

THE EFFECT OF THE CONTEXTUAL APPROACH METHOD ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study investigates the influence of the contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach on children's social behavior in elementary education. Grounded in the principle that learning is most effective when it is connected to real-life experiences, the CTL method encourages students to relate academic content to their daily lives, fostering deeper engagement and practical application. Conducted at SD Negeri 067243 Medan Selayang, the research employed interviews, observation, and documentation to collect data from fourth-grade classrooms. Findings reveal that contextual approaches significantly enhance students' interest and participation, promoting more meaningful understanding and social interaction. Teachers reported that students showed increased motivation and social engagement when learning materials were connected to their everyday experiences. However, challenges such as varying levels of student understanding and classroom management during group activities were noted. These were mitigated by forming heterogeneous learning groups and providing teacher guidance throughout collaborative activities. The study concludes that while the contextual approach supports the development of positive social behavior in children, its successful implementation requires adaptive teaching strategies and continuous reflection.

Keywords

contextual teaching and learning, social behavior, elementary education

Introduction

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) has emerged as a pedagogical approach that bridges the gap between classroom instruction and the lived realities of students. Rather than treating knowledge as a static body of content to be memorized, CTL situates learning within meaningful contexts drawn from students' daily lives, enabling them to internalize concepts through experience and practical application. It emphasizes active involvement, problem-solving, and real-life relevance, thereby fostering deeper comprehension and retention. Within

this framework, learners are not passive recipients but active constructors of knowledge who make connections between what they learn in school and what they encounter in the world around them. Particularly in the realm of elementary education, such a paradigm shift is essential for nurturing students not only as competent individuals but also as socially aware members of their communities (Husni et al., 2023).

One of the most significant yet underexplored potentials of CTL lies in its ability to influence children's social behavior. While traditional teaching models often focus narrowly on academic achievement, CTL encourages the cultivation of interpersonal skills such as collaboration, empathy, and ethical reasoning. These competencies are foundational to social development, especially during early schooling years when children are forming critical behavioral patterns and social identities. The use of real-life scenarios, collaborative projects, group discussions, and reflective inquiry enables students to engage with social issues and learn from one another (Silki et al., 2021). Through such activities, they develop not only cognitive insight but also the capacity to understand, relate to, and respect others—qualities that are vital for functioning effectively in diverse societies.

Despite its conceptual promise, empirical studies on CTL have predominantly examined its impact on learning motivation, academic performance, and cognitive engagement. There is a noticeable scarcity of research that directly investigates how this method shapes social behavior, particularly in primary school contexts in Indonesia. Most existing literature tends to generalize CTL's benefits without providing nuanced insights into its behavioral implications (Nisa & Muhtar, 2022). Moreover, few studies have explored the practical challenges of implementing CTL in real classroom environments, such as how students' diverse backgrounds influence their interpretation of contextual content, or how teachers manage differing levels of engagement and comprehension. These gaps warrant further exploration to fully understand the mechanisms through which CTL fosters social development (Prayuda et al., 2024).

This study addresses the aforementioned gaps by conducting a qualitative investigation into the influence of CTL on children's social behavior in an Indonesian elementary school. Focusing on SD Negeri 067243 Medan Selayang as the research site, the study employs interviews, observations, and document analysis to capture a rich, contextualized understanding of how CTL is implemented and experienced by both teachers and students. The findings aim to reveal not only the benefits of contextual learning in enhancing students' social interactions but also the pedagogical strategies and classroom dynamics that support its

success. By emphasizing the behavioral dimension of CTL, this research offers a novel contribution to the existing literature and provides practical implications for educators seeking to foster holistic learning environments where academic growth is harmonized with social-emotional development.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the influence of contextual teaching and learning (CTL) on students' social behavior in an elementary school setting. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating complex social phenomena in their natural context, especially when the objective is to gain in-depth understanding rather than to measure variables statistically (Prayuda & Ginting, 2024). Descriptive qualitative methods allow researchers to examine events, behaviors, and experiences from the perspective of participants, emphasizing meaning-making processes and subjective interpretations. In the context of this study, the approach provided an opportunity to capture the authentic experiences of teachers and students in implementing CTL strategies and observing their impact on social behavior.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 067243 Medan Selayang, a public elementary school located in the city of Medan, Indonesia. This site was chosen due to its accessibility and the school's active implementation of contextual learning strategies. The focus of the investigation was on how the CTL approach—emphasizing real-world relevance, active learning, and experiential engagement—was applied in classroom settings and how it influenced the development of students' social competencies, such as cooperation, empathy, participation, and respectful communication (Zulfa et al., 2022).

The data for this research were collected using three primary techniques: observation, interview, and documentation. Classroom observations were carried out to understand how CTL was integrated into the teaching process and how students responded during various activities. Through direct engagement with the learning environment, the researchers were able to document behaviors, interactions, and teaching practices as they occurred naturally. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to gain insights into their perceptions, experiences, and challenges in implementing CTL. These interviews allowed for open-ended responses, enabling participants to elaborate on their strategies, successes, and the obstacles encountered during instruction. Furthermore, documentation—such as lesson plans,

student work samples, and school records—was reviewed to triangulate data and validate findings from the interviews and observations.

The participants in this study included classroom teachers and fourth-grade students who were directly involved in CTL-based instruction. The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring that only those with relevant experiences and exposure to contextual teaching practices were included. Data analysis followed a thematic qualitative approach, involving the organization, classification, and interpretation of data to identify recurring patterns and categories. The analysis process included coding interview transcripts, compiling field notes, and synthesizing findings to draw conclusions about the relationship between contextual instruction and students' social behavior.

To ensure trustworthiness, the research applied triangulation across data sources, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking with participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations. Ethical considerations were also taken into account, including informed consent from participants, confidentiality of data, and respectful representation of participant voices. Through this rigorous methodology, the study sought to produce a comprehensive understanding of how CTL strategies foster meaningful social behavior among elementary students in a real-world school setting.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach has a substantial influence on the development of students' social behavior in elementary education. Through classroom observations and teacher interviews at SD Negeri 067243 Medan Selayang, it became evident that contextualized instruction enabled students to better understand academic content while simultaneously fostering essential social competencies. When learning activities were linked to students' daily experiences—such as using weather phenomena to explain water cycles or employing familiar household items to illustrate phase changes in matter—students not only engaged more actively but also demonstrated increased collaboration, empathy, and respect for peer contributions. These results affirm the foundational premise of CTL: that learning grounded in real-life context enhances student participation and supports behavioral development.

This study's results align with the findings of Meutiawati (2023), who noted that CTL encourages students to engage in direct, meaningful experiences that cultivate both cognitive

understanding and behavioral transformation. Students become agents in their own learning processes, which in turn empowers them to internalize values such as cooperation, responsibility, and tolerance. When students are invited to discuss and reflect on problems rooted in their lived experiences, they not only make academic connections but also practice navigating social situations. Teachers involved in this study confirmed that students were more enthusiastic and participative during CTL-based activities, as the method allowed them to draw on their personal experiences and express themselves confidently in a supportive learning environment.

However, the implementation of CTL was not without challenges. One of the primary issues observed was the variation in students' background knowledge and life experiences, which led to differences in how they interpreted contextual examples and participated in discussions. For instance, while some students easily related to scenarios involving common household practices, others struggled due to differing socioeconomic conditions. This disparity occasionally resulted in imbalanced participation and misunderstanding among peers. Teachers responded to this issue by creating heterogeneous learning groups, which allowed students to share diverse perspectives and learn from each other's experiences. This strategy aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, emphasizing peer scaffolding in social learning contexts.

Another challenge involved managing student behavior during group activities. Although CTL promotes student-centered learning and discussion, some sessions became difficult to control due to heightened student enthusiasm or disagreements during collaboration. Teachers addressed these situations by taking on facilitative roles—guiding discussions, reinforcing ground rules, and helping students reach consensus. This highlights the importance of teacher presence and classroom management in maintaining a productive learning atmosphere during CTL activities. As such, effective implementation of CTL not only requires curriculum design adjustments but also ongoing teacher support in the form of professional development focused on facilitation skills, differentiation strategies, and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Importantly, this study contributes a new dimension to existing CTL literature by foregrounding its influence on social behavior rather than academic outcomes alone. While previous research has predominantly emphasized cognitive achievements, the findings here underscore CTL's potential to support holistic student development—bridging cognitive

growth and socio-emotional learning. This is particularly relevant in contemporary educational discourse, where the cultivation of 21st-century skills—including collaboration, adaptability, and ethical reasoning—is considered crucial. The insights from this study suggest that when teachers intentionally design and facilitate learning activities rooted in students' real-world contexts, they can promote not just subject mastery but also the development of socially responsible learners.

Conclusion

In summary, the contextual teaching and learning approach offers a promising strategy for fostering social behavior in young learners. It encourages students to interact meaningfully with content and with one another, creating opportunities for experiential learning that extend beyond academic success. Nevertheless, successful implementation depends on the ability of educators to navigate the diversity of student experiences and maintain effective classroom dynamics. As such, this study recommends that schools provide sustained support for teachers in CTL pedagogy and create learning environments that embrace contextual diversity as a foundation for social learning.

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