

Teacher's Understanding of Student Characteristics and its Implementation in Social Sciences Learning at Junior High School 12 Semarang

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ABSTRACT

The independent curriculum is a series designed to support the implementation of learning with a new paradigm that is centered on basic material and the development of students' abilities in accordance with their existing abilities. This research focuses on: (1) The understanding of class VIII social studies teachers in understanding the characteristics of students at SMPN 12 Semarang; (2) In planning learning characteristics of class VIII students at SMPN 12 Semarang; (3) Application of social science teaching which refers to the characteristics of class VIII students at SMPN 12 Semarang.

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, data collection process through observation, structured interviews and documentation. The research results show that: (1). the social studies teacher at junior high school 12 Semarang understands the characteristics of students by using positive reinforcement to increase students' interest and motivation, especially in social studies learning, namely always giving praise and encouraging students to have good behavior; (2) Teachers at junior high school 12 Semarang have implemented a differentiated learning approach by understanding the diversity of student characteristics, such as learning styles and

learning speed. Understanding these individual differences allows teachers to design learning that suits the needs and potential of each student. (3) Teachers can understand students, teachers form groups by adjusting based on interests to collaborate between teachers and students.

Keywords: Characteristics and Social Studies

INTRODUCTION

Education has a very important role for the continuity of human life. By going through education, people will go from not knowing to becoming knowledgeable, intelligent, creative, responsible and productive. Education is indeed a problem for everyone, because everyone from the past until now has always tried to educate their children or handed over the children to teachers at school to be educated. Achieving the goals of education through teaching and learning activities in schools, when these teaching and learning activities take place there is direct interaction between teachers and students who influence each other so that it is hoped that students will experience changes in behavior for the better.

Schools are formal educational institutions that support the education of children because they can expand knowledge and develop children's potential. This is in line

with Law No. 20 of 2003 that every student in every educational unit receives educational services according to their talents, interests and abilities. Schools have programs that have been designed regularly and officially according to national education process standards with the aim of educating and improving children's intellectual development (Sanjaya, 2016). The learning process requires teaching staff who master teacher competency as a requirement in designing learning plans.

In this context, according to Azrina & Agus Prasetyo (2023), students learn by adjusting to their own interests and learning styles. Ki Hadjar Dewantara described a child as a piece of white paper that has already been written on but is still faint. Therefore, the teacher's task is to strengthen the faint writing, and the teacher can only guide the growth or life of the child's innate strengths, so that they can improve their behavior (not their essence) in the life and growth of the child's innate strengths. At the "guiding" stage, students are given freedom, but education as a mentor will provide encouragement so that students do not lose their direction. Students come to school with different experiences, abilities, and learning styles. When the teacher delivers the lesson material, there will be differences that students need to pay attention to. Learning with the new model will certainly be student-centered. In the learning phase, students will certainly have different characteristics or learning styles, especially in understand the material presented by the teacher

Teachers play an important role in creating conducive teaching and learning activities, with the hope of bringing about positive changes in students. In the teaching and learning activities, students have different abilities and characteristics. From these differences, students have varied responses and abilities (Purnomo & Kurniawan, 2024). Therefore, teachers must better understand and comprehend the characteristics of their students in order to create a comfortable and enjoyable learning atmosphere. The stage of learning, according to (Mashari, 2015) in

(Setiani et al., 2024), is inseparable from the educator's understanding of the students, as educators view students in relation to their mindset and the treatment given to them. Learning is a complex process because students in every learning activity do not only receive information from educators, but also relate to the potential to carry out various activities or actions that must be performed. Becoming a teacher means having the competence to teach their students well. Teachers have various competencies that must be mastered, including pedagogical competence, personality competence, social competence, and professional competence. Competence is essentially a description of what someone can do in their work, as well as what the form of that work looks like. Teacher competency is a description of what a teacher needs to do in carrying out his duties, including various activities, attitudes and results that can be seen during the learning process. According to Purnomo et al. (2023), pedagogical competence is an important foundation for history teachers in delivering learning materials effectively. With a strong understanding of teaching methods, evaluation strategies, and individual student needs, teachers can create a learning environment that encourages motivation and facilitates concept comprehension. This competence also enables teachers to address specific challenges in social studies learning (Purnomo et al., 2024).

According to Cutrer, 2018; Emery, 2021; Liu, 2018a; Purarjomandlangrudi, 2020; Zamecnik, (2022) regarding the characteristics of each student that influence their learning styles, methods, and habits. Understanding the characteristics of students will help teachers determine ways for students to grasp concepts, materials, and acquire new skills, which will determine whether the learning process can proceed effectively or not. This will be a measure of how well educators understand the characteristics possessed by their students. Mastering student characteristics is an indicator of pedagogical competence in

teachers. Students have different characteristics in learning that can be seen from their learning styles and how they understand the information conveyed by the teacher. Teachers can understand the differences in characteristics possessed by students, and thus they will educate, teach, guide, and direct, resulting in the formation of optimal activities studies learning. With an understanding of the characteristics of students, it will certainly make it easier for teachers to design lessons that are tailored to the learning styles of the students.

Based on the explanation provided, the author has an interest in conducting research on the understanding of Social Studies teachers regarding the characteristics of students, particularly in their learning interest, because teachers, as educators, have the obligation to create a learning environment that can encourage students' interest in learning. This research focuses on the understanding of Social Studies teachers regarding the characteristics of students at SMPN 12 Kota Semarang, located at Jalan Ace 42 Sronдол Wetan, Sronдол Wetan, Banyumanik District, Semarang City, Central Java Province, particularly eighth-grade students who exhibit various characteristics in learning the Social Studies subject. This is evidenced by the presence of several students who are less actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Thus, when the researcher conducted observations, it was found that in the learning process, there were still some materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Description

A. Behavioristic Learning Theory

Edward Lee Thorndike

Learning is a stage of interaction between stimulus and response. According to Thorndike, a stimulus will capture learning activity events such as thoughts, feelings, and things that can be implemented responded to through the senses. Meanwhile, a response is the action of the student that emerges during the learning activity, which can be in the

form of thoughts, feelings, or actions. Therefore, according to Thorndike, changes in behavior caused by learning activities can take the form of concrete, observable actions, or non-concrete, unobservable actions. Thorndike's learning theory is called the "Connectionism" theory because learning is the stage of forming a relationship between stimulus and response. This theory is called the "Trial and Error" theory because during the experimental phase, Thorndike underwent the trial and error process repeatedly until he formulated his theory. In this theory, Thorndike conducted experiments using animals, especially cats, to understand the phenomenon of learning. In the experimental stage through a trial and error process, Thorndike proposed 3 basic laws, namely:

The law of exercise, this law states that the relationship between stimulus and response will become strong if frequently used and conversely will become weak if not used. From that law, it can be concluded that in the learning stage, practice is essential to strengthen the relationship between stimulus and response. Therefore, the repetition given by the teacher is an implementation of that law.

The law of effect, this law states that activities or actions that yield pleasant results will tend to be repeated, conversely, actions or changes that yield unpleasant results will tend to be repeated. The law can be explained that in the provision of rewards, which is an action that pleases the participants, students will be inclined to repeat the actions that lead to receiving the reward. The imposition of punishment is an activity that is not permitted by the students, so that they do not repeat or stop the actions that cause them to receive punishment. The Law of Readiness, This law explains that the learning stage will be successful if students have readiness in learning, which means they tend to take action. Readiness is a condition where students already know the goals and benefits that will be achieved during the learning process. From that principle, it can be concluded that learning will be more

effective if students are prepared to learn, both in terms of mental maturity and readiness due to the motivation provided by their teacher.

One of the factors underlying the importance of changing traditional classroom learning practices is the psychological factor marked by the existence of a learning theory known as behaviorism. Behavioristic learning theory argues that learning is a dynamic that can be measured and observed. Changes occur through stimuli that create reactive behavioral responses based on mechanistic laws. Stimulus is none other than the child's learning environment, both internal and external, which causes learning. Meanwhile, response is the consequence or impact, in the form of a physical reaction to the stimulus. Learning means strengthening bonds, associations, characteristics, and tendencies of S-R (stimulus-Response) behavior. The Behaviorist Theory emphasizes environmental factors, focuses on component factors, highlights observable behavior using objective methods, is mechanical in nature, and prioritizes the past.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Characteristics of Students

The characteristics possessed by students must be understood by teachers, because by recognizing the characteristics of students, teachers can help guide them in pursuing their desired aspirations. After that, teachers should also be able to understand the characteristics of their students. Understanding the characteristics of students requires a connection of the teacher's heart and mind so that they can truly comprehend the students' characteristics accurately and correctly. The desired goal of understanding the initial characteristics of students is to determine what conditions need to be taught and how to condition students to learn in accordance with their characteristics. The characteristics of learners are one of the factors in the teaching conditions. This factor is described as aspects or qualities of the individual student. The related aspects can include talent, interest, attitude, learning

motivation, learning style, thinking ability, and the initial abilities they already possess. Every human being has different characteristics. The characteristics of learners are the totality of abilities and behaviors present in their personalities as a result of the interaction between their innate traits and social environment, thereby determining their activity patterns in realizing their desires and achieving their goals. Therefore, in striving for the development of students, it must be adjusted to the characteristics of the students themselves. Teachers not only understand the characteristics of students individually.

B. Social Studies

In general, social studies education teaches students to understand that society is a unity (system) whose problems are interconnected and whose solutions require an interdisciplinary approach, which is a more comprehensive approach from the perspectives of legal science, political science, economic science, and other social sciences, such as geography, history, anthropology, sociology, and economics. The form of learning also includes concepts and facts according to social studies that are important to understand and solve in relation to social issues. For example, in geography, the destruction of the environment leads to phenomena of natural damage that are not only geographical but also economically, socially, politically, legally, and otherwise unbalanced or closely related. Here, social studies have a primary goal, which is not to make students experts in social sciences (history, economics, sociology, geography), but to shape attitudes that are expected for the development process both now and in the future, in accordance with national and state development goals (Erianjoni, 2011).

According to Supardi (2011:186-187), the objectives of social studies include: First, disseminating knowledge to shape students into good citizens, aware that they are creations of God, aware of their rights and obligations as citizens, possessing democratic qualities, and being a source of

national pride and responsibility, having an identity, and being a source of national pride. Second, to provide the ability to think critically and inquiry to understand, identify, analyze and have social skills to be able to contribute to solving social problems. Third, practice learning independently, in addition to fostering togetherness, through creative and innovative learning programs. Fourth, it can develop intelligence, habits, and social skills. Fifth, the hope of social studies education is to train students to emulate good and commendable life values such as morality, honesty, and justice, thereby fostering noble behavior. Sixth, instilling awareness and concern for society and the environment. Trianto (2010: 176) explains that the goal of Social Studies is to equip students with the ability to care about social issues in their community, to have a positive mindset towards correcting all existing inequalities, and to be adept at addressing problems that arise in daily life, whether they affect themselves or the community.

The goal of social studies education at the school level is to emphasize the growth of citizenship values, morality, ideology, state, and religion: to focus on the content and methods of social scientists' thinking: and to emphasize reflective inquiry. From the above opinion, it can be concluded that the purpose of social studies education in schools is to shape students' character into good citizens with a sense of responsibility, and to foster critical thinking and inquiry behavior. With social studies education in schools, students are expected to develop the ability to become good citizens who can solve problems in their social environment.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, which means understanding the phenomena experienced by the research subjects descriptively. The data collected in the form of words, personal documents, field notes, official documents, and video-tape transcripts. The qualitative research results obtained by the researcher will be discussed and agreed upon by the data

sources so that data verification will be more accurate. Moeloeng, (2018)

This research discusses teachers' understanding of students' characteristics and their implementation in social studies learning for eighth grade at SMPN 12 Semarang. The data collection process in this study involved directly observing the teacher's activities in IPS lessons in the classroom, understanding the diversity of student characteristics such as socio-cultural backgrounds, learning interests, and differences in students' learning styles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The teacher is an organizer for the growth based on the experiences of the students. In designing learning, teachers should not only consider the cognitive aspects of students but also need to understand their skills and attitudes (Prastiwi et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers must be individuals who have experience and are able to implement their experiences to students in various ways.

Facing the characteristics possessed by students, teachers must always study and practice to avoid falling into attitudes that will later harm students in the future and tarnish the good name and integrity of teachers as educators. The community certainly desires that an educator with good competence will guide students towards goodness. Based on the research results from eighth-grade social studies teachers regarding their understanding of student characteristics, all teachers can identify the characteristics of their respective students, and each teacher has their own methods for understanding student characteristics in the classroom, especially in social studies learning. This is based on the behaviorist theory proposed by Edward Lee Thorndike (1874-1949), which focuses on observable behavior and the relationship between stimulus and response.

The theory above reinforces the opinion of the eighth-grade social studies teacher at SMPN 12 Semarang that understanding student characteristics is the key to creating a supportive and productive learning

environment. As stated by Henson (2015), teachers' knowledge of individual differences in the classroom enables them to design more relevant and adequate learning to meet the needs of each student. Teachers who understand that no two students learn in the same way will be better able to adjust their teaching approaches to encompass the diversity of students' learning styles. In the context of this research, the social studies teachers at SMPN 12 Semarang demonstrate a good understanding of their students' characteristics.

The research results indicate that the IPS teacher for the eighth grade at SMPN 12 Semarang understands and adjusts the learning process based on the characteristics of the eighth-grade students by using positive reinforcement to enhance students' interest and motivation, especially in IPS learning, by always giving praise and encouraging students to exhibit good behavior. For example, when a student successfully expresses a logical opinion during a group discussion, they can be appreciated, which motivates the students during IPS lessons. The teacher also gives punishment to students who behave poorly and disturb their classmates, such as assigning extratasks.

According to Hajar & Nanning (2022), each individual learner has characteristics that differ from others. In these differences, it is a natural aspect of education, especially in the learning process. Differences in student characteristics can be seen from cognitive abilities, psychomotor skills, learning styles, interaction abilities, social, emotional, physical, and mental backgrounds, as well as the types of intelligence possessed by the students. The research results show that at SMPN 12 Semarang, particularly in classes VIII C and VIII G in the subject of Social Studies, there are diverse characteristics. Students in each class have different characteristics in the IPS subject; among them, some have varying levels of focus, a lack of self-confidence, and diverse learning styles. Becoming a teacher requires wisdom in behavior to adjust to the characteristics

and needs of students, as well as their entire personalities and backgrounds.

(Wani et al., 2024) strengthen that to strive for understanding student characteristics and solutions to face challenges in understanding student characteristics, the social studies teacher conducts to eighth-grade students involves various planned and continuous stages using direct observation during the learning process by observing student behavior, how students interact directly with peers, and student participation in learning activities. In this observation, it includes formal aspects such as participation in class discussions, and informal aspects such as students' communication patterns during breaks or outside of class hours.

This is supported by the opinion of the social studies teacher, who conducts communication with the class guardian and the students' parents to obtain additional information regarding the social, cultural, and psychological background of the students. The teacher carries this out to help students in the learning process for the upcoming semester and to understand their learning patterns, as well as the challenges faced by students both in and out of the classroom. Based on the research conducted with the Social Studies teacher of class VIII-G regarding the issues.

The characteristics of students in social studies learning are developed with the help of a teacher. The teacher hopes that the character that emerges from the students can be developed through lesson planning. In addition, in fostering positive character in students, attention must also be paid to the characteristics of the Social Studies subject. In IPS learning, one should have noble, innovative, creative personalities, and the ability to think positively. However, the reality in the field is that teachers face challenges, especially in understanding the characteristics of students when designing IPS learning plans. This becomes a demand for teachers to be able to use methods, models, and media used in social studies learning. Therefore, by using varied learning methods, the active participation of students

in social studies learning will be realized. Sari et al., (2023).

According to (Kasman & Lubis, 2022), non-cognitive diagnostic assessment primarily aims to assist teachers in planning lessons based on students' characteristics to provide a profile of students regarding their backgrounds and abilities in adjusting learning, including interests, talents, learning styles, and daily conditions. The process of lesson planning is one of the most important stages in education. The success of a learning process greatly depends on how a teacher designs learning materials that align with the characteristics and needs of the students. One of the main challenges in lesson planning is adjusting the material to the various speeds and learning styles of the students. At SMPN 12 Semarang, the Social Studies (IPS) teachers strive to develop lesson plans that not only align with the curriculum but also take into account the diverse characteristics of the students. However, even though the teachers have made every effort to adjust the lesson plans, challenges still remain. Students have different learning speeds, which can affect the effectiveness of the implementation of teaching strategies in the classroom. Teachers at SMPN 12 Semarang tend to choose a varied approach and try to make learning more engaging, but there remains a gap between the designed strategies and the responses received from students. In this context, this research aims to delve deeper into how lesson planning at SMPN 12 Semarang is implemented, as well as the challenges faced by teachers in adjusting the material to the students' learning pace.

As part of the effort to improve the quality of learning, teachers at SMPN 12 Semarang have designed a learning plan by considering the diversity of student characteristics. The teacher's understanding of individual differences in learning styles and learning speeds is very important in this process. According to Tomlinson (2001), in a differentiated learning approach, teachers must understand that students have different

needs and potentials, which affect how they learn and assimilate information.

The teacher at SMPN 12 Semarang has been trying to design lessons by adapting the material to various learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. For students with a visual learning style, teachers often use diagrams, concept maps, and image or video-based learning media. Meanwhile, for students with an auditory learning style, oral explanations and group discussions become one of the main methods applied. Meanwhile, for students with a kinesthetic learning style, teachers integrate practical activities and simulations that allow students to engage directly in the learning process. However, even though the planning has taken into account the diversity of these characteristics, a major challenge faced by teachers is the gap in students' learning speeds. Not all students can assimilate information at the same speed, so teachers must be able to adjust the learning pace without leaving behind the slower students in the learning process. Adjusting learning materials to match students' learning speeds requires extra attention from teachers, especially in ensuring that all students can master the material well. (Prayoga & Purnomo, 2023) that the center of the independent curriculum learning is the students, with the teacher's role as a facilitator, and the teacher must recognize the potential and character of each student individually. By adjusting the lesson planning to the characteristics of the students in class VIII C and VIII G at SMPN 12 Semarang The IPS subject teacher can create students' understanding of the material and increase student participation in the learning process as well as enhance students' learning motivation. This is because the teacher creates lesson plans by ensuring an understanding of the characteristics of their students to design learning that meets the needs of the students (Syafrin et al., 2023). Not only by implementing students' learning styles in social studies education but also by considering the diversity of students' thinking levels. (Nuryanti et al., 2018) state

that in understanding the diverse thinking abilities of students, teachers must be able to create learning that trains students' critical thinking skills. Various teaching methods can be implemented, one of which is using the differentiated process learning method. Based on the research results using the differentiated process learning method, teachers can understand students, form groups by adjusting based on interests for collaboration between teachers and students, for example, teachers provide prompting questions before the learning process and conduct group discussion activities. This is supported by the opinion of (Sulistiyosari et al., 2022) that when forming groups according to the cognitive abilities of students who have strengths in certain areas such as critical thinking, speaking, and reading and writing skills, it will create a flexible learning environment.

Edward Lee Thorndike (1874-1949) in (Zulfitri et al., 2020) stated that the interests and talents of students in social studies learning emphasize the importance of interest and talent in the learning process, believing that each student has different abilities, especially talent (innate potential) and interest (emotional drive). In social studies learning, teachers need to adjust to students' interests, especially in selecting engaging materials using varied methods and learning media. The theory above supports the opinion of the IPS teacher for the 8th grade at SMPN 12 Semarang, stating that in teaching, it is important to understand the interests and talents of students. To determine this, the IPS teacher observes directly during the learning process. Seeing directly the interest of students who are active in discussion activities and when students have an interest in learning social studies through visual media. It can be concluded that IPS teachers understand students' interests and talents in learning by adjusting more engaging teaching methods.

CONCLUSION

The understanding of eighth-grade social studies teachers regarding student

characteristics enables them to comprehend the differences in students' learning motivations, as this is an important part of creating effective learning. Teachers who understand the various types of student learning motivations can identify factors that influence the enthusiasm for learning, whether from curiosity and self-confidence or from family and environmental support.

The planning of social studies learning based on the characteristics of eighth-grade students at SMPN 12 Semarang, designed by the teacher, can create lessons that align with the students' needs to capture their attention and motivate them to learn actively. The teacher uses this approach not only to ensure that students achieve optimal learning outcomes but also to help develop students' skills in critical thinking, collaboration, and social responsibility for their future development.

The implementation of social studies learning conducted by the teacher, referring to the characteristics of eighth-grade students at SMPN 12 Semarang, begins with an initial assessment to understand the students' needs, particularly in terms of initial understanding, interest in the material, and learning styles, whether visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. In delivering the IPS material, the teacher combines various teaching methods, starting from group discussions to train cooperation and critical thinking, and the teacher also uses teaching media such as images or videos specifically for students who are attracted to auditory learning.

Declaration by Authors

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