

## APPLICATION OF THE PROJECT-BASED LEARNING MODEL IN ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING PLANNING TO DEVELOP 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

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### Abstract

This study aims to describe the application of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in Social Science (IPS) learning planning in elementary schools and its contribution in developing 21st century skills. The research approach used is qualitative descriptive, with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The subjects of the study are classroom teachers and grade V students in one of the public elementary schools who have implemented a project-based curriculum. The results of the study show that PjBL-based social studies learning planning is carried out by compiling integrative and contextual learning objectives, and actively involving students in projects related to real problems in the surrounding environment. The implementation of PjBL encourages the development of students' critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity skills. Although several obstacles were found such as differences in students' abilities and limited facilities, teachers were able to overcome them through adaptive strategies. In conclusion, the PjBL model is effective in increasing student learning engagement and is relevant to shaping the character and skills needed in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** *Project-Based Learning, Social Studies Learning, 21st Century Skills, Primary School, Learning Planning*

### INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in forming a generation that is capable and adaptive to the changing times (Marsini, 2025). The development of technology and globalization has brought new challenges in the world of education, especially in preparing students to be able to compete in the 21st century. The 21st century demands a paradigm shift in education from just the transfer of knowledge to learning that emphasizes the development of critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Therefore, the learning model used must be able to encourage students to develop this potential optimally. One of the approaches that is considered effective in answering this challenge is Project-Based Learning (PjBL) (Kurniawan et al., 2023). This learning model emphasizes real and meaningful project-based learning activities, which are able to integrate a variety of 21st century skills in the learning process (Thomas, 2000). Project-Based Learning provides opportunities for students to work independently or in groups in completing projects related to the real world. This process involves not only the cognitive aspect, but also the affective and psychomotor aspects as a whole.

In the context of basic education, especially in Social Sciences (IPS) subjects, the application of PjBL is very relevant (Marsini, 2023c). Social studies has multidisciplinary characteristics that allow the integration of a wide range of social, cultural, economic, and environmental issues that are real in students' lives (Marsini, 2023b). According to (Majid, 2020), social studies learning in elementary school aims to form citizens who are critical, caring, and responsible for society. Therefore, learning planning that encourages students' active participation in solving social problems is indispensable. However, in reality, social studies learning in elementary school is often still theoretical and teacher-centered (Marsini, 2023a). Students are less given the opportunity to explore knowledge through hands-on experience, so 21st-century proficiency has not been fully developed to its fullest. To answer these problems, social studies learning planning needs to be designed using a model that is able to actively involve

students. The application of PjBL is believed to be an innovative solution in creating a contextual and meaningful learning atmosphere. The Project-Based Learning model is in line with a learning approach that emphasizes student-centered learning, where students are the main subjects in the learning process. This is supported by opinion (Bell, 2010) which states that PjBL is able to improve 21st century skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and time management. In learning planning, teachers have an important role as facilitators and designers of learning activities. Teachers are required to be able to prepare project-based Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) and design activities that are relevant to the needs and environment of students. Project-based learning planning does not only emphasize the end result, but rather the learning process that students experience. Through this process, critical thinking skills, collaboration, and responsibility are strengthened in completing a project gradually. 21st century skills developed through PjBL include four main competencies, namely critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (4C). These four competencies are very important to equip students to face the dynamics of future life.

The implementation of PjBL also encourages cross-disciplinary learning, where students can connect social studies concepts with other subjects, such as Indonesian for project reports, Mathematics for data analysis, and Arts for visual presentation. Research conducted by (Mergendoller et al., 2006) showed that students engaged in PjBL showed significant improvements in higher-level thinking skills compared to students who learned through conventional methods. The implementation of PjBL in elementary schools can also integrate digital technology as a learning aid. The use of this technology is in line with the characteristics of the native digital generation who are familiar with digital devices in daily life (Prensky, 2001). In the context of elementary social studies learning, the project designed can be in the form of a simple social investigation, the creation of a map of the area, the interview of community leaders, or the creation of an environmental campaign video. This activity makes students actively involved in understanding their social environment.

Teachers need to have a strong understanding of project-based learning design, including goal planning, achievement indicators, project activities, and authentic and thorough forms of assessment (Marsini, 2024). Assessments in PjBL focus not only on the final product, but also on processes, such as teamwork, data collection, problem-solving, and presentation of project results. This assessment is formative and summative, in accordance with the principles of 21st century learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to master learning design techniques that not only meet the curriculum, but also cultivate skills that are relevant to future challenges. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the application of the Project-Based Learning model in elementary social studies learning planning has great potential to develop students' 21st century skills. This study aims to describe how the PjBL model can be effectively integrated in contextual and innovative social studies learning planning.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study type. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the planning process and implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in social studies learning in primary schools, as well as how the model contributes to the development of 21st century skills in students. Qualitative research is naturalistic and emphasizes the interpretation of phenomena in their natural context, as stated by (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), that qualitative research allows researchers to understand the meaning contained in social actions, processes, and interactions in depth. The research location was carried out in one of the public elementary schools that has implemented the Merdeka curriculum and showed interest or experience in integrating project-based learning models, especially in social studies subjects. The selection of the location was carried out purposively, taking into consideration that the school has teachers who are active in developing innovative learning tools and supporting a contextual and student-centered learning approach.

The subjects in this study are classroom teachers who teach social studies subjects and class V students as direct actors in project-based learning activities. The selection of subjects is carried out purposively, because the teacher concerned has experience in applying the PjBL model and is willing to cooperate in the research process. In addition, additional informants such as principals and students are also involved to obtain richer data and triangulation of information. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation is used to directly observe the planning and implementation process of learning that implements PjBL, including student involvement in the learning process. In-depth interviews were conducted with classroom teachers to gather information about the learning planning process, project selection, and reflection on the implementation of activities. Meanwhile, documentation is carried out by collecting documents such as lesson plans, student project worksheets, photos of activities, and portfolios of project results as supporting data. Data obtained from various collection techniques will be analyzed using qualitative analysis of the model (Miles &

Huberman, 1994), which consists of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is carried out by selecting relevant data and simplifying information according to the focus of the research. Furthermore, the presentation of data is carried out in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic tables to facilitate understanding. Finally, conclusions are drawn inductively based on patterns, relationships, and meanings found from observations and interviews. The validity of the data in this study was tested through source triangulation techniques and techniques. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information from teachers, students, and principals. Meanwhile, technical triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. The validity of the data is also strengthened by member checking, which is asking for confirmation from the research subject about the results of the interview or findings that have been analyzed. This study does not aim to generalize the results, but rather to understand in depth the process of PjBL-based learning planning in a specific context and how the learning impacts the development of students' 21st century skills. The main focus of this study is to look at students' active involvement in the learning process, critical thinking skills, collaboration in groups, communication skills in project presentations, and creativity in completing tasks that are open and contextual. By using this approach, it is hoped that the research will be able to provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of the effectiveness and challenges in the application of the Project-Based Learning model in social studies learning planning at the elementary school level, as well as provide practical recommendations for teachers in developing teaching tools that are innovative and relevant to the needs of the times.

## RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Social Studies Learning Planning Based on Project-Based Learning

The learning planning carried out by teachers has reflected the basic principles of Project-Based Learning. Teachers prepare Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) by emphasizing project activities based on real problems in the student environment, such as school waste management projects, making social maps of residential areas, and energy-saving campaigns. Based on the documentation of the lesson plan and interviews with teachers, it is known that teachers design learning objectives that include the dimensions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Learning indicators are not only directed at cognitive achievement, but also assess students' active involvement in the project work process. Teachers also arrange project stages according to the PjBL syntax: (1) determine fundamental questions, (2) design project planning, (3) develop schedules, (4) monitor progress, (5) test results, and (6) evaluate learning experiences. The teacher pointed out that the planning process is carried out by adjusting the social context of students and integrating simple technology in the implementation of the project. This shows that teachers play the role of designers and facilitators in fostering meaningful and relevant learning experiences.

The findings show that teachers have designed social studies learning by utilizing a project-based approach oriented towards real and contextual problem solving. This is in line with the statement (Thomas, 2000) that Project-Based Learning is a pedagogical approach that gives students the opportunity to investigate complex problems and produce real products as learning outcomes. Teachers have consciously integrated 21st century skills in the planning stage, as stated by (Trilling & Fadel, 2009), which states that 21st century education must be able to develop critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity skills (4Cs). This can be seen from the existence of learning indicators in the lesson plan which include the purpose of process skills, not just mastery of the material. The use of social contexts such as the surrounding environment, hygiene issues, and community participation also reflects that teachers not only teach factual knowledge, but also foster students' social awareness. This supports the social studies learning objectives according to (Majid, 2020), namely forming citizens who are active and concerned about community life.

### 2. Implementation of Learning and Student Engagement

The results of the observation show that students are very active in participating in each stage of the project. They work in small groups to design and execute mutually agreed projects. Collaboration, discussion, and joint decision-making are integral to ongoing learning. Teachers provide space for students to determine project ideas, conduct simple research, collect data from the surrounding environment, and compile project results in the form of posters, short videos, or oral presentations. Students look motivated because learning activities are contextual and give them the opportunity to voice their opinions and creativity. During the project activities, the teacher monitors the work process of each group and provides periodic feedback. In addition, daily and weekly reflections are carried out that allow students to evaluate their learning process. This activity forms a collaborative learning pattern and emphasizes individual and group responsibility.

**Table 1. Student engagement observation results categorized by 21st century skills (4C)**

21st Century Skills Aspect	Observation Indicators	Engagement Rate
Critical Thinking	Analyze environmental issues	Tall
Communication	Project presentation in front of the class	Quite High
Collaboration	Group work and voting	Very High
Creativity	Campaign poster/video design	Tall

The data above shows that the PjBL model provides ample space to cultivate the essential skills that are urgently needed in today's global era. In the implementation of learning, students show high enthusiasm when involved in group projects. They work together, share roles, discuss, and deliver the results of their work through various forms of creative presentations. These findings reinforce the view (Bell, 2010), which states that PjBL is able to encourage students to learn collaboratively, solve problems, and develop communication skills. The observed aspects of 21st century skills cover the 4Cs comprehensively. Critical thinking is seen when students analyze social issues, such as waste management or the influence of the media. Collaboration is seen in the way students work together in project groups. Communication is manifested in oral presentation sessions in front of the class, and creativity is shown through the visual design of posters or digital media that they produce. These observations show that project-based learning provides ample space for students' self-expression and builds their confidence. This is in line with the principles of constructivist learning, where students build their understanding through direct experience and reflection on their own activities.

### 3. Challenges and Strategies for Teachers in the Implementation of PjBL

Although the implementation of PjBL has a positive impact on student engagement, there are several challenges faced by teachers. The main challenges lie in the differences in students' abilities in groups, limited learning time in the classroom, and lack of adequate technological facilities in some groups. Some students who have a passive learning style show difficulty adapting to a project-based learning approach. Teachers get around this by providing individual mentoring, assigning specific roles in groups, and engaging students in reflective activities to build confidence. Another challenge is in terms of assessment. Since the project does not only assess the final product, teachers must compile an authentic assessment rubric that includes process, cooperation, and creativity. The teacher also stated the need for further training related to project-based assessment and simple digital technology integration so that the implementation of PjBL is maximized. Despite these obstacles, teachers still show enthusiasm for the application of this model because it has been proven to increase students' motivation and thinking skills. Project activities that raise local issues also make students more concerned about their social environment.

Although positive results dominate, teachers face several challenges that need to be observed. Inequality of ability between students in groups, limited support facilities, and time management are the most prominent obstacles. These findings suggest that the implementation of PjBL requires good managerial skills from teachers, especially in regulating classroom dynamics and ensuring that each student is involved fairly. According to (Mergendoller et al., 2006), one of the weaknesses of PjBL lies in the complexity of its implementation, including in terms of assessment and active involvement of all students. Therefore, teachers must prepare a holistic and authentic assessment rubric, as well as provide assistance during the project to ensure that the learning process runs according to the goal. Teachers' strategies in overcoming challenges through group role-sharing, individual guidance, and routine reflection are practices that are in line with the principle of differentiated instruction, where the learning approach is tailored to the needs and potential of each student. This reflects the role of teachers as facilitators in 21st century learning, not just material presenters. The teacher also stated that professional training

support and competency strengthening in the design of project assessments are needed so that the implementation of PjBL is more systematic and directed. This is in accordance with the opinion (Prensky, 2001) which emphasizes the importance of educators mastering media and strategies that are relevant to the way of learning of today's digital generation.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the application of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in the planning and implementation of social studies learning in elementary schools is able to make a positive contribution to the development of students' 21st century skills. Through a systematic and contextual planning process, teachers can design learning activities that not only emphasize cognitive achievement, but also encourage critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (4C) skills. Learning planning by teachers is carried out by designing projects that are relevant to the student environment, such as hygiene, social issues, and local culture. The PjBL model provides ample space for students to learn through hands-on experience, exploration, and teamwork. This has been proven to be effective in increasing students' motivation to learn and active involvement during the learning process. In practice, students show high involvement in all stages of the project, from planning, implementation, to presentation of final results. They engage in group discussions, simple research, and creative drafting of project products. Learning becomes more meaningful because students are able to relate knowledge to the reality of daily life. However, the implementation of PjBL is not free from challenges. Teachers face obstacles in the form of differences in students' abilities, limited time, and uneven learning facilities. However, through strategies such as individual mentoring, division of roles in groups, and regular reflection, teachers are able to manage these challenges adaptively. Thus, it can be concluded that the Project-Based Learning model is an effective learning approach to be applied in elementary social studies learning to develop 21st century skills. The success of the implementation of this model is largely determined by the quality of the learning planning, the skills of the teacher as a facilitator, and the supportive learning environment. This model is relevant to be applied in today's educational context that demands students to be active, critical, and socially responsible learners.

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