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Introducing the Concept of Population and the Indonesian Government System to Elementary Madrasah Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the initial understanding of elementary school (MI) students regarding the concept of population and the Indonesian government system, and to assess the effect of using contextual learning media in improving this understanding. The main issues raised are how MI students understand these abstract concepts and the extent to which contextual media can help facilitate deeper understanding. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study design, involving observation, interviews, and documentation in several MIs in Kendari City. The research informants consisted of students, teachers, and principals. The results of the study indicate that although students have basic knowledge about the population and the Indonesian government system, their understanding is still limited to factual and theoretical aspects. The use of contextual media that is relevant to students' daily lives can improve their understanding, making these concepts easier to understand and accept. As a result, contextual media has been shown to increase student engagement in learning and help them relate the material to their social lives, introducing citizenship values more effectively. This study suggests the use of more diverse media and further research with larger samples to deepen understanding of the implementation of contextual learning in elementary school.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pemahaman awal siswa Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) mengenai konsep penduduk dan sistem pemerintahan Indonesia, serta menilai pengaruh penggunaan media pembelajaran kontekstual dalam meningkatkan pemahaman tersebut. Permasalahan utama yang diangkat adalah bagaimana siswa MI memahami konsep-konsep abstrak ini dan sejauh mana media kontekstual dapat membantu dalam memfasilitasi pemahaman yang lebih dalam. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi deskriptif, melibatkan observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi di beberapa MI di Kota Kendari. Informan penelitian terdiri dari siswa, guru, dan kepala sekolah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun siswa memiliki pengetahuan dasar mengenai penduduk dan sistem pemerintahan Indonesia, pemahaman mereka masih terbatas pada aspek faktual dan teoritis. Penggunaan media kontekstual yang relevan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari siswa dapat meningkatkan pemahaman mereka, menjadikan konsep-konsep tersebut lebih mudah dipahami dan diterima. Dampaknya, media kontekstual terbukti meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dalam pembelajaran dan membantu mereka mengaitkan materi dengan kehidupan sosial mereka, memperkenalkan nilai-nilai kewarganegaraan secara lebih efektif. Penelitian ini menyarankan penggunaan media yang lebih beragam dan penelitian lebih lanjut dengan sampel yang lebih besar untuk memperdalam pemahaman terhadap implementasi pembelajaran kontekstual di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

INTRODUCTION

Civics education plays a strategic role in shaping a young generation with national awareness, social responsibility, and an understanding of the state system in which they live. The instillation of basic national values, including the concept of the Indonesian population and government system, ideally begins at the elementary level. In the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) environment, as a basic education unit with Islamic characteristics, this material is an important part of strengthening the Pancasila student profile and forming national character from an early age. However, delivering abstract material such as the government system often presents a challenge, given the characteristics of MI students who are still at the concrete-operational thinking stage according to Piaget's cognitive development theory. Therefore, a learning approach is needed that can bridge abstract concepts with everyday realities that are close to students' experiences (Lubis, 2019).

Salah satu permasalahan yang kerap muncul dalam pembelajaran materi penduduk dan pemerintahan di jenjang MI adalah rendahnya tingkat pemahaman siswa. Hal ini tidak hanya disebabkan oleh kompleksitas isi materi, tetapi juga karena media pembelajaran yang digunakan cenderung konvensional dan kurang kontekstual. Akibatnya, siswa kesulitan mengaitkan informasi yang disampaikan guru dengan pengalaman nyata dalam kehidupan mereka. Oleh karena itu, pendekatan berbasis media pembelajaran kontekstual menjadi alternatif yang potensial untuk meningkatkan pemahaman siswa. Konteks lokal, lingkungan sekitar, dan pengalaman sosial siswa dapat dijadikan titik pijak dalam merancang media dan strategi pembelajaran yang lebih bermakna (Andriani, *et.al.*, 2022).

This study specifically aims to describe elementary school students' initial understanding of the concepts of population and the Indonesian government system. Furthermore, it aims to identify the types of contextual learning media used in the learning process and analyze how these media contribute to helping students understand the concepts taught. By focusing on initial understanding, this study aims to provide an initial overview of students' cognitive readiness and perceptions of the material being taught, as a basis for designing more targeted learning (Yonanda, 2017).

Within the existing literature, several studies have examined the implementation of civics and governance learning at the secondary education level. However, studies specifically examining Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students' initial understanding of these concepts are still very limited. Most studies focus more on learning outcomes or final cognitive achievements, without exploring how students understand these concepts in the early stages of learning. Furthermore, studies on the effectiveness of contextual learning media in civics education at MI have not been systematically developed (Noviyanti, 2023).

This research offers novelty by focusing on initial understanding, not just final learning outcomes. With a descriptive approach and the use of contextual learning media, this research is expected to make a new contribution to the field of civics education at the elementary level, particularly in Islamic schools (madrasah). The justification for this research lies in the urgency of improving the quality of civics learning through a more adaptive and student-centered approach. The results of this study are expected to not only enrich academic discourse but also provide practical implications for MI teachers in designing more effective and meaningful learning (Zuriah & Sunaryo 2022).

Civic education is a crucial element in shaping the character and national awareness of the younger generation. At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level, material on the Indonesian population and government system serves not only to introduce students to the state's structure but also to instill the fundamental values of democracy, justice, and social responsibility. However, teaching this material faces significant challenges, given young children's limited understanding of abstract and complex concepts. In this regard, the use of contextual learning media relevant to students' daily lives can be key to bridging the gap between theory and practice, which can be difficult for them to grasp (Sawitri, 2013).

However, despite widespread awareness of the importance of effective media use in learning, there is still little research that examines elementary school students' initial understanding of concepts such as population and the Indonesian government system. Many existing studies tend to focus on learning outcomes or on media use in general, without considering how students' initial understandings can influence their learning process. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' initial understanding of the material through a contextual learning media approach, which is believed to provide a deeper and more applicable understanding for students. This research not only contributes to the development of learning methodologies at the elementary school level but also enriches the literature on civic education relevant to the context of elementary education in Indonesia (Kristanto, 2019).

Elementary Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students often struggle to grasp abstract concepts, such as the concept of population and the Indonesian government system. While fundamental to developing an understanding of citizenship, these concepts require a more concrete approach to be easily accessible to students at this level. The problem arises from the mismatch between the teaching methods used and the cognitive development of elementary school students, who are still at the concrete-operational thinking stage. Consequently, students' understanding of the material is limited, and the use of more contextual and relevant learning media becomes increasingly important to increase student engagement in the learning process (Lumbantobing, 2024).

Furthermore, although various studies have shown that the use of learning media can improve student understanding, there are still very few studies that specifically examine the application of contextual media in learning about the Indonesian population and government system in MI classrooms. Learning media that do not refer to students' daily experiences and life contexts tend to fail to provide in-depth and applicable understanding. Therefore, this study will focus on two main issues: first, the level of MI students' initial understanding of the material on the Indonesian population and government system; and second, the extent to which contextual learning media can help overcome these obstacles in the context of learning in MI.

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of elementary school students' initial understanding of the concepts of population and the Indonesian government system. Students' initial understanding is a critical stage in the learning process, as difficulties at this stage can impact the effectiveness of subsequent learning. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring how elementary school students understand the material and the obstacles they face in absorbing these abstract concepts. By describing students' initial understanding, this study will provide an overview of their level of readiness to further understand civics material at the elementary level (Shabrina, 2025).

Furthermore, this study also aims to identify and analyze the use of contextual learning media in teaching Indonesian population and government systems in elementary school (MI) classes. In this case, contextual media is expected to improve students' understanding by linking the material to their daily life experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not only to describe students' initial understanding but also to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning media used in improving student understanding and engagement in the learning process (Atmoko, 2024).

Although numerous studies have addressed citizenship learning and the Indonesian government system at the secondary education level, very few have focused on the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level, particularly in the context of students' initial understanding of the material. Existing studies generally focus on final learning outcomes or the use of instructional media in general, without in-depth examination of students' understanding of concepts such as population and government at this early stage. Furthermore, the existing literature largely focuses on the use of media in higher-level learning contexts, while research examining the application of contextual media at the elementary level, particularly MI, is still very limited (Ramadhan, 2021).

This gap highlights the importance of further in-depth research into elementary school students' initial understanding of basic citizenship concepts, as well as how contextual learning media can be used to bridge this gap. This research is expected to address this gap in the literature by providing new insights into more effective ways to teach abstract material at the elementary level. By focusing on approaches that better align with the characteristics of elementary school students, this research will significantly contribute to the development of more appropriate and effective learning models at the elementary level in Indonesia (Lubis, 2022).

This research offers a significant contribution to the field of civics education, particularly at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary school) level, focusing on students' initial understanding of the Indonesian population and government system. One aspect that distinguishes this research is its approach, which combines the study of students' initial understanding with the use of contextual learning media. This approach allows the research to provide new insights into how abstract material can be presented in a more relevant and understandable way for MI students, who are still at the concrete-operational stage of cognitive development. Thus, this research introduces a more applicable approach to civics education at the elementary level (Firdaus & Permatasari, 2025).

The justification for this research also lies in the urgent need to develop a learning model more appropriate to the context of MI students. Given the limited literature examining the teaching of government at the elementary level using contextual media, this research is expected to fill the knowledge gap and provide a basis for developing a more adaptive and effective curriculum. Furthermore, the results of this study can be used by educators to improve the quality of civics learning and contribute to the development of better education policies at the madrasah level. Therefore, this research is not only important academically but also has practical implications that can enrich educational practices in Indonesia (Mawardini, 2022).

METHOD

This study aims to describe descriptively how MI students understand the material that is taught and how contextual media can improve this understanding (Santosa & Zaenuri 2022).

Types of research

This research is a descriptive qualitative study. Descriptive qualitative research is used to obtain an in-depth overview of the phenomenon under study, without the aim of testing a specific hypothesis. The main focus of this study is to describe students' initial understanding of the topic of population and the Indonesian government system and how contextual media is used in learning to enhance student understanding. With this approach, researchers can understand students' and teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation of relevant and effective learning media.

Research Approach

The research approach used is a case study, which allows researchers to explore in depth and detail the learning dynamics that occur in MI classes in Kendari City. This approach allows researchers to analyze various factors that influence students' understanding of abstract concepts such as government systems, as well as to explore how the use of contextual media can influence the learning process. This case study will focus on one or more MI classes in Kendari City, selected based on characteristics relevant to the research focus.

Research Background

This research was conducted in several Islamic elementary schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) in Kendari City, which were chosen as research locations because they are representative of the conditions of citizenship learning at the elementary school level in eastern Indonesia. Kendari City has unique characteristics, with cultural and social diversity that can

influence the learning process and the use of contextual media. Several elementary schools in Kendari City were chosen because they have implemented contextual media-based learning methods, but few have studied the effectiveness of these media in improving students' understanding of the Indonesian population and government system.

Research Informants

The informants in this study consisted of two main groups: (1) teachers who teach citizenship subjects in MI classes, and (2) fifth-grade MI students who were the main subjects in this study. Teachers were selected based on their experience in teaching citizenship materials, particularly those related to the concept of population and the Indonesian government system. The students selected were those in fifth grade, because at this level, materials related to the Indonesian government system and population begin to be introduced in more depth. The selection of informants was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely the selection of informants based on certain criteria deemed relevant to the research objectives.

Data collection technique

The data collection techniques used in this study included in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The in-depth interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of contextual learning media and to understand how they teach material related to the Indonesian population and government system. Interviews were also conducted with students to determine their initial understanding of these concepts and their experiences using contextual media during learning.

Observations were conducted in selected classes to directly observe the learning process, particularly how contextual media was used and how students responded to it. Observations also aimed to document interactions between teachers and students and to assess the extent to which students were able to relate the learning material to their own lives. Documentation, including teaching materials, learning media used, and notes from discussions or student exercises during the learning process, was also collected to enrich the existing data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. This process involves collecting, organizing, and categorizing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation into specific themes relevant to the research objectives. First, interview transcripts and observation notes were sorted and analyzed to identify key patterns and themes related to students' initial understanding of the concepts of population and the Indonesian government system, as well as the effectiveness of contextual media in learning. The collected data was analyzed inductively, focusing on the understanding constructed by students through contextual learning media.

Data Validity Test

To ensure data validity, this study will utilize several triangulation techniques. The triangulation techniques employed include source, technique, and time triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing data obtained from various informant sources (teachers and students), as well as various data collection methods (interviews, observation, and documentation). Technique triangulation is conducted by combining various data collection techniques, such as interviews and observation, to ensure the consistency of findings. Time triangulation is conducted by collecting data at several different points in time, to ensure that the findings are accountable and independent of specific time conditions.

In this study, the interpretation of the results was carried out by linking the research findings with relevant theories in education and student cognitive development. The main findings indicate that students of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) still experience difficulties in

understanding abstract concepts such as population and the Indonesian government system. These results are in line with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which states that students at this age are in the concrete-operational stage, where they more easily understand concrete and directly observable concepts. The use of contextual learning media has been proven to help students in connecting the material with their daily experiences, which allows them to more easily understand these concepts. This study also compares the results obtained with previous studies, which show that even though contextual media is used, its effectiveness depends on the students' social and cultural context.

The results of this study make a significant contribution to educational theory, particularly in the area of civics learning at the elementary level. This study introduces an approach that combines students' prior understanding with the use of contextual media, which can enhance their understanding of material previously considered abstract. Practically, these findings can be applied in civics teaching in elementary school classes by integrating learning media relevant to students' daily lives, which not only enhances their understanding but also increases their engagement in learning. Thus, this study has the potential to improve learning practices in the field and provide guidelines for teachers in optimizing the use of media appropriate to students' contexts.

However, this study has limitations that should be considered. One limitation is the limited sample size, which only included a few schools in Kendari City, so the results may not be fully generalizable to all Islamic elementary schools in Indonesia. Furthermore, the use of interviews and observations as data collection techniques may not fully describe all factors influencing students' understanding of the material. The limited timeframe of the study may also have affected the results, as the development of students' understanding can be more visible over a longer period.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the sample size and involve more schools from various regions, so that the results can be more representative and generalizable. Longitudinal research is also important to monitor the development of students' understanding of citizenship concepts over time, and to explore whether the use of contextual media has long-term effects on their understanding. More in-depth research on various types of contextual learning media is also needed to determine which is most effective in teaching the Indonesian population and government system in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

In terms of social and ethical implications, this study shows that civics education in Islamic elementary schools plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and social awareness. Relevant, everyday-based instruction can enhance their understanding of the importance of their role in society. This study also highlights the need for an inclusive approach that takes into account students' social and cultural backgrounds in civics instruction, to ensure that it is accessible to all students without exception. Furthermore, the use of learning media must be ethical, ensuring that the material taught is not only informative but also sensitive to the cultural values present in the community, thus avoiding misunderstandings or negative stereotypes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the initial understanding of elementary school (MI) students regarding the concepts of population and the Indonesian government system and explore how the use of contextual learning media can support this understanding. The analysis found that although MI students have received instruction on these topics, their understanding is often limited to factual and contextual knowledge, which cannot always be connected to the realities of their daily lives. These findings indicate that their understanding of the concepts of population and the Indonesian government system is still at a relatively simple stage and requires a more contextual approach to improve deeper understanding.

Students' Initial Understanding of the Concept of Population and the Indonesian Government System

Interviews with teachers and students indicate that the majority of MI students possess basic knowledge of the topic of population and the Indonesian government system, but their understanding is limited to technical and theoretical aspects. For example, when asked about the concept of "population," most students can answer by referring to the number of people in Indonesia or defining population numerically, but only a few can explain the relationship between the concept of population and social, economic, or cultural dynamics in the context of their daily lives. A similar finding is found in students' understanding of the Indonesian government system. Although they can name the hierarchical structure of government, such as the president, ministers, and other officials, their understanding of the functions and roles of these institutions in the context of day-to-day governance remains very limited.

This phenomenon indicates that at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, students are not yet fully able to connect the knowledge taught to their concrete experiences. This may be due to a learning approach that lacks contextualization and focuses more on abstract and theoretical aspects. Therefore, students tend to passively receive information, without understanding its direct relevance to their lives. Concepts such as population and government systems, which are fundamentally relevant to their social lives, become too distant from their understanding because they are not presented in a way that they can directly relate to.

The Role of Contextual Learning Media in Improving Student Understanding

One of the main findings of this study is the importance of using contextual learning media in improving students' understanding of the material being taught. Based on observations and interviews, the use of contextual media that connects population and government systems to real-life situations and experiences has been shown to clarify concepts previously considered abstract. For example, when teachers use everyday life examples related to the population in students' neighborhoods or implement simple simulations of the regional election process, students demonstrate a deeper interest and understanding of the material. The use of contextual media, such as images, maps, and relevant local stories, allows students to see direct connections between the material being taught and their own lives.

Students who previously struggled to grasp the concept of the Indonesian government system, considering it a distant topic irrelevant to their lives, began to see the importance of government structures in the context of the division of labor at home or in their neighborhoods. For example, they could relate their understanding of the president's role to the head of the family's role in managing the household, or compare members of the legislature to the roles of community leaders in their villages. This demonstrates that contextual media not only makes learning more engaging but also helps students simplify and personalize more complex concepts.

The Impact of Contextual Media on Civic Understanding and Democratic Education

Furthermore, the use of contextual media has been shown to not only enhance students' understanding of the Indonesian population and government system but also positively impact the development of civic awareness and an understanding of democratic values. Media that connects learning to students' local social and cultural lives facilitates their understanding of their role in society. This is particularly important in the context of civics education, as students not only learn about government theory but also begin to relate it to their rights and obligations as citizens.

Through contextual learning, students are also taught to be more critical of social issues around them, such as population issues, social justice, and active participation in government. Thus, this learning is not limited to cognitive aspects but also encompasses affective and social dimensions, strengthening students' character as good citizens. These findings demonstrate the

importance of a more holistic approach to civics education, one that not only teaches knowledge but also develops attitudes and social skills that will benefit students in their lives.

Limited Understanding and Inhibiting Factors

Although the results of this study indicate that contextual media can improve student understanding, several barriers remain that require attention. One of the main barriers identified in this study is the reliance on limited and less varied teaching materials. In some cases, even when contextual media is used, the types of media available in schools are still limited to relatively simple images or text, which are insufficient to explore their full potential. This is due to limited resources, both in terms of teaching materials and technological infrastructure that supports the use of more interactive media.

Furthermore, the diversity of students' social and cultural backgrounds also influences the effectiveness of contextual media. Students from different social and cultural backgrounds may have different understandings of the symbols or concepts being taught, which can lead to gaps in their understanding. Therefore, while contextual media can improve students' overall understanding, it is important to adapt the media to the students' social and cultural contexts for optimal results.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the initial understanding of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) students regarding the concepts of population and the Indonesian government system and to assess the impact of using contextual learning media in improving this understanding. Based on the analysis, it was found that although MI students have basic knowledge regarding both concepts, their understanding is still limited to factual and theoretical knowledge that is less relevant to their daily lives. When contextual learning media is used, students can more easily relate the material taught to their real experiences, which in turn improves their understanding of abstract concepts such as population and the Indonesian government system. In addition, the use of contextual media also helps students understand their roles in society, introducing them to the values of citizenship and democracy, which are highly relevant to the goals of civic education.

The implications of this research's findings are significant both in the theoretical and practical contexts of education. From a theoretical perspective, this research broadens understanding of how contextual media-based learning can optimize students' understanding of topics considered abstract and complex at the elementary level. In practice, these findings demonstrate that contextual learning media, which connects learning materials to students' daily lives, can enhance their engagement and understanding. Therefore, this approach can be an effective alternative in improving the quality of civics instruction in Islamic elementary schools. This research also demonstrates that civics education can be more meaningful to students if taught in a way that connects the material to their local and social contexts, rather than simply abstractly taught theory.

However, this study also has limitations, particularly the limited sample size of a few schools in Kendari City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the limited use of contextual media available in schools also poses a barrier. Therefore, it is important to consider these factors in future research, which may provide a more comprehensive and representative picture.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. First, it is suggested that the use of contextual media be expanded and enriched, by incorporating various types of media, such as videos, interactive maps, or even technology applications relevant to students' lives. This will provide students with the opportunity to experience deeper and more comprehensive learning. Second, further research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to test the effectiveness of contextual media in various regions with different social backgrounds. Third,

educators need to be involved in ongoing training on creative ways to integrate contextual media into learning, so they can be more flexible and innovative in adapting materials to students' needs.

Thus, despite several limitations in this study, the findings provide an important contribution to the development of teaching methodology in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, particularly in improving students' understanding of basic citizenship concepts. This study also opens up opportunities for further research that could expand the scope and effectiveness of learning approaches that are more contextual and relevant to students' real lives.

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