thinking that supports literacy development, social understanding, and critical thinking skills among elementary school students.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that elementary Social Studies teachers integrate deep Reading strategies more systematically into their instructional practices. The *How to Read a Book* concept may serve as a pedagogical framework to enrich literacy practices and improve the quality of Social Studies learning. Future research is encouraged to examine the implementation of this Reading strategy more broadly, across different grade levels and more structured instructional designs, to strengthen the findings and contributions to elementary education research.

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