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**Effectiveness of Contextual Teaching Strategies in  
Enhancing Civic Attitudes of Islamic Elementary School Students**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates the effectiveness of contextual teaching and learning (CTL) strategies in enhancing civic attitudes among students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic Elementary Schools). The research was motivated by the persistent gap between civic knowledge and actual civic behavior observed in elementary-level learners, which indicates the need for more meaningful and experience-based learning approaches. The objective of this study is to explore how CTL strategies contribute to the development of civic attitudes through real-life contextualization of learning materials. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, the research was conducted at a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Kendari, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive model involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that contextual learning fosters students' active participation, strengthens value internalization, and improves civic behaviors such as tolerance, social responsibility, and democratic engagement. These results imply that CTL is an effective pedagogical strategy for character-building in civic education, particularly within religious-based elementary institutions. The study recommends broader implementation of CTL in civic instruction and further research to evaluate its long-term impact on students' character development.*

**ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas strategi pembelajaran kontekstual (*Contextual Teaching and Learning/CTL*) dalam meningkatkan sikap kewarganegaraan siswa Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Latar belakang penelitian ini adalah masih adanya kesenjangan antara pengetahuan kewarganegaraan dengan perilaku kewarganegaraan siswa pada jenjang sekolah dasar, yang menunjukkan perlunya pendekatan pembelajaran yang lebih bermakna dan berbasis pengalaman nyata. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana strategi CTL dapat berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan sikap kewarganegaraan melalui pengaitan materi pelajaran dengan konteks kehidupan sehari-hari siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, dan dilaksanakan di salah satu Madrasah Ibtidaiyah di Kendari, Indonesia. Teknik pengumpulan data mencakup wawancara mendalam, observasi kelas, dan dokumentasi, yang dianalisis dengan model interaktif melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran kontekstual mendorong partisipasi aktif siswa, memperkuat internalisasi nilai, dan meningkatkan perilaku kewarganegaraan seperti toleransi, tanggung jawab sosial, dan keterlibatan demokratis. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa CTL merupakan strategi pedagogis yang efektif dalam pembentukan karakter, khususnya dalam pendidikan kewarganegaraan di lembaga pendidikan dasar berbasis keagamaan.

## INTRODUCTION

Civic education has a strategic role in shaping the character of students as democratic, responsible citizens who are committed to national values (Zulfikar & Dewi, 2021; Suleman, *et.al.*, 2025). At the elementary education level, especially Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), civic education not only functions as a means of strengthening cognitive knowledge about the state and law, but also as a medium for internalizing the values of Pancasila, tolerance, and diversity in everyday life. In this context, learning Civic Education (PKn) should not only emphasize memorization of concepts, but should be able to develop students' awareness of their role as part of the social community and nation (Aulia, *et.al.*, 2021).

However, in practice, civics learning in MI still tends to take place conventionally and is oriented towards a textual approach, which does not link teaching materials to the realities of students' lives. This approach has the potential to hinder the development of substantive citizenship attitudes, because students are not given space to construct meaning through their own experiences and social contexts. Therefore, a learning strategy is needed that is able to bridge civics material with students' real experiences, one of which is through a contextual approach that is applicable, relevant, and meaningful in their daily lives.

The main problem in learning Citizenship Education (PKn) in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) lies in the incompatibility between the learning approach used and the developmental characteristics of students (Putri, *et.al.*, 2021). Civics material that should be a vehicle for instilling citizenship values and attitudes is often delivered in an abstract, normative, and less contextual manner, so that students have difficulty in understanding and internalizing these values in everyday life. This has an impact on the low emotional and social involvement of students in the learning process, which ultimately affects the low citizenship attitudes shown in their social interactions.

In this context, important questions arise that need to be answered through a scientific approach: to what extent can contextual learning strategies improve students' citizenship attitudes in MI? Is this approach able to make PKn learning more meaningful and applicable? What is the form of implementation of contextual learning strategies in MI classroom settings, and indicators of success? These questions indicate an urgent need to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of contextual learning strategies in fostering citizenship attitudes rooted in students' life experiences and national values.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of contextual learning strategies in improving students' citizenship attitudes in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The main focus of this study is to determine the extent to which the contextual approach is able to integrate students' real experiences into the PKn learning process, thereby encouraging the formation of attitudes that reflect national values, such as responsibility, tolerance, and the spirit of diversity. Through a quasi-experimental approach, this study also examines in a measurable manner the differences in citizenship attitudes between students who take learning with a contextual approach and students who take conventional learning.

In addition to testing the effectiveness of the approach, this study also aims to identify the implementation practices of contextual learning strategies in civics learning in the classroom. The results of the study are expected to not only provide theoretical contributions to the development of context-based civics learning models, but also provide practical implications for teachers, curriculum designers, and policy makers in designing learning strategies that are more relevant and impactful for civic character education at the MI level.

Studies on contextual learning strategies have been widely conducted at various levels of education, especially at the secondary and higher levels, with the main focus on improving students' cognitive learning outcomes. Various studies have shown that this approach is able to improve conceptual understanding by linking material to real situations in students' lives. However, most of these studies tend to ignore the affective dimension, especially in strengthening citizenship attitudes, which are actually fundamental aspects in civics learning. In

addition, the context of research that is predominantly conducted in public schools still leaves a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of this strategy in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah environment, which has its own characteristics in terms of culture, values, and educational orientation (Nasrulloh & Umardiyah, 2020).

Thus, there is an important gap in academic studies that has not been adequately answered, namely the effectiveness of contextual learning strategies in shaping students' citizenship attitudes in religious-based elementary education units such as MI. In fact, strengthening citizenship attitudes from an early age is crucial to building a foundation for sustainable national character. This study is here to fill this gap by offering empirical data that has been tested quantitatively, while expanding the scope of the PKn learning discourse to be more inclusive of the context of basic Islamic education.

This study offers a new contribution in the realm of civic education by emphasizing the affective dimension, namely students' civic attitudes, as the focus of evaluating the effectiveness of contextual learning strategies. Different from most previous studies that emphasize academic achievement or cognitive aspects, this study positions attitudes as the main outcome, which is relevant to the essential goals of civic education. Another novelty of this study lies in its institutional context, namely Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, which until now has been relatively marginalized in global academic literature on learning innovation and civic character education.

The academic justification of this study is rooted in the need to build a pedagogical approach that is not only instructionally effective, but also culturally and contextually relevant. By combining contextual learning strategies and the unique characteristics of MI, this study is expected to be able to produce applicable findings for the development of PKn learning in religious-based elementary education environments. The findings of this study also have the potential to enrich the global perspective on citizenship education by presenting an alternative model of the Islamic education system in Indonesia, while strengthening the position of MI as an institution capable of forming religious, inclusive, and democratic citizens.

## **METHOD**

### ***Types and Approaches of Research***

This research uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study type (Dewi, 2019). This approach was chosen to deeply understand the phenomenon of implementing contextual learning strategies in shaping students' citizenship attitudes in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) environment. Intrinsic case studies are considered relevant because the focus of the research is directed at a comprehensive understanding of learning practices in a specific context, not for generalization, but rather to explore the meaning, dynamics, and complexity of the cases studied.

### ***Research Background***

The research was conducted in one of the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi. This Madrasah was selected purposively based on several criteria, namely: (1) has implemented contextual learning strategies in PKn subjects; (2) has heterogeneous student characteristics in terms of social and cultural backgrounds; and (3) there is support from the school for research activities. This setting is considered representative to explore how contextual learning strategies are applied in an Islamic elementary education environment that is full of religious and nationalistic values.

### ***Research Informants***

The research informants were determined purposively by considering their direct involvement in the practice of PKn learning at MI. The main informants consisted of three PKn teachers who actively teach in grades IV, V, and VI. Supporting informants included the head of the madrasah, two students from each class selected based on participatory criteria, and two parents of students. The selection of informants was carried out with the principle of rich data representation (information-rich cases), in order to enable a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

### **Data collection technique**

Data was collected using three main techniques, namely: (1) participatory observation, carried out directly in the classroom to observe the civics learning process using a contextual approach, including teacher and student interactions, the media used, and student responses to learning activities (Gumelar, *et.al.*, 2023). (2) Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, madrasah principals and parents to explore their views, experiences and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of contextual learning in forming citizenship attitudes (Sandroto, 1999). (3) documentation, used to obtain secondary data such as RPP (Learning Implementation Plan), student work, teacher reflection notes, and relevant school documents. Triangulation techniques are used to strengthen the credibility of the data obtained.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes three main stages (Rahmadhani & Dahlan, 2023), namely (1) data reduction: the process of selecting, simplifying, and transforming field data into a more organized and meaningful form. (2) Data presentation: data is presented in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or thematic diagrams to facilitate drawing conclusions. (3) Drawing and verifying conclusions: interpretation is carried out systematically based on the patterns of findings that emerge, with reference to contextual learning theory and citizenship education theory. Analysis is carried out simultaneously from the beginning of data collection and continues throughout the research process. This process is iterative, allowing researchers to continue to revise understanding and interpretation based on new data that emerges.

### **Data Validity Test**

The validity of the data is maintained through four main criteria according to Lincoln and Guba, namely: (1) Credibility: carried out through triangulation of sources and techniques, member checking (validation of findings to informants), and continuous observation during the research process. (2) Transferability: maintained by providing a detailed description of the context, including the characteristics of the madrasah, the background of the informants, and the learning situation. (3) Dependability: carried out by systematically recording the entire research process, including the methodological decisions taken, to allow for an audit trail by other researchers. (4) Confirmability: guaranteed by maintaining objectivity and transparency in reporting the results, and involving peer debriefing to reduce interpretation bias (Hadi, 2021).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study indicate that the application of contextual learning strategies in Citizenship Education (PKn) subjects at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) has a real positive impact on improving students' citizenship attitudes. This finding was obtained through participatory observation of three classes that implemented a contextual approach, supplemented by in-depth interviews with teachers, students, the head of the madrasah, and parents of students. All data collected showed a consistent pattern that students showed higher enthusiasm, active involvement in discussions, and increased awareness of citizenship values such as social responsibility, tolerance, and respect for differences (Lumbantobing, *et.al.*, 2024).

One strong indication of the effectiveness of the contextual approach is seen from the increasing participation of students in discussion activities that link current issues with values in civics lessons (Utami, 2024). Teachers, for example, relate material on the rights and obligations of citizens to the pandemic situation, as well as the importance of maintaining cleanliness and complying with health protocols as a form of social responsibility. This approach has been proven to strengthen students' understanding, not only cognitively, but also encourages affective reflection that enriches the internalization of values. Students do not just understand the concepts of citizenship, but also place them in the context of their real lives.

Theoretically, these results support Johnson (2002) view that contextual learning is effective in building meaning when students actively relate the subject matter to their real

world. In this context, MI students are not only recipients of information, but also active subjects in building their civic awareness through concrete experiences. Vygotsky's constructivist learning theory is also relevant, where the process of social interaction and mediation of the teacher's role as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) are very important in shaping the development of students' proximal zones in the context of civic values.

From interviews with teachers, it was found that contextual strategies enable students to more easily understand the importance of values such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, and tolerance because they are directly related to their daily lives at school, home, and in the surrounding community. One teacher revealed that when students were invited to discuss examples of tolerant behavior that they encountered in the playground or mosque, they were able to identify and reflect on these values in their own language. This shows that the process of internalizing values through contextual learning takes place naturally and authentically.

Furthermore, from the observation results, it can be seen that students involved in contextual learning show the initiative to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss openly. This is an important indicator in the development of democratic citizenship attitudes. Interactions in the classroom become more dialogic and participatory, in contrast to classes that use traditional learning approaches that tend to be monologic and didactic. In this context, the contextual approach functions not only as a teaching strategy, but also as a habitat for learning values, where students experience and express citizenship values directly.

These results also show changes in the affective dimension of students, as reflected in the results of interviews with parents who stated that their children began to show behavior that was more concerned about their social environment, more responsible, and respectful of differences. This strengthens the argument that contextual learning strategies not only have an effect in the classroom, but also have an impact on students' daily behavior outside of school. In other words, this strategy expands the space for learning citizenship into the realm of real life.

However, the implementation of contextual learning strategies also faces a number of challenges, especially related to limited teacher resources and the readiness of learning devices (Fauzi, *et.al.*, 2023; Assingily, *et.al.*, 2023). Several teachers stated that preparing contextual-based lesson plans requires more time and creativity, and demands a deep understanding of the context of students' lives (Shefira, *et.al.*, 2024). In addition, there are still obstacles in terms of holistic attitude assessment, considering that the affective dimension is often subjective and difficult to measure quantitatively. This finding indicates the need for ongoing training for teachers to improve pedagogical competence in implementing contextual strategies optimally.

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this study enrich the discourse on civic education by emphasizing the importance of the affective dimension in learning. Civic education is often trapped in a normative and textual approach that emphasizes memorization of concepts, but fails to form attitudes that are in accordance with the spirit of nationalism. The contextual approach is a relevant alternative in responding to this challenge, because it is able to bridge abstract values and concrete realities of students. The results of this study also add empirical evidence about the effectiveness of the CTL approach in the context of Islamic educational institutions, which has so far been under-explored in international literature (Azra, 2019; Fauziah, *et.al.*, 2025).

The practical implications of these results are significant. For educators, these results encourage the need for a paradigm shift in civics learning from an orientation towards knowledge transfer to the process of forming values and character. For education policy makers, these findings support the importance of integrating contextual approaches into the curriculum and teacher training, especially in the context of madrasahs. Meanwhile, for education researchers, these results open up space for further study related to the effectiveness of contextual learning strategies on other dimensions of national character, such as social awareness and global responsibility (Permatasari & Junanto, 2023).

Overall, this study provides a significant contribution to efforts to build transformative civic education at the elementary level, especially in madrasahs. The contextual approach has been proven to be able to make civic education learning more meaningful, down-to-earth, and have an impact on strengthening students' civic character. Through concrete experiences, open discussions, and active involvement, MI students not only learn to be good citizens theoretically, but also begin to tread the practices of citizenship in their daily lives.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the application of contextual learning strategies in Citizenship Education (PKn) subjects in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah significantly contributes to improving students' citizenship attitudes. Through a learning process that links teaching materials to students' real-life contexts, this strategy is able to form a more meaningful understanding of values, increase active participation in the learning process, and foster attitudes of social responsibility, tolerance, and awareness of diversity. These findings are supported by data from observations, interviews, and documentation that consistently show positive changes in students' attitudes and behaviors, both inside and outside the classroom.

The implications of these findings cover three main areas. First, theoretically, the results of this study strengthen the relevance of the contextual learning approach as a foundation for the development of more substantial civic character education that is not solely oriented towards cognitive aspects. This strategy has proven to be able to ground civic values through a communicative, reflective, and contextual approach. Second, from a practical perspective, teachers are required to be more creative in designing learning that is responsive to students' social contexts, and facilitating learning based on real experiences. Third, at the policy level, these results encourage the need to strengthen teacher training and develop a curriculum that supports the integration of a contextual approach in civics subjects, especially in elementary madrasah environments.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations can be put forward. First, educators at the elementary level, especially madrasah teachers, are advised to implement contextual learning strategies systematically and sustainably, and combine them with a participatory value learning approach. Second, for educational policy developers, it is suggested to provide support in the form of pedagogical training, module development, and learning evaluation policies that accommodate the affective dimension. Third, for further researchers, it is recommended to conduct further research with a mixed methods or longitudinal approach to strengthen the generalization of findings and assess the sustainability of the impact of this strategy on the development of student character in the long term.

Overall, this study shows that contextual learning strategy is a relevant, effective, and applicable approach in building students' citizenship attitudes in elementary madrasahs. By prioritizing connectivity between subject matter and students' real lives, this approach not only supports the achievement of citizenship education goals, but also strengthens the function of madrasahs as agents of national character formation.

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