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Implementation of Problem-Based Learning with a Connected Approach in Indonesian Language Learning in Grade III Elementary School: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Abstract. Indonesian language learning in elementary schools requires strategies that can enhance student engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. The Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model with a Connected approach allows students to relate the learning material to real-life experiences, promoting active and meaningful learning. This study aims to describe the implementation of the PBL model with a Connected approach in Indonesian language learning for third-grade elementary school students, including the learning process, student participation, and challenges encountered. The research used a descriptive study with a qualitative approach. The subjects were third-grade students at one elementary school, and data were collected through participatory observation, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of learning activities. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the implementation of PBL with a Connected approach followed the stages of problem identification, group discussion, problem solving, and reflection. Students actively participated, were able to connect the material to daily experiences, improved critical thinking skills, and enhanced communication abilities. Challenges included limited time and differences in students' readiness to understand the problems. In conclusion, the PBL model with a Connected approach is effectively implemented in third-grade Indonesian language learning, increasing student engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking, while providing a foundation for teachers to develop contextual and meaningful learning strategies.

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning, Connected Approach, Descriptive Qualitative.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of 21st-century education requires schools to develop students' abilities in critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity collectively known as the 4Cs (Trilling & Fadel, 2012). In Indonesia, the Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes student-centered and integrated learning, allowing students to connect classroom concepts with social, cultural, and environmental contexts (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). However, Indonesian language instruction at the elementary level often remains teacher-centered and focused on rote memorization, limiting students' engagement, comprehension, and ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations (Astuti & Dewi, 2021). Therefore, innovative pedagogical models are needed to create more meaningful and participatory learning experiences.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is widely recognized as an effective model for cultivating inquiry and higher-order thinking skills. It encourages learners to construct knowledge through authentic problems, collaboration, and reflection (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Savery, 2015). Recent studies reaffirm its importance in promoting engagement and critical thinking across

disciplines (Alrahlah, 2016; Hung, 2019; Loya et al., 2022). In language learning, PBL fosters deeper comprehension by engaging students in contextual communication and problem-solving activities (Chootongchai & Songkram, 2018). Similarly, the Connected approach which links learning materials to real-life experiences and across disciplines has been adopted to promote integrated and meaningful learning (Nordin et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2021). Research indicates that connected learning enhances motivation and knowledge retention by helping students recognize meaningful relationships between school subjects and everyday life (Becker & Park, 2019). Despite its success in STEM education, its integration into language learning, particularly at the elementary level, remains limited.

Although many studies have highlighted the effectiveness of PBL in improving student outcomes, most focus on secondary or higher education (Hung, 2019; Rahman et al., 2021). Few have explored how PBL integrated with the Connected approach can be applied in Indonesian language classrooms for young learners. Moreover, little is known about its classroom implementation, student participation, and related pedagogical challenges. This study addresses that gap by applying and analyzing the PBL-Connected model in third-grade Indonesian language learning. It contributes new insights into how these frameworks can be integrated to foster contextual and holistic learning. The study also emphasizes the need to design instructional models that not only enhance academic outcomes but also help students connect knowledge with real-life experiences in culturally relevant contexts.

This research examines how to effectively implement a PBL model integrated with the Connected approach in elementary Indonesian language classes. It focuses on three main aspects: (1) the implementation process how teachers design, facilitate, and adapt PBL stages such as problem identification, group discussion, inquiry, and reflection; (2) student participation and engagement highlighting motivation, interaction, and the ability to relate learning materials to authentic contexts; and (3) challenges faced by teachers and students, including time constraints, varying readiness levels, and the need for differentiated instruction. Examining these aspects reveals how contextual and inquiry-based learning can foster literacy, communication, and critical thinking in young learners. The study also aims to demonstrate how the PBL-Connected framework aligns with the goals of the Kurikulum Merdeka and 21st-century competencies to encourage active, reflective, and student-centered learning.

A qualitative descriptive approach is employed to gain in-depth and contextual insights into classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and learning experiences. This design enables the researcher to observe the natural flow of instruction. Data are collected through

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participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and documentation such as lesson plans, worksheets, and reflective journals. These multiple data sources ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings. The approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how teachers apply and adapt the PBL-Connected model to diverse student needs, and how students collaboratively solve contextual language problems, construct meaning from experiences, and develop communication and critical thinking skills.

The study is expected to describe in detail each stage of implementation from problem identification to reflection within Indonesian language learning. It will also depict students' engagement and highlight challenges teachers encounter in managing time, supporting diverse learners, and maintaining motivation. The findings are anticipated to show that integrating PBL with the Connected approach enhances comprehension, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. Furthermore, the results are expected to provide practical implications for educators in designing contextual, student-centered learning environments that reflect the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka: autonomy, relevance, and active learning. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on innovative pedagogy in elementary education and serve as a reference for teachers seeking effective strategies to improve literacy and higher-order thinking among young learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at providing an in-depth portrayal of the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model with a Connected approach in Indonesian language learning. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to observe and interpret educational phenomena in their natural setting without manipulating the learning environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this design, the study sought to describe teaching and learning processes, student engagement, and the challenges encountered during the implementation.

Research Context and Participants

This study was conducted at an elementary school located in Purwadadi District, Subang Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia, in the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. This study focused on third grade, which consisted of 12 students (6 girls and 6 boys) aged 8-9 years. The teacher who acted as the key informant had 8 years of teaching experience and had participated in professional development training related to student-

centered learning. This class was selected based on the teacher's willingness to implement the PBL model with the Connected approach and the relevance of the topic to Indonesian language competencies.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, considering their direct involvement in the learning process and their potential to provide rich, relevant data. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining permission from the school principal, informed consent from the teacher, and verbal assent from the students and their parents. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process, ensuring that all data were used solely for academic purposes and that participants' identities remained protected. Additionally, participants were informed about their rights to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

The research data were collected using three primary qualitative techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation, which were applied triangulatively to ensure data validity and strengthen the credibility of findings. These methods provided comprehensive insights into the teaching process and students' learning experiences. The combination of these techniques also allowed for cross-verification of information obtained from different sources, ensuring more accurate interpretations. Furthermore, the triangulation process helped identify patterns and themes that emerged consistently across various data sets.

1. Observation

   Observation was conducted to obtain direct data regarding the implementation of Problem-Based Learning with a Connected approach in Indonesian language instruction for third-grade students. The observations were carried out in a structured manner during the core stages of learning problem identification, group work, and presentation of solutions. The observation instrument consisted of a structured checklist including indicators of teacher activities and student engagement. Observations were conducted across four learning sessions to ensure the representativeness of the data.

2. Interviews

   Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences and perspectives of the teacher and several students regarding the implementation of the PBL-Connected approach. The interview guide covered topics such as the learning process, challenges encountered, facilitation strategies for group discussions, and the impact on students'

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understanding. The interview participants consisted of the third-grade classroom teacher and three to five purposively selected students.

3. Documentation

   Documentation was used as supporting data and included lesson plans, student worksheets, student group products, activity photos, and the teacher's instructional notes. These documents were analyzed to reinforce the findings from the observations and interviews. They also provided concrete evidence of students' engagement, creativity, and understanding throughout the learning process in various classroom and group learning activities, highlighting their active participation, collaborative problem-solving skills, and ability to connect knowledge meaningfully across contexts.

Data Triangulation

Data validity was strengthened through technique triangulation by cross-checking the results from observations, interviews, and documentation to obtain a more credible and comprehensive picture of the PBL-Connected implementation.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed through Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, which includes three main stages:

1. Data Reduction - selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data from observation notes, interviews, and documents.
2. Data Display - organizing and presenting data in narrative and tabular form to identify emerging patterns.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification - interpreting the meaning of the data and verifying conclusions through continuous comparison and triangulation across data sources.

Triangulation was applied to enhance the credibility of findings by cross-checking information obtained from multiple instruments. Member checking was also conducted by sharing summaries of findings with the teacher to confirm accuracy and interpretation.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the rigor of qualitative research, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were applied-credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement and triangulation. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context. Dependability and confirmability were achieved by maintaining an audit trail of data and analysis procedures.

Ethically, the research adhered to the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, and respect for participants' rights. All identifiable information was anonymized, and findings were reported with integrity and transparency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model with a Connected approach in third-grade Indonesian language learning produced several key findings. The data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation revealed that the learning process followed four primary stages: problem identification, group discussion, problem solving, and reflection. Throughout these stages, students demonstrated increased engagement, collaboration, and comprehension. They were able to relate the learning materials to their daily experiences, which made the learning process more meaningful and contextual. However, several challenges emerged, particularly regarding students' varying levels of readiness and the limited duration of class sessions.

Implementation Process of PBL with Connected Approach

The implementation model of PBL integrated with the Connected approach in Indonesian language learning follows four main stages: (1) identifying problems linked to students' real-life experiences; (2) discussion and exploration emphasizing collaboration and interdisciplinary connections; (3) developing solutions in the form of products or ideas applicable in everyday contexts; and (4) reflection that helps students reconnect their new understanding with personal and social experiences.

The following conceptual diagram illustrates this process flow concisely.

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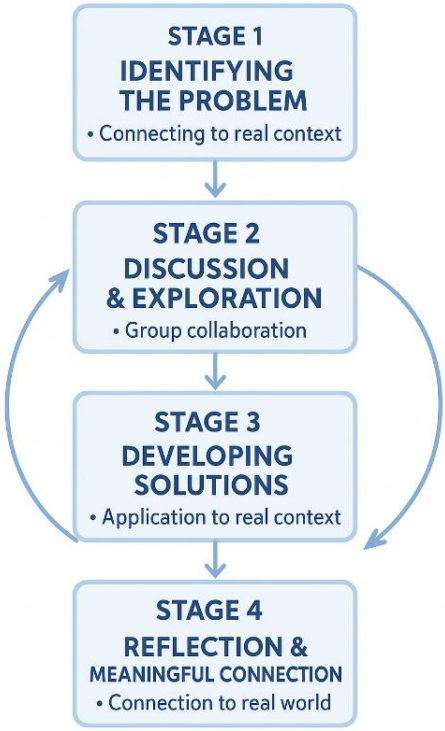
Figure 1

Conceptual Flowchart of PBL Integrated with the Connected Approach.



1. Problem Identification and Engagement

At the beginning of each lesson, the teacher introduced authentic problems related to students' daily experiences, such as local cultural stories, environmental issues, or school events. This strategy successfully captured students' curiosity and encouraged active questioning. The use of familiar contexts helped students build connections between prior knowledge and new content, aligning with the Connected approach principle and fostering deeper engagement in the learning process. By grounding learning in real-life situations, students became more motivated to explore concepts further and apply their understanding in meaningful ways.

Students actively responded to open-ended questions and proposed possible interpretations of the problems. Observation notes showed that 10 out of 13 students participated spontaneously in problem identification activities. This high level of engagement supports previous findings by Loya et al. (2022), who reported that contextual problems in PBL increase student motivation and comprehension.

However, not all students could immediately grasp the problem's complexity. Some required additional scaffolding and explanations, which is consistent with Rahman et al.

(2021), who emphasized that effective facilitation is crucial when applying integrated learning approaches in lower grades.Group Discussion and Collaboration

During group discussions, students collaborated to explore possible solutions using simple language and shared experiences. Each group consisted of 3–4 students who collectively discussed, compared ideas, and used visual aids (e.g., drawings and word maps) to express their thoughts. The teacher functioned as a facilitator, guiding students through inquiry rather than providing direct answers.

Analysis of classroom recordings indicated that student interaction improved progressively over sessions. Initially, only a few students dominated the discussions, but by the third session, all groups were actively participating. The collaborative nature of PBL encouraged peer learning, allowing students with stronger literacy skills to support their peers.

This finding is consistent with Chootongchai and Songkram (2018), who observed that PBL-based discussions enhance students' social and communication skills. Furthermore, it aligns with Nordin et al. (2020), who emphasized that connected learning fosters collective meaning-making through shared problem-solving experiences.

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3. Problem Solving and Application of Knowledge

   In the problem-solving stage, students proposed creative ideas and wrote short texts or narratives related to the identified problems. For instance, in one lesson, students developed a short dialogue about maintaining cleanliness at school, linking language skills with environmental awareness. Such integration reflects the Connected approach's strength in linking curriculum content to students' real-life situations (Becker & Park, 2019).

   Students' ability to apply language structures correctly improved over time. They used more varied vocabulary and demonstrated better coherence in their writing tasks. This improvement illustrates how the PBL framework encourages practical language use within meaningful contexts, resonating with the findings of Hung (2019), who noted that PBL enhances deeper understanding through active engagement with authentic tasks.

4. Reflection and Metacognitive Development

   The reflection stage allowed students to evaluate their learning experiences. The teacher guided them to express what they had learned, the difficulties encountered, and how they overcame those difficulties. Reflection journals and interviews showed that students were able to articulate their thoughts more clearly after each session.

   One student remarked, "I like learning this way because I can talk and think together with my friends. It helps me understand the story better." This indicates not only improved engagement but also the development of metacognitive awareness students began recognizing their own learning processes.

   The importance of reflection in consolidating learning outcomes aligns with Savery (2015) and Hmelo-Silver (2004), who highlight reflection as a crucial phase in PBL for reinforcing understanding and critical thinking. In this study, reflection enabled students to connect their newly acquired knowledge with prior experiences and real-life contexts, deepening their overall comprehension.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the overall success, several challenges were observed. The first challenge was time limitation. Conducting full PBL cycles within standard class periods was difficult, requiring adjustments in lesson pacing. Second, students' readiness levels varied; some required more teacher guidance to understand the problem context. Third, teacher preparation played a

significant role the teacher needed to carefully design real-life problems and appropriate scaffolding strategies.

These findings echo Astuti and Dewi (2021), who reported that transitioning from teacher-centered to student-centered learning in Indonesia often faces constraints related to time, readiness, and instructional design. Addressing these issues requires ongoing teacher training and institutional support.

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that integrating the PBL model with a Connected approach effectively enhances students' engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking in Indonesian language learning. The success of the model lies in its ability to situate learning within familiar contexts, encouraging students to construct meaning through real-world connections and actively participate in the learning process, thereby supporting more meaningful and long-term learning outcomes as well as promoting students' confidence in expressing ideas independently.

From a theoretical perspective, this study confirms the constructivist principle that knowledge is best developed through active participation and contextual application (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pedagogically, it reinforces the Kurikulum Merdeka philosophy, which promotes authentic, meaningful, and student-driven learning experiences.

Comparatively, this research extends prior studies on PBL by providing empirical evidence from early-grade language classrooms an area rarely explored in previous literature. It also supports the notion of interdisciplinary integration proposed by Becker and Park (2019), where connecting language learning with real-life contexts can yield both cognitive and affective gains.

Practically, the study suggests that teachers can implement the PBL-Connected model by:

1. Designing authentic and locally relevant problems.
2. Structuring learning activities into clear inquiry-based stages.
3. Providing scaffolding to support varied student readiness.
4. Allocating sufficient time for reflection and feedback.

This study contributes to the existing body of research on Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in language education by extending its application to the elementary school context in Indonesia, an area that remains underexplored. Previous studies have predominantly focused on

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secondary or higher education, demonstrating PBL's effectiveness in promoting inquiry, collaboration, and deeper comprehension. However, limited empirical evidence has addressed how PBL can be integrated with the Connected approach to support young learners' linguistic development through contextual, experience-based learning. By documenting the implementation of PBL-Connected in Grade III Indonesian language learning, this study offers novel insights into how authentic problem contexts, collaborative exploration, and reflective practices can be meaningfully adapted for younger students. The findings highlight how this integrated model supports early development of critical thinking, communication, and contextual comprehension, thereby expanding the theoretical conversation surrounding PBL-based literacy instruction and demonstrating its feasibility and educational benefits at the primary level. In addition, this study highlights the need for structured pedagogical support and targeted teacher training to ensure that contextual, experience-based strategies can be effectively implemented in language classrooms. These contributions also provide a strategic reference for policymakers and curriculum designers to further institutionalize the PBL-Connected framework within elementary education.

Summary of Results

In summary, the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning model with a Connected approach in third-grade Indonesian language learning:

1. Promoted active participation and collaboration among students.
2. Improved critical thinking and language comprehension.
3. Enabled students to relate academic content to real-life experiences.
4. Faced challenges related to time constraints and varied student readiness.

Overall, the PBL-Connected approach proved to be a promising model for developing literacy and higher-order thinking in early elementary education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model integrated with the Connected approach in third-grade Indonesian language learning. The findings revealed that this model enhanced students' engagement, collaboration, and comprehension by connecting language learning to real-life contexts. Through the structured stages of problem identification, discussion, problem solving, and reflection, students

demonstrated notable improvements in critical thinking, communication, and literacy skills, fostering creativity and meaningful connections during varied activities.

The research highlights that contextual and inquiry-driven learning enables students to actively construct meaning rather than passively receive information. The integration of the Connected approach strengthened the relevance of learning materials by linking them to students' daily experiences, thereby supporting deeper conceptual understanding and fostering positive learning attitudes.

Furthermore, the results confirmed that teacher facilitation and well-planned guidance are essential to sustain active participation, particularly among younger learners with varying readiness levels. Although challenges such as limited time and the need for differentiated support were identified, these did not undermine the overall effectiveness of the model. Instead, they indicate the importance of strategic lesson planning and continuous professional development for teachers.

Overall, this study concludes that the PBL-Connected approach provides a promising pedagogical framework for enhancing literacy, communication, and problem-solving abilities in primary education, aligning with the principles of Kurikulum Merdeka and 21st-century learning, while also fostering more meaningful, contextual, and collaborative learning experiences for young learners, thus supporting their holistic academic and social development in the classroom environment and contributing to improved student engagement and learning outcomes over time.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of this study, several recommendations are proposed for educators, school administrators, and future researchers:

1. For Teachers:
    a. Integrate authentic, locally relevant problems into lessons to strengthen contextual understanding.
    b. Employ scaffolding techniques to guide students with differing readiness levels during inquiry and problem-solving activities.
    c. Allocate sufficient time for the reflection phase, as it plays a crucial role in consolidating students' learning and metacognitive development.

Beyond these recommendations, certain pedagogical supports are necessary to ensure that teachers can effectively implement PBL-Connected in the classroom. In practical terms,

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teachers can begin adopting the PBL-Connected model by designing structured lesson modules that incorporate authentic problems drawn from students' everyday experiences, such as community issues or school events. These modules should be supported by clear scaffolding, including guiding questions, vocabulary banks, and visual organizers to help students navigate inquiry and collaboration. Schools can strengthen implementation by organizing targeted teacher workshops focused on PBL facilitation skills, contextual material selection, and formative assessment strategies aligned with reflective learning. Regular professional learning communities may also be established so teachers can collaboratively refine lesson design, share classroom reflections, and integrate cross-disciplinary themes that reinforce real-world connections. By embedding these supports institutionally, schools can foster a learning environment that normalizes contextual problem-solving and encourages students to actively construct meaning in language learning. These pedagogical supports will ensure that the PBL-Connected approach can be sustained and integrated into everyday instructional practices.

2. For Schools and Policymakers:
    a. Provide continuous professional training on PBL and Connected learning design to enhance teacher competence in student-centered pedagogy.
    b. Encourage curriculum flexibility that allows integration across subjects, enabling more holistic and meaningful learning experiences.
    c. Support the use of digital and interactive learning tools that can further enrich PBL implementation and collaboration among students.
3. For Future Research:
    a. Conduct longitudinal or comparative studies across different grade levels to explore the long-term effects of PBL-Connected learning on students' literacy and critical thinking.
    b. Investigate the role of technological integration (e.g., digital storytelling, gamification, or AI-assisted feedback) in enhancing the Connected learning experience.
    c. Examine how socioeconomic factors or teacher readiness moderate the effectiveness of the PBL-Connected model in diverse classroom settings.

By implementing these recommendations, educators and researchers can further strengthen the application of problem-based and connected pedagogies in primary education. This study supports the growing emphasis on contextual, inquiry-oriented, and student-centered learning as the foundation for effective 21st-century literacy development, ultimately promoting meaningful and relevant learning experiences that empower young learners to think critically

and apply knowledge in real-life contexts. The findings also highlight the importance of reflective teaching practices that adapt to students' diverse needs and local cultural contexts. Furthermore, the study provides practical insights that can guide curriculum designers and policymakers in fostering innovative, equitable, and sustainable learning environments. Overall, the integration of PBL and the Connected approach serves as a strategic framework for cultivating lifelong learning habits, holistic student development, and continuous educational improvement across diverse learning contexts.

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