

## **A trans-disciplinary approach and inquiry-based learning model of social studies**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study describes the learning of social studies using both a trans-disciplinary approach and an inquiry-based learning model, through the international baccalaureate curriculum implemented by some schools in Bandung, Indonesia. The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive research, which seeks to examine information from various viewpoints to complement the data sourced to impact the development of knowledge in regard to the learning of social studies in primary schools. It has been revealed that the implementation of the trans-disciplinary approach in the teaching of social studies based on the international baccalaureate curriculum has been loosely conducted at the fourth-grade level in the schools studied; however, just in a similar situation, the inquiry-based learning model showed improvements in the teaching of social studies in the same schools. Based on this, it is therefore concluded that both the trans-disciplinary approach and inquiry-based model are good methodologies.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a conscious and deliberate effort to create an atmosphere of learning, and in the learning process, learners actively develop the potential for spiritual and religious empowerment, self-control, personality, character and skills needed in society, nation and state [1]. Developing such a potential can be done by planting good social attitudes.

Educational efforts undertaken in cultivating a good social attitude and preventing or overcoming social problems is one of the vital functions in formal, non-formal or informal education. In this case, the educational efforts undertaken in formal education are principally intended for the purpose of education and human development in general. To achieve this requires cultivation of social skills, which in Indonesia's education system has become one of the dimensions of social sciences education, also called social studies in several other countries.

Social studies in Indonesia are a blend of various disciplines, such as economics, history, geography, sociology, psychology and pedagogy [2]. Social studies is a subject that combines the basic concepts of the various social sciences compiled through educational and psychological feasibility for its significance to students and life [3].

Social studies is one element in education introduced to students from lower levels up to higher levels; however, it does not only provide the ability to think socially, but it also teaches students how they can troubleshoot and solve problems, especially in building their ability to analyse, synthesise and evaluate situations [4]. Troubleshooting here is how students can apply everything learned at school as a basis to solve existing problems in their real daily lives according to their ability and age. Students may soon join the working population for instance, and should be able to understand differences in work types and their benefits on social life and environmental damage, but many still have difficulty distinguishing between types of work in the light of prevailing values in society.

Thus, the approach required in learning social studies in order to achieve the objectives and the purpose of national education is no longer just an approach integration, but an integrated curriculum that directly touches on real life. This is the most appropriate to the nature of social education or social studies as disclosed by Lee [5]. It is mentioned that the content of social studies can be drawn from four sources: the academic disciplines dealing with human behaviour, the lives of children, the lives of those in their immediate community, and the lives of people in other communities, as they are reported to people in the communications media [5].

At elementary school, social studies is an organisation of educational materials that use an integrated approach tailored to the characteristics of the development of primary school students who are still in early stages of abstract thinking. Social studies learning at this level does not show the labels in their respective fields of social sciences, but rather is engaged in some form of interconnected social themes around students. Therefore, social studies at elementary level

basically aims to prepare students as citizens with appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that can be used as an ability to solve personal and social problems, and their ability to make decisions and participate in various forms of community activities in order to become good citizens. This is supported by the opinion of Turner who in other words states that there are numerous goal statements for social studies education [6].

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in Indonesia, has issued statements dealing with the role of social studies, as have many school districts and state departments of education. All of the fifty states require the teaching of certain elements of social studies. The following are typical examples of what is expected of social studies education: knowledge and information goals, attitude and values goals, and skill goals.

The characteristics of learning social studies should continue to be adjusted to the development of society and be able to adapt to developments in the globalised world. This is also in line with the opinion of Sapriya, who argues that *...One of the characteristics of social studies is a dynamic, ever-changing means in accordance with the level of development of society* [7]. From the above explanation, it can be interpreted that social studies is an important learning component at primary school, that should be done with learning patterns that stimulate students' freedom of thought and enable them to apply this knowledge in a way that is responsible.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method, because it provides for in-depth study on numerical data and facts. Qualitative research shows the outline of what must be conducted by researchers from the research statement to final analysis [8].

The approach chosen for the study is not intended to test the hypothesis, but describe data, facts and circumstances or trends, analysis and predictions about what should be done to achieve the desired state in the future. Qualitative research is used to examine the condition of natural objects, where the researcher is a key instrument. Data collection is by triangulation, its analysis is inductive, and results further emphasise significance rather than generalisations [9].

The descriptive method supports the qualitative method. The purpose of this study is to reveal the facts, circumstances, phenomena, variables and circumstances that occurred, while conducting the research and presenting it. According to Whitney descriptive method is fact-finding with the correct interpretation [10]. Descriptive research is vital in studying problems in the community, as well as applicable procedure and specific situations, including relationships, activities, attitudes, views and processes ongoing and the effects of a phenomenon.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The focus and object of this study are the implementation of a trans-disciplinary learning approach and inquiry-based model in teaching social studies based on the international baccalaureate (IB) curriculum at Bandung Independent School (BIS) and Cipto Basic Education School, both in Indonesia. Implementation of the process of learning social studies in Indonesia, especially at BIS is not too different from the current education curriculum system in Indonesia.

Many factors supporting the learning of social studies at BIS include adequate physical facilities accompanied by an adequate curriculum. The factors inhibiting learning social studies in Indonesia, when compared with the existing curriculum in Indonesia, include that the curriculum is too crowded. However, there are several factors supporting the implementation of social studies teaching at BIS: 1) a social studies curriculum is a complete learning experience that is consistent; 2) social studies provide a clear link between the humanistic and social science disciplines and natural sciences; 3) social studies materials can be studied and debated; and 4) the learning strategy is done to help students become independent and cooperative students.

These factors are in line with the proposal of the National Commission of Social Studies, which requires that social studies learning should be carried out by: 1) integrated learning between the disciplines of social sciences, natural sciences and humanities; and 2) applying the inquiry-based learning strategy to develop the ability to think critically, solve problems and make decisions. Based on the above, it can be ascertained that teachers' understanding of the approaches used in teaching social studies, especially on trans-disciplinary inquiry-based models has generally been good.

The international baccalaureate curriculum (IB) has five essential aspects in it that are required in the learning of social studies. These aspects are as follows:

- 1) Knowledge - content that enables students explore taking into account their previous experience and understanding, recognising the significant overall knowledge of all students of all cultures. The six main subject areas being: language, social studies, mathematics, science and technology, art, social and physical education;
- 2) Concept - knowing what one wants students to understand. The idea of a strong relevance in the subject, enabling students to explore and re-explore to develop a coherent and deep understanding. Concepts are expressed as key

questions, to encourage the process of investigating and helping to drive the trans-disciplinary perspective. This concept is research driven and investigative and is the heart of the curriculum model design;

- 3) Skills - what one wants students to be able to do. Capabilities of students are demonstrated and changes are made to meet the challenges of the world, and become a disciplined and trans-disciplinary;
- 4) Attitude - what one wants students to feel, value and demonstrate. Disposition is an expression of fundamental values, beliefs and feelings about learning, the environment and society. The programme should be able to promote and foster a set of attitudes that include tolerance, respect, integrity, independence, enthusiasm, empathy, curiosity, creativity, cooperation, trust, commitment and respect;
- 5) Action - how one wants students to act. A demonstration lesson in a responsible attitude can be conducted. Students are invited to reflect, make informed choices and take actions that will help their friends, school staff and the wider community.

#### Basic Themes in the Framework of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Curriculum

The international baccalaureate (IB) curriculum has six major underlying themes, so the trans-disciplinary approach and models of inquiry in social studies learning can be achieved. The six major themes are as follows:

- 1) Who one is - steeped in ourselves, one's beliefs and values, rights and responsibilities, friends, family and culture;
- 2) Where one is in place and time - to deepen one's location in space and time, one's personal history, global and local history and geography, migration and self-discovery of one's own and others, the contributions of individuals and civilizations;
- 3) How one expresses oneself - steeped in thousands of ways one finds and expresses oneself, his/her thoughts, feelings, culture, and beliefs and values;
- 4) How the world works - exploring the natural and man-made phenomena of nature and the world of science, and technology and their impact on society and the environment;
- 5) How one organises oneself - steeped in humans, which makes the system and society, and their impact on society and the environment;
- 6) Sharing the planet - explores the relationship between living things and how humans and other living creatures sharing of resources and opportunities.

The basic themes in the framework of the IB curriculum are illustrated in Figure 1.

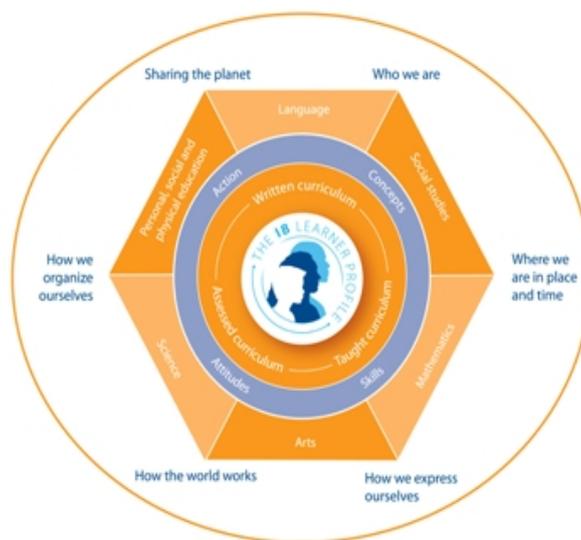


Figure 1: Basic themes in the framework of the IB curriculum.

In the implementation of the trans-disciplinary approach, learning is done for the development potential of learners in improving humanity. Students should be able to develop a personal life that is related to various aspects of life with regard to social life, culture, religion, art, economics, science and technology as a living being. Learning social studies with a trans-disciplinary approach is also the ability to develop the human potential of a learner who is concerned about the environment and society by using their knowledge for the benefit of the environment.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This trans-disciplinary approach of teaching social studies based on the international baccalaureate curriculum implemented in Bandung Independent School and Cipto Basic Education School in fourth grade uses the approach to learning (ATL) to impart self-development abilities in students in form of self-management, self-direction through independence, student-based skills and focus on the teaching process.

The trans-disciplinary approach of teaching social studies is also designed to strengthen inquiry-based conceptual learning, engaging students actively in learning as teachers support students to construct meaning. So, the approach to learning and the approach to teaching are used to reinforce the holistic experience that is not only for the cognitive development of students, but also their social, emotional and physical well-being. More intensive training in the trans-disciplinary approach and models of inquiry should be considered, especially in teaching social studies.

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