

THE ROLE OF THE THEMATIC APPROACH IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: The thematic approach is a learning strategy that combines various subjects into one particular theme so that the learning process becomes more complete and meaningful. Through this approach, students do not study the material separately, but rather connect various concepts from subjects such as science, social studies, Indonesian, mathematics, and art into one unit. This article discusses the basic concepts, implementation, benefits, and obstacles in using the thematic approach in elementary schools. The results of the study show that this approach is able to improve students' understanding of the material, foster learning motivation, develop creativity, and strengthen social skills. However, there are still several challenges, such as limited learning resources and teachers' abilities in managing thematic learning. With good planning, use of appropriate learning media, and improvement of teacher competency through training, these obstacles can be overcome. Therefore, a thematic approach can be a solution to improve the quality of learning to be more interesting, relevant, and in accordance with students' daily lives.

Keywords: thematic approach, learning quality, elementary school, subject integration

INTRODUCTION

Elementary school is the initial level of formal education which plays an important role in building the foundation of students' knowledge, character and skills. At this stage, students begin to learn various basic concepts that will provide them with the necessary skills to continue their education to the next level. The quality of learning in elementary schools not only affects students' academic results, but also their ability to think critically, solve problems, cooperate, and

interact with the social environment. Therefore, a learning approach is needed that is able to meet students' needs comprehensively.

One approach that can be used to improve the quality of learning in elementary schools is the thematic approach. This approach combines several subjects in one theme, so that students can understand the material as a whole. In this way, students do not learn separately, but can see the relationship between one concept and another, so that learning becomes more meaningful. In addition, the thematic approach also makes it easier for teachers to relate material to students' daily lives, so that learning feels closer, more interesting, and easier to understand.

The thematic approach not only focuses on increasing knowledge, but also helps shape students' character, such as discipline, responsibility, caring for the environment, and being able to work together with friends. This is in accordance with the national education goals which aim to create a generation that is intelligent, creative, and has good attitudes. Thus, the implementation of the thematic approach in elementary schools not only aims to improve learning outcomes, but also to develop students' social and emotional abilities in a balanced manner.

DISCUSSION

A. Concept and Characteristics of the Thematic Approach

1. Definition of the Thematic Approach

The thematic approach is a learning method that combines several subjects under a specific theme, with the goal of enabling students to understand the material holistically and in a real-life context. This approach not only emphasizes mastery of the material, but also on the relationship between subjects, so that students are able to see the connection between what is learned and everyday life.

For example, the theme “Environment” can cover several subjects at once. In science, students study ecosystems, food chains, and the effects of pollution on living things. In social studies, students learn about human behavior towards the environment, such as waste problems, deforestation, and efforts to preserve nature. In Indonesian language lessons,

students can write stories or reports about experiences of protecting the environment or make speeches about cleanliness. Meanwhile, in Art lessons, students can create posters or works that encourage others to protect the environment. Through this integration, learning becomes more meaningful because students not only learn theory, but can also relate it to real conditions around them.

2.Characteristics of thematic learning

Thematic learning has a number of special characteristics that distinguish it from conventional learning, including :

a. Integrative

Material from various subjects is combined into one theme, so students can understand the relationships between concepts. For example, The theme “ healthy and clean “ combines science material about health, social studies about community behavior, Indonesian about writing instructions, and mathematics to calculate nutritional needs.

b. Contextual

The material studied is related to students' daily lives, making it easier to understand. For example, students learn about waste through hands - on activities such as cleaning the school or home environment.

c. Actively involve students

Students not only listen, but also participate through discussions, practical exercises, group work, and experiments. This can increase enthusiasm for learning, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

d. Holistic

Assessment not only looks at knowledge, but also at students' attitudes and skills. For example, in the theme “Clean Environment”, students are assessed based on their ability to make posters, their attitude of caring for the environment, and their understanding of recycling.

e. Flexible

Learning is adaptable, allowing it to be tailored to learners' needs, classroom conditions, and the resources at hand. Teachers can also utilize a range of approaches, including games and technology, to enhance students' comprehension.

3. Differences from Conventional Learning

Conventional learning generally places more emphasis on memorization and test scores as the primary benchmark. Subject matter is delivered separately, such as science, social studies, Indonesian, and art, without any clear connection between subjects. In this learning, the teacher acts as the main source of information or provider of material, while students tend to be passive, only listening to explanations and memorizing the material.

On the other hand, thematic learning places more emphasis on understanding concepts and their application in everyday life. Material from various subjects is combined into one theme, so that students can see the relationship between concepts more clearly. The role of the teacher in thematic learning is no longer as an information center, but as a facilitator and guide who helps students in the learning process. Students are also required to be more active, creative, and able to work together through various activities such as discussions and group projects.

Based on these differences, it can be concluded that thematic learning places more emphasis on active student involvement and the development of comprehensive abilities, while conventional learning still focuses on memorization and mastery of material separately. Through a thematic approach, students are encouraged to discover their own knowledge, collaborate with friends, and connect learning materials with real experiences in everyday life.

B. Implementation of the Thematic Approach in Elementary Schools

1. Thematic Learning Planning

Planning is a crucial initial step for thematic learning to run smoothly and achieve its intended goals. At this stage, teachers develop a theme-based Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) with the following steps:

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a. Determine appropriate themes and subthemes

Teachers choose themes that are relevant to the curriculum and close to students' daily lives. For example, the theme “Environment” can be connected to environmental conditions around the school, so that students can directly observe and practice what they have learned.

b. Linking core competencies from various subjects

Each sub-theme is linked to core competencies from several subjects, such as science, social studies, Indonesian, and art. For example, in the sub-theme of environmental cleanliness, students learn about ecosystems (science), human behavior towards the environment (social studies), writing stories or reports (Indonesian), and creating posters or artwork (art).

c. Develop integrated learning activities

Learning activities are designed to combine several subjects into one activity, so that students can understand the material comprehensively. For example, students might conduct environmental observations (Science), then write down their findings (Indonesian), understand their social impact (Social Studies), and present their findings in the form of a poster or creative work (Art).

d. Determining appropriate learning media and resources

Teachers select supportive learning media, such as images, videos, props, real objects, or digital media. The use of these media aims to make learning more engaging and help students understand the material more easily.

e. Develop comprehensive assessments

Assessments should not only focus on knowledge, but also encompass students' attitudes and skills. For example, teachers can assess group work, artwork, presentations, and observe students' attitudes and skills throughout the learning process.

2. Example of Subject Integration

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The following is an example of implementing a theme that combines several subjects along with activities that can be carried out in class:

a. Environmental Theme

Integrating science, social studies, Indonesian language, and art. Activities: Students observe the number of trees in the school environment, write a story about environmental protection, and create a poster for a cleanliness campaign.

b. Transportation Theme

Integrating science, social studies, Indonesian, and art. Students make a map of the route to school, learn words about transportation, and draw different kinds of transportation.

c. Health Theme

Integrating science, social studies, Indonesian, and physical education. Activities: Students create a healthy meal plan, write health tips, do light exercise, and create posters about healthy living.

By involving artistic elements, students can express their understanding visually and creatively, making learning more interesting and enjoyable.

C. Teacher Strategies in Thematic Learning

a. Acting as a facilitator and guide

Teachers not only deliver material but also guide students to explore, observe, and complete various activities or projects.

b. Using a variety of learning media

Teachers can utilize various media such as real objects, images, videos, artwork, and digital media to help students understand the material.

c. Provide group project-based assignments

Through group activities, students learn to work together, communicate, and develop creativity, for example through creating posters, plays, or other works of art.

d. Adapting methods to student characteristics

Teachers need to adapt learning activities to students' abilities, interests, and learning styles so that everyone can be actively involved.

D. Advantages of the Thematic Approach

a. Improving Conceptual Understanding

The thematic approach helps students understand the subject matter better because it shows how different ideas are related. For example, when studying the theme “Environment,” students learn about ecosystems, human behavior, and how to express what they know through language and art.

b. Boosting Creativity and Learning Motivation

Creative activities like making poster or acting in plays get students to think outside the box and get more excited about learning.

c. Improving social and teamwork skills

Students learn how to work together, share responsibilities, talk to each other, and solve problems emotional, and motor skills.

d. Facilitating Holistic Assessment

Teachers are able to evaluate students' development from multiple aspects, including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, through projects, presentations, and observations.

e. Strengthening Parental Involvement

Parents can participate in assisting their children with assignments or home-based projects, creating stronger connections between school learning and the family environment.

E. Challenges and Solutions in Thematic Learning

1. Challenges

a. Limited instructional time

Time constraints require teachers to carefully manage learning activities so that all materials can be delivered effectively within a single theme.

b. Limited learning media and resources

Not all schools have adequate facilities such as teaching aids, books, or supporting instructional media.

c. Variation in teacher competence

Some teachers are not yet proficient in integrating multiple subjects into a thematic framework, resulting in less optimal implementation.

d. Students' adaptation difficulties

Not all students can immediately adapt to active and collaborative learning, especially those accustomed to passive learning methods.

2. Solutions

a. Careful and flexible planning

Teachers should design detailed lesson plans while remaining adaptable to classroom conditions.

b. Utilizing alternative learning resources

Teachers can make use of available resources such as the surrounding environment, digital media, and simple materials.

c. Improving teacher competence

Training programs, workshops, and peer collaboration can enhance teachers' skills in implementing thematic learning.

d. Providing additional student support

Students facing difficulties can be assisted through peer tutoring, structured group work, or remedial activities.

With these solutions, challenges in thematic learning can be addressed effectively, ensuring that the learning process remains engaging, meaningful, and capable of developing students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills holistically.

F. The Impact of the Thematic Approach on Learning Quality

The implementation of thematic learning in elementary schools significantly influences the quality of the learning process. Its impact is evident not only in improved academic achievement but also in students' social skills, creativity, and active participation.

a. Improvement in Academic Achievement

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One of the primary impacts of the thematic approach is the enhancement of students' conceptual understanding and academic performance. Since the material is delivered in an integrated and contextual manner, it becomes easier for students to comprehend and apply. For example, in the theme "Environment," students simultaneously learn about ecosystems, human behavior, and environmental zation to a deeper understanding. As a result, learning outcomes tend to get better, especially for students who had trouble with subjects like science and social studies.

- b. Increased Student Participation and Engagement Thematic learning promotes active student involvement.

Students are not just passive listeners; they actively participate by asking question, having discussions, and doing both individual and group tasks. Activities like group projects, observations, poster-making, and simple expriments make students more interested in what they are learning. This active paticipation increases motivation because students feel like they are involved and responsible for their learning. Additionally, group activities help students develop communication, collaboration, and leadership skills.

- c. Succesful implementation case studies

Several examples of the implementation of the thematic approch in elementary schools have shown positive results, including:

1. Elementary school 01 jakarta - " Health" Theme

Students learned about healthy eating habits, hygiene, and the importance of exercise. Activities included creating healthy meal plans, engaging in discussions about lifestyle, and participating in light physical exercises. As a result, students not only understood the material but also applied it in daily life, as seen in improved healthy behaviors and academic outcomes.

2.Elementary School 05 Bandung – "Environment" Theme

Students carried out recycling projects and environmental campaign posters. These activities enhanced creativity and deepened understanding of ecosystems and human impact on the environment. Furthermore, students showed improvement in report writing, presentation skills, and teamwork.

These examples demonstrate that thematic learning enhances not only knowledge but also social skills and creativity.

G. Development of Additional Skills

1. Social skills: Students learn how to work together, respect other peoples opinions, and solve problems.
2. Leadership: Students learn how to lead, plan tasks, and make good choices.
3. Time management: Students learn how to use their time wisely when doing tasks and projects.
4. Collaboration: Activities based on projects teach students how to work together and help each other.

So, thematic learning not only helps students do better in school, but it also gets them gets them ready for real-life problems by teaching them important skills like creativity, teamwork, and critical thinking.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the thematic approach is an effective instructional strategy for elementary education. It integrates multiple subjects into a united theme, enabling students to develop a holistic understanding that is closely related to real-life contexts. Consequently, learning shifts from mere memorization to meaningful comprehension and application.

The implementation of this approach offers numerous benefits, including improved academic performance, increased students engagement, and the development of creativity and social skills such as collaboration, communication, and leadership. Additionally, teachers can assess students progress more comprehensively across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Although challenges exist, such as limited time, insufficient learning resources, and variation in teacher and student readiness, these issues can be addressed through effective

planning, the use of diverse learning resources, professional development for teachers, and additional student support.

In conclusion, the thematic approach not only enhances the quality of learning but also helps shape students into active, creative, and well- prepared individuals. Therefore, it is essential to implement this approach to create a more effective, engaging, and meaningful learning experience.

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