

Thematic Learning Strategy in Elementary Schools

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Abstract. Thematic learning has been applied in elementary schools. The purpose of this study is to describe the strategy in thematic learning. This study uses a qualitative design of phenomenology studies. The research was conducted at SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang. Based on the findings, direct learning strategies were applied in thematic learning in the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang, including: (1) conveying information, (2) delivering stories verbally, (3) provoking responses from students with different questions, and (4) giving an example (modeling). While the indirect learning strategies in thematic learning in the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang include: (1) playing while learning, (2) giving students the opportunity to be creative, (3) using the media, (4) using teaching materials, (5) doing group work, (6) being actively involved in problem solving, and (7) using existing technology in the classroom.

Keywords: *strategy, thematic, elementary school.*

INTRODUCTION

With the enactment of the 2013 Curriculum, students in elementary schools learn through thematic learning. Thematic learning is learning designed based on themes. These themes were developed based on (1) the acquisition of children's language, (2) relationships with peers, (3) children's skills, and (4) self-worth [1].

Thematic learning has different characteristics such as (1) student-centered, (2) direct experience, (3) the separation of subjects is not very clear, (4) presenting concepts from various subjects, (5) flexible, and (6) learning while playing [2]. The PGSD Development Team concludes that the characteristics of thematic learning include (1) holistic, which means that the events become the center of attention and do not classify subjects, (2) meaningful, which means the assessment is based on various aspects which allow the students to do meaningful understanding relating to the theme/topic, (3) authentic, meaning thematic learning allows students to understand the concepts and principles to be learned, and (4) active, meaning thematic learning involves students' activity in the learning process starting from planning, implementation, and evaluation.

From several definitions above, it can be concluded that thematic learning has a uniqueness in three

components, namely: (1) the role of teachers and students, (2) classroom management, and (3) learning strategies. The Ministry of Education and Culture stipulates the 2013 Curriculum to be applied in elementary school (SD/MI) students since the academic year 2013/2014. The implementation of learning strategies in elementary schools/madrasah ibtidaiyah schools is carried out with a thematic-integrated learning approach. Thematic-integrated learning is a learning activity in which the subjects are organized based on themes. One of the primary schools in Malang City that has implemented the 2013 Curriculum with thematic learning is SD "Brawijaya Smart School of Malang," starting from the academic year 2013/2014.

One of the components in thematic learning is learning strategies. Strategy is defined as planning, which contains a series of activities designed to achieve certain goals [3]. Learning strategies are the basis of a direct instruction which consists of six components, namely: (1) learning model, (2) exercise book, (3) method, (4) independent practice, (5) application, and (6) review [4]. The learning strategy is not only an activity procedure, but it is a package of learning programs that will be delivered to students. The components of the learning strategy are (1) preliminary learning activities, (2) delivery of information, (3) students' participation, (4) tests, and (5) follow-up activities. Preliminary learning activities can be carried out by certain techniques to explain specific learning objectives and conduct apperception. Without an interesting preliminary activity, this information is not meaningful. There are several aspects to be considered in conveying information, namely the order of delivery, the scope of the material delivered, and the material to be delivered. Based on the students' centered principle, students are the center of learning. Some things related to the students' participation are training and practice and feedback. The end of learning is usually done by giving a test. Tests are conducted to find out whether the learning objectives have been achieved and whether the knowledge, attitudes, and skills have been possessed by the students. After the test activities are carried out, students receive follow-up from the varied learning outcomes.

Nowadays, Elementary Schools use the 2013 Curriculum, which is characterized by a constructivist and a scientific approach. The constructivist approach

is in the center of William James and John Dewey's philosophy of education. The constructivist approach is the center of the learning approach, which emphasizes the importance of active individuals in building knowledge and understanding with guidance from the teacher. In a constructivist view, teachers are not allowed to pour information into the students' minds. However, children should be encouraged to explore their world, find knowledge, reflect, and think critically with meaningful monitoring and guidance from the teacher [5].

Constructivists argue that children could get bored if they are required to sit for long, become passive learners, and do memorization most of the time. The philosophy of constructivist learning is that the students get meaningful opportunities to build knowledge and understand the material and guide their learning [5]. A distinctive feature of a constructivist is the idea that students actively build knowledge from their personal experiences with others and the environment [6].

The scientific approach in Curriculum 2013 has the following steps: (1) observing, (2) asking questions, (3) gathering information, (4) associating/processing information, (5) communicating, and (6) creating a scientific approach to learning. Galton explains that pedagogy can also be a scientific basis, but teachers need to adopt it when trying to choose one learning method over the others [7]. The scientific approach aims to try to get new knowledge through reading and counting strategies. To achieve goals, the scientific approach embraces an integrated approach, combining with a different method of interactive teaching in the classroom. The perspective that will be adopted is that the most appropriate strategy is to take an approach in various pedagogies. In choosing a particular learning method, we have to work about the tasks the students are going to do.

In thematic learning, students learn in different ways. The students enrich the environment by arousing the entire nervous system, meeting the needs of curiosity, being able to answer questions, collaborating with other students, and earning feedback directly [8]. This emphasizes that thematic learning strategies need to consider the diversity of students. The theory of Multiple Intelligences [9] offers teachers to develop learning strategies which can facilitate all students. Students have different tendencies in the eight types of intelligence so that each particular strategy allows it to be very successful in one group of students, but it is also possible that the strategy is less successful in other groups of students.

Similarly, when utilizing images, students who tend to be spatial could reach out to students who tend to have physical or spatial characteristics. In the learning strategy, there are learning methods. The success of implementing this strategy depends on the method used.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with phenomenological study design. Qualitative research in education, such as research in the social sciences, is subjective based on personal responses [10]. This study describes the phenomenon of thematic learning in the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang.

The presence of the researchers in this study is as observers, which means that the researchers are involved in the thematic learning process in the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang. Researchers, as data collectors, compile research instruments, analyze data, and report research results. This research was conducted in the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang. The sources of the data were taken from the research subjects, namely the principal, curriculum teacher, teachers of Class IIIC and IIID, 27 students in Class IIIC, and 28 students in Class IIID. In this study, data collection techniques were taken from observation, interviews, and audiovisual material.

RESULT

In thematic learning, students not only learn in a classroom but also outside the classroom. Thematic learning allows for varied learning activities. The varied learning is adjusted to the students' characteristics, especially elementary school students, with the average age is 6-12 years old. The development of elementary school students aged 5-7 years old is a concrete operational stage, while students aged 9-12 can use abstract thinking [11].

The first data shows the direct learning strategy in which the teacher conveyed information about someone who had not finished the assignment yet. The students who have not finished their assignments would be guided by the teacher. The students responded to the information. The next data shows that students were given random questions by the teacher: Fandi responded to the first question about the dance from Bali island, Ihsan responded to the second question about language in an official letter, Earth responded to the third question about the parts of a letter, and all students responded to the fourth question about traffic congestion.

Indirect learning strategies indicate that the teacher provided opportunities for learning while playing outside the classroom. The teacher conveyed information that learning was done by playing "flying carpet." Furthermore, the teacher gave a rule for students to ride the carpet with group members and not to step on the ground while singing the Garuda Pancasila song. The next data shows that during thematic learning, students made paper clocks in accordance with their creations. The clocks that students made were in two forms, circles and boxes. The teacher allowed students to choose one form based on their interest. Next, the teacher reminded the students to decorate the clocks. The next data shows that the teacher assigned the students to make cardboard

aquariums. The students responded by bringing materials from home. Students were divided into several groups and worked together with their groups. One group consisted of five students. The next data shows that the teacher invited the students to discuss a video by asking, "what is littering?" After the students answered the questions, then the students got reinforcement from the teacher.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, it can be said that conveying information is a strategy designed to help students obtain an organized form of knowledge. The lecture method can help students obtain information that is not easily acquired through other methods. Lectures can also help students to integrate information from different sources. Based on the findings, the teacher played an active role in learning, which is conveying information.

Conveying stories verbally in thematic learning can provide opportunities for students to express ideas in their way. Conveying stories verbally can increase literacy motivation as well as oral skills [12]. The direct strategy appeared when the teacher read stories to students. The direct learning strategy is used to explain when a teacher transfers information directly to students [11]. Based on the findings, the teacher played an active role in learning, which is conveying the story orally.

Questions can help students to change a wrong answer. When there is a student who failed to answer questions, the teacher switched by asking other students. It was to maintain the students' interest and momentum that had been built. Based on the findings, the teacher played an active role in learning, which is provoking the students' responses with different questions. Thematic learning in the 3rd grades was by giving examples (modeling). The finding is in line with Kauchak's opinion. Teacher's trust in learning is communicated through modeling. By giving examples to students, it indicates that the teacher loves teaching the materials delivered to the students. Based on the findings, the teacher played an active role in learning by giving an example (modeling).

The findings above are in line with Majid's opinion that direct learning strategies are teacher-centered strategies using lecture methods, didactic questions, explicit teaching, practice, and demonstration [2]. Based on the findings, the direct learning strategy in thematic learning in the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang includes: (1) conveying information, (2) delivering stories verbally, (3) provoking responses from students with different questions, and (4) giving examples (modeling).

When the teacher invited the students to study outside the classroom (Selecta), it proves that the teacher provided opportunities to learn while playing. Enriching the thematic learning environment can be done by simulation, curiosity, being able to answer many

questions, supporting resources, reflecting real life, full of printed and non-printed materials, and giving real examples [8]. Based on the findings, the students played an active role in learning while playing strategy.

Students are unique individuals. Thus their learning methods vary. Providing creative freedom is the way teachers develop different learning methods. Interest is a source of motivation that encourages someone to do what they want if they are free to choose. Interest can satisfy the children's needs. The more interests are expressed, the stronger the interest in children [13]. Based on the findings, the students played an active role in learning, especially when the teacher allowed the students to be creative. Technology and media have important roles in learning [14]. Based on the findings, the students played an active role in learning using media.

In the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang, the students did group work with their friends to make products. Group work is a practical response to the needs of teachers to get results in class. Group work provides a good opportunity to develop leadership skills. Group work aims to complete certain projects, and students learn to choose friends who can be invited to work together [8]. Based on the findings, the students played an active role in doing group work.

Based on the findings, the students discussed classically the video being played by asking, "what is littering?" In thematic learning, students are expected to be active in discussions. The use of videos can affect both in terms of cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and interpersonal abilities. In terms of cognitive, students can observe the events in the video. In terms of affective, the occurrence of videos played can affect students' attitudes. In terms of motoric, students can record quickly and can receive feedback from the teacher. The video also affects students' interpersonal abilities. When students observe videos, students can analyze and then practice in their lives [14]. Based on the findings, the students played an active role in learning using technology in the classroom.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that thematic learning can use indirect learning strategies, which are student-centered strategies. This strategy describes the teacher as a facilitator rather than teaching directly. In this strategy, the teacher pays more attention to students by involving, initiating, and interacting socially with students. In the implementation, it allows students to think critically. As mentioned earlier, the characteristics of indirect learning strategies include: (1) the role of teachers as facilitators, supporters, and personal resources, (2) involving students, (3) providing feedback, (4) using good media (printed, non-printed, or human resources) when learning, (5) encouraging students to think critically and creatively. This strategy provides opportunities for students to be actively involved in the learning process. This learning strategy can be used in thematic learning that has the characteristics of active students in learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, indirect learning strategies were applied in thematic learning in the 3rd grades of SD Brawijaya Smart School of Malang, including: (1) playing while learning, (2) giving students opportunities to be creative, (3) using media, (4) using teaching materials, (5) doing group work, (6) engaging actively in problem solving, and (7) using technology in the classroom.

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