

TEACHERS' INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPING CONTEXTUAL INTEGRATED SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe innovative strategies used by teachers to develop contextual, integrated social studies learning in MI/SD, including the planning, implementation, and assessment stages, as well as the factors that support and hinder its implementation. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study Design at SDN 001 Airtiris. The research subjects included classroom teachers, the principal, and students, who served as supporting informants. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, and analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing techniques. The results showed that the teachers' strategies were realized through mapping social studies concepts onto the local context, implementing meaningful learning activities such as discussions and simple social problem-solving, and using authentic assessments in the form of assignments, work demonstrations, and reflections. Supporting factors included the principal's support and the use of the environment as a learning resource, while time and facility constraints were the main obstacles. This study provides practical recommendations for MI/SD teachers in developing contextual and meaningful integrated social studies learning.

Keywords: Teacher Strategies, Integrated Social Studies, Contextual Learning

INTRODUCTION

Social studies learning in MI/SD is essentially integrated (through social concepts such as people–place–environment, time/change, economics, culture, and citizenship) and ideally directs students towards 21st-century skills (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, social literacy). In this framework, a contextual approach is essential because the “meaning” of social studies will be easier to form when social concepts are linked to the daily realities of students (home environment, school, community, and surrounding social phenomena). The emphasis on developing 21st-century competencies and skills through social studies learning in elementary schools is also evident in studies on implementing social studies instruction to develop these skills, which emphasize meaningful learning rather than memorization. (Arifin, 2024).

In the context of current policies and practices, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages more flexible, student-centered learning. It emphasizes character building through the Pancasila Student Profile, thereby opening up more space for contextual social studies learning, including the use of local issues and students' real experiences. However, classroom

implementation is highly dependent on teachers' readiness to Design teaching tools (especially teaching modules) so that the integration of objectives, materials, activities, and assessments is truly aligned with and relevant to students' context. An overview of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools (including its teaching tools) has been mapped out in a literature review. An overview of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools (including teaching tools) has been mapped out in literature reviews, while other studies show that teachers' abilities and obstacles in developing Merdeka Curriculum teaching modules remain significant issues (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022; Rismawanda & Mustika, 2024).

Although conceptually integrated contextual social studies is ideal, the reality in the field often shows that social studies learning remains teacher-centered and text-dominant, and it does not sufficiently engage students in relating concepts to real-life situations. This challenge is not only a matter of teaching methods but also of how teachers choose appropriate contexts, organize the sequence of activities, manage discussions/inquiries, and develop authentic assessments so that social studies learning is truly “alive” and relevant. A literature review on the challenges of context-based social studies learning in elementary schools reveals obstacles such as limited learning resources/environments, difficulties in contextualizing material with students' experiences, and factors related to teachers' readiness to Design meaningful learning (Hatibu, 2025).

Several previous studies have emphasized the effectiveness of contextual approaches/models (e.g., CTL) in improving social studies learning outcomes. For example, classroom action research applying CTL to fifth-grade social studies showed increases in average scores and learning completeness across cycles, thereby strengthening the argument that contextual learning can improve academic achievement in social studies (Tarome et al., 2024). However, evidence of “effectiveness” such as this often does not provide sufficient detail on the teacher's strategies: how the teacher designed the integration, how the context was selected, what the pedagogical considerations were, and how the assessment practices were carried out from the beginning to the end of the learning process.

Other studies show that “contextual” in social studies can be strengthened through local cultural values and local wisdom as learning resources. For example, a study on the integration of local cultural values in elementary school learning emphasizes that local culture can be processed into learning experiences that are closer to students and have the potential to

foster more meaningful social understanding (Sumarni et al., 2024). In line with this, the development of social studies teaching materials based on local wisdom has also been shown to increase the relevance of learning and help students understand social concepts through real-world examples in their environment (Widodo, 2020). However, many studies still stop at “local content integration” or “teaching material development” and do not fully capture teachers’ strategies in developing integrated contextual social studies learning as a series of practices (planning–implementation–assessment) in Islamic elementary schools/elementary schools.

At the elementary school level, studies on teacher strategies in social studies learning do exist. However, most are contextualized to specific local cases and do not always depart from the issue of “contextual integrated social studies” in the dynamics of the newer curriculum. For example, field research in MI that maps out implementative learning strategies (from planning and implementation to evaluation) illustrates the importance of varying active strategies. However, the context is specific to one institution and does not emphasize “integrated-contextual” integration as the focus of learning development (Wibowo, 2019). On the other hand, literature studies (e.g., on contextual social studies) often provide a list of general challenges/solutions, but do not describe how teachers make real decisions when designing integrated learning and choosing contexts that suit the characteristics of MI/SD students (Hatibu, 2025; Wibowo, 2019).

Based on these gaps, the novelty of the research “Teacher Strategies in Developing Contextual Integrated Social Studies Learning in MI/SD: A Descriptive Qualitative Study” lies in its in-depth and comprehensive examination of: (1) teacher strategies in designing learning (mapping objectives/competencies, selecting local contexts, developing integrated activities, preparing resources and media), (2) strategies during implementation (building concept–context connections, managing discussions/inquiries, facilitating collaboration), and (3) assessment strategies (authentic and in line with contextual activities), including (4) supporting and inhibiting factors and teachers’ adaptation methods. Descriptive qualitative research on teacher strategies in social studies lessons for shaping the Pancasila Student Profile shows that teacher strategies can be mapped concretely (e.g., through understanding, habituation, exemplification, and reinforcement), thus providing a basis for systematic analysis of teacher

strategies in social studies—and your research extends this to the focus of “contextual integrated social studies” in MI/SD (Fatimah et al., 2024).

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the fact that non-contextual social studies learning risks reverting to rote memorization of concepts, failing to build social understanding and sensitivity to the surrounding reality; meanwhile, the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum require teachers who can develop teaching tools and manage meaningful learning. Thus, this study aims to comprehensively describe teachers' strategies in developing contextual integrated social studies in MI/SD (at the planning, implementation, and assessment stages), as well as to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the field and formulate practical implications (recommendations for realistic strategies) to strengthen social studies learning practices in MI/SD. This objective is relevant to findings on the need to strengthen planning/teaching modules (Rismawanda & Mustika, 2024) and the challenges of contextual social studies that require teachers' operational strategies in the classroom (Hatibu, 2025). However, there is still limited research that comprehensively captures teachers' strategies for developing integrated contextual social studies learning as a single practice, from planning through implementation to assessment, in the context of MI/SD.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social studies learning at the elementary school level is essentially integrated, combining social concepts such as people-place-environment, time/change, economics, culture, and citizenship (Arifin, 2024). Integration in social studies learning refers to the integration of various social disciplines into a single, comprehensive learning unit, so that students can understand social phenomena holistically rather than in isolation. This integrated approach allows students to develop a deeper understanding of the relationships between social concepts in real life.

The contextual approach is important in social studies learning because the meaning of social concepts is easier to grasp when linked to students' everyday realities, such as their home environment, school, community, and surrounding social phenomena (Arifin, 2024). Contextual learning emphasizes the connection between learning materials and students' real-world situations, encouraging students to make connections between their knowledge and its application in everyday life. Tarome et al. (2024) show that the application of the Contextual

Teaching and Learning (CTL) model in social studies learning has been proven to improve student learning outcomes through more meaningful learning.

Teacher strategies play a crucial role in the development of integrated contextual social studies learning. Wibowo (2019) maps out implementative learning strategies that span the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation, emphasizing the importance of varying active strategies to support meaningful learning. Fatimah et al. (2024) show that teacher strategies can be mapped concretely through understanding, habituation, modeling, and reinforcement, which can be systematically analyzed to optimize social studies learning.

The Merdeka Curriculum encourages more flexible, student-centered learning and emphasizes character building through the Pancasila Student Profile, thus opening up more space for contextual social studies learning (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). However, its implementation is highly dependent on teachers' readiness to Design teaching tools, especially teaching modules aligned with students' contexts (Rismawanda & Mustika, 2024). Hatibu (2025) identifies challenges in context-based social studies learning in elementary schools, such as limited learning resources, difficulties in contextualizing material, and teacher readiness, which require concrete operational strategies to be addressed at the classroom level.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative case study Design to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies for developing contextual, integrated social studies learning at SDN 001 AIRTIRIS. The research was conducted in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year at SDN 001 Airtiris. The research informants consisted of two classroom teachers, one principal, and six students as supporting informants. A case study was chosen because it allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon holistically in the real context of the school, including the dynamics of planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning influenced by student characteristics, school culture, and internal policies. The case focus of this study was teachers' strategies for designing and implementing integrated social studies learning that relates to students' lives.

The research subjects were determined purposively based on their direct involvement in integrated social studies learning, including classroom teachers (especially those teaching social studies in grades IV–VI or relevant grades), school principals, and students as supporting informants to obtain perspectives on learning experiences. Informants can be

identified using the snowball technique if necessary to reach other relevant parties (e.g., curriculum representatives or assistant teachers). The researcher's presence serves as the primary instrument for observing and interpreting data while upholding research ethics, including obtaining participant consent, maintaining participant confidentiality, and being transparent about research objectives.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques, namely observation (observing the social studies learning process in the classroom and teacher-student interactions), semi-structured in-depth interviews (exploring teachers' strategies, considerations, and constraints as well as school support), and documentation studies (analyzing teaching modules/lesson plans, teaching materials, student worksheets, assessment tools, and evidence of learning outcomes). To ensure data quality, the study applied triangulation of techniques and sources, persistent observation, and member checking with key informants to ensure that the researchers' interpretations were consistent with the meanings intended by the informants.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously from the beginning of data collection through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data from observations, interviews, and documents were coded to identify themes such as planning strategies (goal mapping, material integration, selection of local contexts), implementation strategies (contextual activities, methods, media, classroom management), assessment strategies (authentic, rubrics, reflection), and supporting/inhibiting factors (teacher competence, time, learning resources, school support). The results of the analysis were then presented as thematic narratives and comprehensive case descriptions to inform recommendations for good practices in contextual integrated social studies learning at SDN 001 AIRTIRIS.

DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the development of integrated contextual social studies learning at SDN 001 AIRTIRIS was carried out through a series of interrelated strategies at the planning, implementation, and assessment stages. Class observation data, interviews with teachers and the principal, and documentation of teaching tools (teaching modules/lesson plans, student worksheets, and assessment instruments) show that teachers

not only linked social studies material to everyday examples, but also sought to integrate social studies concepts into a precise sequence of learning activities.

At the planning stage, the teacher's primary strategy begins with mapping learning objectives onto operational indicators, then linking them to the students' context. Teachers identify easily accessible contexts such as economic activities around the school/home, community customs, public facilities, and simple issues that are close to children's experiences (e.g., environmental hygiene, school rules, and buying and selling activities). The integration of social studies is evident when teachers combine simple concepts of geography (place/environment), basic economics (needs-economic activities), and citizenship (rules and responsibilities) into a single learning sequence, so that the material is not delivered in separate units.

During the implementation stage, contextual learning strategies were evident early in learning. Teachers began with sparking questions, real-life stories, or observations of simple objects/events around students. After that, teachers implement core activities that encourage students to be active, mainly through group discussions, guided question-and-answer sessions, and simple problem-based tasks. In several meetings, teachers utilize contextual teaching materials such as pictures of the surrounding area, simplified local news clippings, or mini case studies drawn from students' experiences. These activities make it easier for students to provide examples, explain simple cause-and-effect, and express opinions based on experience.

During the assessment stage, teachers use a combination of knowledge and skill assessments that lead to authentic assessments, for example, through presentations of discussion results, the creation of simple products (posters/solution sheets), and process assessments (activity, cooperation, and responsibility). Assessment documents show the existence of rubrics/assessment indicators that assess content (concept accuracy), delivery (communication), and participation (collaboration). In addition, teachers conduct brief reflections at the end of the lesson, for example, by asking students to reflect on lessons learned and behaviors to apply at home/school.

The study also found factors that support the implementation of teacher strategies, namely the principal's support for learning innovation, a culture of collaboration (discussions between teachers/internal teacher working groups), and the availability of learning resources from the school's surrounding environment. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors include limited

time to prepare contextual tools and media, variations in student learning abilities that require differentiation, and limitations in certain facilities (e.g., ICT tools/access to digital materials), which require teachers to adjust their strategies to continue using simple resources.

The visible impact of implementing this strategy is increased student engagement in learning (more active questioning/answering), improved ability to relate concepts to real-life examples, and the emergence of a habit of working together on group assignments. Students tend to understand the material more easily when the context comes from their familiar experiences, rather than when the material is presented as definitions or Reading alone.

The findings of this study reinforce that integrated contextual social studies learning is effective not because of the “name of the model,” but because of the teacher’s strategic decisions at three key points: (1) choosing contexts that are relevant to students’ experiences, (2) designing activities that require students to build understanding through interaction and problem solving, and (3) assessing the learning process and products authentically. These findings are in line with Arifin’s (2024) view that meaningful social studies learning requires a connection between concepts and students’ social realities, so that students not only understand the material cognitively, but also develop social literacy and 21st-century skills. When the context is drawn from the immediate environment, students have an “anchor” of experience to interpret social studies concepts, making learning more meaningful and reducing the tendency to memorize.

In terms of integration, teachers’ strategies that combine several social studies concepts within a single learning scenario have been shown to help students see the relationships among concepts (e.g., the relationships among environmental conditions, simple economic activities, and social rules). This shows that integration does not have to be complex material; in fact, at the elementary school level, good integration is characterized by a logical flow, relatable examples, and activities that encourage students to connect information into a coherent understanding.

In terms of implementation, contextual prompts and group discussions serve as a “bridge” from experience to concept. Activities such as observing, discussing, concluding, and presenting enable students not only to receive information but also to process it through their own language. In social studies learning, this strategy is important because the objectives of social studies also include the formation of social attitudes (responsibility, cooperation,

concern), which are more easily developed through interaction and meaningful activities than through one-way lectures.

In terms of assessment, the use of rubrics and authentic tasks reinforces the consistency of contextual learning. If learning requires students to be active and produce products/solutions, then the assessment needs to evaluate the thinking process, cooperation, and quality of solutions, not just written tests. The finding that teachers conduct simple reflections at the end of learning shows an effort to build students' metacognition (awareness of what is being learned and how to apply it), which is an important part of contextual learning.

Constraints such as time limitations, student heterogeneity, and limited facilities indicate that learning innovation requires adaptive strategies. These findings lead to practical implications: teachers can prepare a bank of local contexts (case studies/stories/objects from the surrounding area) and a bank of simple rubrics to make preparation more efficient, as well as implement light differentiation (e.g., division of roles in groups, tiered worksheets) to accommodate variations in student abilities.

Overall, this study confirms that the strategies employed by teachers at SDN 001 AIRTIRIS can be understood as a layered practice: starting from designing conceptual integration, bringing context to life in learning activities, and ensuring that assessments are aligned with students' learning experiences. These findings imply the need to strengthen school support through collaboration on teaching tools, the provision of simple learning resources, and assistance with designing authentic assessments so that contextual, integrated social studies practices can be implemented more consistently and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a case study at SDN 001 AIRTIRIS, it can be concluded that the teacher's strategy for developing integrated contextual social studies learning is carried out in a planned manner through three main stages: planning, implementation, and assessment. In the planning stage, teachers map out social studies objectives and materials, then integrate them into a single learning flow by linking social studies concepts to the real-life contexts of students and their surroundings. This strategy helps ensure that social studies materials are not presented in isolation but understood as an interconnected whole.

In the implementation stage, teachers apply student-centered learning through contextual prompts, group discussions, guided questions and answers, and simple problem-solving activities that are closely aligned with students' experiences. These activities encourage students to be more active, relate social studies concepts to real-life examples, and develop social skills such as cooperation, responsibility, and the courage to express their opinions. At the assessment stage, teachers use a combination of knowledge and skill assessments that lead to authentic assessments, such as process assessments, work demonstrations/presentations, and task products, supplemented by simple indicators or rubrics and reflections at the end of the learning process.

The study also found that the success of teachers' strategies was supported by the principal's support, a culture of collaboration among teachers, and the use of learning resources from the surrounding environment. The main obstacles included limited time to prepare contextual tools and media, differences in students' learning abilities, and limited supporting facilities. Overall, contextually integrated social studies learning at SDN 001 AIRTIRIS has been proven to make learning more meaningful and increase student engagement. Therefore, it is recommended that there be a strengthening of teaching material planning, development of a local context bank, and strengthening of authentic assessment so that the implementation of teacher strategies becomes more consistent and sustainable.

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