

Enhancing Problem-Solving Skills on Ethnic Diversity Through Problem-Based Learning in Fifth-Grade Students

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategies in improving students' problem-solving skills on the topic of ethnic diversity in fifth grade at MIS Hidayatussalam. PBL was chosen as a learning approach to encourage students not only to understand the material theoretically, but also to think critically and develop problem-solving skills relevant to social issues in everyday life. The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, which involves participatory observation and interviews with teachers and students. The results of the study indicate that the successful implementation of PBL improves students' critical thinking skills and their ability to analyze and solve social problems related to ethnic diversity. Students become more active in class discussions, more confident in expressing opinions, and better able to connect learning materials with social issues that occur in society. Despite challenges, such as low initial student participation and difficulties in connecting the material to real life, the implementation of PBL has proven effective in improving students' problem-solving skills. This study recommends that PBL can be an alternative effective learning strategy to develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills in schools.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Ethnic Diversity, Problem-Based Learning

A. Introduction

As time goes by, the traditional learning approach that emphasizes memorization and understanding of material in a one-way manner from teacher to student is no longer able to develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that students need (Wijaya et al., 2025). Learning that only depend on teaching from teacher to student without involving participation active from student tend limit development ability cognitive they, especially in matter analysis and problem solving problem (Schmidt et al., 2011), (Branch, 2004). Therefore, innovation is needed in more effective learning strategies that can enable students to play a more active role in the learning process. One method that can be used to achieve this goal is Problem-Based Learning (PBL), which is more student-centered and emphasizes the use of real-life problems relevant to their lives.

PBL is a learning approach that prioritizes student involvement in the learning process, where students are faced with a real situation or problem and must find a solution independently or in groups (Hidayati et al., 2024). This approach encourages students to think critically, collaborate with their friends, and hone their skills in solving the problems they face (Musa'ad et al., 2024).

The learning process at school is not only aimed at transferring knowledge, but also at developing critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills (Sutarmi & Suarjana, 2017). As a result, students' active participation is low, and their ability to solve contextual problems, especially those related to real life, remains very limited. One impact of a social studies learning approach that should be contextual and encourage students to think reflectively about social and environmental issues is a lack of student understanding of the social studies learning approach (Safran et al., 2024).

In fifth grade, one of the important topics in social studies learning is the diversity of ethnic groups in Indonesia. This topic not only includes geographical and demographic facts, but also includes important values such as tolerance, unity, and national identity. However, based on the results of initial observations conducted in fifth grade elementary schools (school names can be adjusted), it was found that most students had difficulty connecting the material on ethnic diversity with phenomena occurring in society, such as discrimination, social conflict, or challenges in maintaining national integrity amidst such diversity. Furthermore, it was found that students tended to be passive in discussions, were not yet able to identify the core of the problem, and showed low reflective thinking skills regarding socio-cultural issues. This condition indicates that the learning strategies implemented were not able to optimally stimulate students' problem-solving abilities (Hidayah et al., 2018). In fact, these abilities are very essential in forming 21st-century life skills, which emphasize critical thinking, collaborative skills, and socio-cultural literacy (Amalia et al., 2022).

This problem also occurs at MIS Hidayatussalam, based on initial observations in grade V. Teachers still predominantly use a one-way approach, while students only act as recipients of information. During teaching and learning activities, students show difficulty in understanding ethnic diversity as a national treasure that must be preserved. They are less able to identify social problems related to diversity issues, such as discrimination, stereotypes, and intergroup conflict. This is reflected in low student participation in class discussions, minimal initiative in expressing opinions, and their inability to provide solutions to case studies related to cultural differences. This indicates that students' problem-solving skills are still relatively low, particularly in the analysis of social issues and decision-making relevant to the values of tolerance and diversity. Yet, these skills are crucial as part of the primary goal of social studies learning (Damanik, 2020), namely forming citizens who think critically, democratically and are socially responsible.

To answer these problems, it is necessary to implement innovative and student-centered learning strategies, one of strategies PBL (Suwastini et al., 2021), (Adlini, 2023). This strategy prioritizes a learning process that starts from real problems, encouraging students to think critically, work together, and find solutions independently or in groups (Azer, 2017). PBL has been proven effective in improving students' higher order thinking skills, including in the context of social studies learning (Branch, 2004); (Ernawati & Rahmawati, 2021).

Although PBL has been proven effective in improving problem-solving skills, its implementation in Islamic elementary schools remains very limited. This is due to several factors, including a lack of understanding of this strategy among educators, limited resources, and a lack of training for teachers to implement PBL effectively. This creates a research gap that needs to be bridged. Therefore, this study aims to implement a problem-based learning strategy as an effort to improve fifth-grade students' problem-solving skills on the topic of ethnic diversity at MIS Hidayatussalam. Through this research, it is hoped that an effective and contextual learning model can be found to develop students' critical thinking skills and strengthen their understanding of the importance of unity in diversity. Furthermore, more traditional learning approaches and a dense curriculum often limit the space for innovation in teaching methods. As a result, students in Islamic elementary schools may struggle to develop the problem-solving skills necessary to face real-world challenges, particularly in complex topics such as ethnic diversity. Therefore, further studies on the implementation of PBL in madrasah-based elementary schools are very important to identify its potential and challenges, as well as to improve the quality of education in this sector.

B. Methods

This research uses qualitative methods (Sugiyono, 2022), with a descriptive approach to examine in depth the implementation of problem-based learning strategies in improving problem-solving abilities on ethnic diversity material for fifth-grade students at MIS Hidayatussalam, Percut Sei Tuan District. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to obtain a detailed and contextual picture of the learning process as well as teacher and student perceptions of the strategy's implementation. The research subjects consisted of fifth-grade social studies teachers and fifth-grade students as the main respondents, who were selected purposively so that the information obtained was relevant to the research focus. Data collection techniques used included participatory observation, where researchers directly observed the problem-based learning process carried out by teachers in class, semi-structured interviews with teachers and several selected students to explore experiences, obstacles, and benefits felt during learning, as well as documentation in the form of learning implementation notes, teaching materials, and student work results as supporting data. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, namely grouping data based on main themes that are in

accordance with the research objectives, such as the strategy implementation process, students' problem-solving abilities, and obstacles found. To ensure data validity, the researcher used source triangulation by comparing the results of observations, teacher interviews, and student interviews, as well as conducting member checks with informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. With this approach, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the implementation of problem-based learning strategies and their impact on improving students' problem-solving abilities in the subject of ethnic diversity at MIS Hidayatussalam.085215078469

C. Results and Discussion

As part of this research, observations of the implementation of PBL strategies in teaching ethnic diversity in fifth graders have provided valuable insights into teachers' perceptions and experiences. The implementation of PBL aims to improve students' problem-solving skills by engaging them in solving problems relevant to social issues in the community. Through interviews with social studies teachers, various perspectives were obtained on how PBL is implemented in the classroom, the challenges faced, and its impact on student skill development. The following are the results of interviews with teachers and students regarding the process and results of implementing PBL strategies in the context of social studies learning. In this study, it was found that the implementation of PBL strategies in teaching ethnic diversity in fifth graders at MIS Hidayatussalam had a positive impact on students' problem-solving skills. Teachers implemented PBL by presenting real-life cases related to social issues, such as discrimination, stereotypes, and inter-ethnic conflicts. Through this approach, students were given the opportunity to work in groups, analyze problems, and formulate solutions collaboratively. This has proven effective in encouraging students to think critically and develop skills in solving social problems relevant to their lives.

However, the main challenge faced in implementing PBL is low student participation, especially at the beginning of the method's implementation. Some students feel a lack of confidence or struggle to express their opinions in discussions. To address this, teachers strive to facilitate more open discussions, providing opportunities for each student to speak, and providing constructive feedback so that students feel valued and motivated to be more active. With this support, student participation in discussions increases, and they begin to think reflectively about existing social problems and provide more relevant and realistic solutions.

Over time, the implementation of PBL has proven effective in improving students' problem-solving skills related to ethnic diversity. Students began to demonstrate a better understanding of the values of tolerance, unity, and diversity, and became more critical in viewing social issues. This demonstrates that PBL not only helps students gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter of ethnic diversity but

also develops important skills that will be useful in facing future social and cultural challenges.

Although the implementation of PBL strategies has had a positive impact on students, research findings also revealed differences in teacher and student perspectives on the learning process and outcomes. Teachers perceived PBL as effective in improving students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, despite facing initial challenges in encouraging student participation. Meanwhile, students experienced immediate benefits from PBL implementation, particularly in increasing self-confidence and active engagement in class discussions. These differences provide a comprehensive picture of how the implementation of PBL in the classroom can impact both the learning process for teachers and the learning experience for students.

The findings of this study indicate that students experienced a positive impact from implementing PBL strategies in teaching about ethnic diversity. Students expressed that learning with PBL provided a different experience compared to traditional methods. They felt more challenged and understood the material more easily when presented with real-life problems, such as discrimination or inter-ethnic conflict. According to students, having relevant problems enabled them to relate learning to real-life social situations, which helped them better understand the importance of tolerance and unity amidst diversity. Although some students initially felt less confident in expressing their opinions, the implementation of PBL, which involved group discussions, was proven to help students participate more actively. Students felt more valued when given the opportunity to speak and share their ideas. They also felt more comfortable expressing their opinions, which contributed to increased active participation in the learning process. With this approach, students develop critical thinking skills and are able to identify and provide solutions to social problems in society.

Overall, students acknowledged that the PBL method not only improved their problem-solving skills but also helped them become more aware of social issues and appreciate the cultural diversity around them. This problem-based learning made them feel more engaged and better prepared to face complex social challenges, as well as developing a better understanding of the values of tolerance and diversity.

The Impact of PBL on Students' Problem-Solving Abilities in the Material of Ethnic Diversity

The implementation of PBL strategies in the topic of ethnic diversity in fifth grade at MIS Hidayatussalam has been proven to have a significant positive impact on students' problem-solving abilities. Findings indicate that PBL successfully improves students' critical thinking and analytical skills, particularly in addressing social issues related to ethnic diversity. Teachers reported that, by implementing PBL,

students became more actively involved in class discussions and were able to identify and analyze social problems around them, such as inter-ethnic discrimination, stereotypes, and social conflicts that frequently occur in society.

Real-world problem-based learning enables students to gain a deeper understanding of the social impacts of diversity issues. Through this process, students are encouraged to think creatively and creatively in providing solutions to the social problems they face. Furthermore, PBL also helps students generate solutions based on the values of tolerance, diversity, and unity. This approach not only enhances students' understanding of the importance of ethnic diversity but also equips them with essential social skills for interacting in a pluralistic and challenging society.

During the PBL process, students work in groups to find solutions to given problems. This process encourages them to think critically, collaborate with their peers, and develop communication skills in expressing their opinions. Students also begin to think reflectively about broader social situations, rather than relying solely on the knowledge provided by the teacher. Analysis shows that students improved problem-solving skills are evident in the quality of their discussions and the solutions they produce, which are more relevant to the existing social and cultural context. This also supports the development of higher-order thinking skills expected in 21st-century education, namely the ability to analyze, collaborate, and solve complex problems.

The application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategies to the topic of ethnic diversity not only demonstrated positive impacts in this study but was also supported by various previous studies, including research conducted by (Nia Devi Anggraini, Rosnida Siregar, Nurbaiti, 2024), which revealed that the use of the PBL model in learning about ethnic and religious diversity in fourth grade elementary school can significantly improve student learning outcomes. This study shows that PBL is able to encourage students to be more active in discussions and think critically in solving social problems around them, thereby increasing their understanding of relevant social and cultural issues. This is in line with the findings of this study, which shows that the implementation of PBL in fifth grade MIS Hidayatussalam also successfully improved students' problem-solving abilities related to ethnic diversity. Another study by (Anik Handayani, 2021) also confirmed that implementation of PBL can increase interest and results Study students, especially in field Mathematics, however findings this is also relevant with social studies learning regarding diversity ethnic group nation . Through PBL, students are given the opportunity to think more deeply about real-life problems and collaborate with classmates to find solutions, leading to improved critical thinking and analytical skills. This research supports the findings of research conducted at MIS Hidayatussalam, which showed that PBL not only improves students' problem-solving skills but also develops their collaboration and communication skills, which

are crucial in understanding social issues such as discrimination and inter-ethnic stereotypes.

In addition, research by (Sari & Rosidah, 2023) also supported these findings by demonstrating that PBL is effective in improving students' social studies learning outcomes, particularly those related to ethnic diversity. Their research findings indicate that PBL can make students more active and engaged in learning because they are given the opportunity to solve problems relevant to their lives. This aligns with the findings of this study, which demonstrates that the implementation of PBL successfully encourages students to think more reflectively and deeply. Furthermore, PBL enhances students' understanding of the values of diversity, tolerance, and the importance of respecting differences among others. This method also helps students understand effective ways to address common social problems in society, such as discrimination and stereotypes, and encourages them to propose practical solutions in their daily lives.

Overall, these three studies reinforce existing research findings, which indicate that the application of PBL strategies in teaching ethnic diversity can improve students' problem-solving abilities, encourage them to be more active and critical thinkers, and develop the social skills necessary to face social and cultural challenges in society.

Challenges in Implementing PBL Strategies in Ethnic Diversity Material.

Although the implementation of the PBL strategy on ethnic diversity in fifth grade at MIS Hidayatussalam has shown positive impacts, several challenges need to be addressed. One of these is the low initial student participation in class discussions. Some students felt awkward or lacked confidence in expressing their opinions, especially when asked to speak on social issues considered sensitive, such as discrimination or inter-ethnic conflict. The teacher identified that initially, some students tended to be passive and relied solely on the opinions of their peers. To address this, the teacher took steps to facilitate more open and inclusive discussions, giving each student the opportunity to speak and providing constructive feedback to encourage students to feel valued and motivated to participate more actively.

Another challenge was students' difficulty connecting the ethnic diversity material to real life. Some students initially struggled to connect the knowledge they gained in class to actual phenomena occurring in society. Although the teacher attempted to present relevant social issues in PBL, more time and effort were needed to facilitate students' understanding of how these issues directly affect them in their daily lives. In this case, the role of the teacher is very important in providing guidance and more contextual real examples so that students can more easily relate learning to their personal experiences.

In addition, other challenges arise from limitations of the learning media used. Research by (Ginting & Sitepu, 2023) Studies have shown that the use of insufficiently varied learning media can hinder students' understanding of ethnic and cultural diversity. In the context of PBL, the media used must be able to arouse interest and facilitate students' understanding of complex social issues. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to select appropriate media to make PBL learning more effective and engaging for students.

Challenge other is low interest student in learn material diversity ethnic group nation. Research by (Robiah et al., 2023) This indicates that low student interest in the material can be a barrier to the learning process. Implementing PBL requires an innovative and contextual approach to ensure that students are not only engaged but also motivated to think critically. Teachers must be able to present material in an engaging and tailored manner to students' needs, so they feel more engaged and enthusiastic about learning the topic. To increase student interest, material on ethnic diversity in Indonesia must be presented interactively, arousing students' curiosity about cultural, ethnic, and religious differences, and how these influence social dynamics in society. The right approach will enrich students' learning experiences and motivate them to be more actively involved in discussions and learning activities.

Despite these challenges, PBL has proven effective in improving students' problem-solving skills. Teachers report that with patience and the right approach, students eventually begin to show significant improvements in their participation and ability to analyze and provide solutions to problems related to ethnic diversity. This demonstrates that despite the challenges in implementing PBL, with the right adjustments, problem-based learning can yield maximum results in improving students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Facing these challenges, teachers need appropriate strategies to facilitate effective learning. Teachers need to provide engaging and relevant learning media and create a supportive learning environment to increase students' interest and understanding of the subject of ethnic diversity.

D. Conclusions

Based on the results of research on the application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategies in improving students' problem-solving abilities on the topic of ethnic diversity in grade V of MIS Hidayatussalam, it can be concluded that PBL has a significant positive impact on improving students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The application of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in madrasah-based elementary schools shows that PBL can improve students' problem-solving abilities, especially in understanding complex material such as ethnic diversity. However, there is initial resistance from students towards this method because they are more

accustomed to traditional learning methods that are more structured and direct. In addition, teachers often face challenges in managing group discussions that can cause difficulties in achieving learning objectives. To overcome these challenges, teachers need to provide scaffolding for students who are shy or unfamiliar with the PBL method. Teachers are also advised to build students' confidence gradually, by starting with simpler problems and increasing their complexity over time. In addition, teachers need to carefully manage group dynamics and ensure that each student is actively involved in discussions and problem-solving. Providing more relevant and context-based materials will help students more easily understand and apply PBL in everyday life.

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