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Connected Learning Model: An Innovative Approach to Enhance Literacy in Primary Islamic Education

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Abstract
Low literacy skills at the elementary education level are frequently caused by conventional, teacher-centered instructional models and a lack of connection between learning materials and students' real-life experiences. Within the ecosystem of Islamic primary education (madrasah), fostering literacy carries a profound moral and intellectual mandate, aligning with the prophetic tradition of seeking knowledge through active comprehension (*iqra*). This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the Connected Learning model as an innovative pedagogical approach to improving the literacy skills of fifth-grade students at MI Darul Ulum 02 Ngembalrejo, Kudus. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews with the madrasah principal, teachers, and students, as well as document analysis. Data validity was established via source, methodological, and temporal triangulation, followed by interactive data analysis consisting of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The research findings indicate that the Connected Learning model effectively enhances students' literacy skills by integrating descriptive text materials with contextual environmental observations and core Islamic values of mindfulness and collaborative inquiry (*ta'awun*). This pedagogical success was further propelled by teachers' creativity in optimizing low-cost, non-digital learning media amidst digital resource constraints. The broader significance of this research underscores that the Connected Learning model serves as an adaptable, low-tech, and replicable solution for strengthening literacy in madrasahs, bridging modern thematic pedagogy with Islamic educational philosophy..

Keywords:
Connected Learning Model; Literacy; Elementary Education; Islamic Primary Education; Innovative Learning.

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian language instruction in elementary school plays a crucial role in developing students' ability to understand and convey information. Literacy is not limited to reading and writing but also includes listening and speaking skills. These four skills are interrelated. Students who can understand reading material well will

find it easier to develop ideas in writing and express their opinions orally. From an Islamic pedagogical perspective, literacy acquisition echoes the core spirit of surah Al-Alaq, emphasizing reflective reading and active intellectual engagement rather than passive rote memorization. Therefore, Indonesian language instruction should provide experiences that encourage students to actively use the language, rather than simply memorizing material. (Ali, 2020;Khair, 2018; Al-Attas, 2022)

In practice, students' literacy skills remain a concern. Teaching that is too teacher-centric and activities that rely solely on textbooks or worksheets can limit students' opportunities to discuss, observe, write based on their experiences, and express their opinions. Literacy instruction will be more meaningful if students are given the opportunity to engage with reading materials and environments that are relevant to their lives. (Amalia & Yaqin, 2022 ; Mubin & Aryanto, 2023; Smith et al., 2024)

This situation was also observed in the fifth-grade classroom at MI Darul Ulum 02 Ngembalrejo, Kudus. Based on initial observations in this study, Indonesian language instruction still largely consists of reading texts and completing assignments. Students have not yet had many opportunities to connect the content of the readings to their daily experiences. In the descriptive text unit, for example, students need to observe an object, identify its characteristics, develop information about it, and then express it in writing. Activities like this require a learning approach that provides space for students to learn through direct experience.

In addition, madrasahs have limited access to digital learning resources. This situation requires teachers to choose teaching materials that are simple yet still capable of capturing students' attention and helping them understand the material. Using teaching materials appropriate to the school's circumstances can be an alternative to ensure that learning remains active and contextual. Integrated learning can also help teachers connect different topics so that students gain a more comprehensive understanding. (Ansori, 2020; Dewi et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2023)

One model that can be used is the "Connected" integrated learning model. This model links related concepts, skills, or content so that students can see the connections between ideas. (Fogarty, 1991a) explains that the "Connected" type of integrated learning helps link various concepts in the learning process so that the knowledge students acquire is not isolated. In Indonesian language instruction, this model can be used to link reading, observing, writing, speaking, and listening activities into a single series of interconnected activities.

Previous research shows that the Connected model has been used in several learning contexts. Studies on the Connected model indicate that it can help improve students' motivation, critical thinking skills, communication, and comprehension. Research on the Connected model in Indonesian language learning also indicates that students can become more active when the material is linked to experiences and contexts that are relevant to them. However, research specifically addressing the application of the Connected model to develop literacy in the study of descriptive texts at madrasahs with limited digital resources remains scarce. (Oktari et al., 2023 ; Rahmat, 2017; Hassan & Rahman, 2025)

Given these circumstances, this study focuses on the application of the "Connected" model in teaching Indonesian language descriptive texts to fifth-grade students at MI Darul Ulum 02. The novelty of this research lies in the use of simple media and direct observation activities to develop literacy under conditions of limited digital resources. Activities such as reading newspaper clippings, observing the environment, discussing, writing descriptive texts, decorating their work, and presenting their results were designed as interconnected activities. In this way, students not only receive information but also process and convey that information.

B. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive case study approach utilizing field research methods. A case study design was selected because it enables an in-depth, bounded exploration of the model's implementation within a real-world madrasah setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). This approach was chosen because the study aims to directly describe the process of implementing the "Connected" integrated learning model in real classroom settings. The study does not use statistical calculations to determine the model's impact but rather describes changes in students' literacy skills and activities based on data from observations, interviews, and documentation.

The study was conducted at MI Darul Ulum 02 Ngembalrejo, Kudus, in a fifth-grade Indonesian language class. The research subjects included the fifth-grade Indonesian language teacher and 29 fifth grade students. The principal of the madrasah also served as an informant to provide information about the madrasah's conditions and support for the implementation of instruction. The selection of these subjects was aligned with the study's focus, which examined the application of the Connected model and students literacy development.

Primary data was obtained through direct observation of the learning process and interviews with teachers, the madrasah principal, and several students. Secondary data was obtained from school documents, teaching materials, student work, and activity records. The data collection methods used were observation, interviews, and documentation.

The observations were conducted during Indonesian language classes. The aspects observed included the teacher's activities in opening the lesson, explaining the material, guiding groups, using teaching aids, and directing students in reading and writing activities. The student activities observed included reading, discussing, asking questions, writing, collaborating, listening to explanations, and presenting their work.

Interviews were conducted to supplement the observational data. Teachers were interviewed about the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction, as well as the challenges they encountered. Students were interviewed about their experiences participating in lessons using the Connected model. The madrasah principal was interviewed about the condition of the madrasah and the support provided for instructional activities. Documentation was used as supporting data, including instructional materials, student work samples, and photographs of activities. Direct quotes from these sessions were captured to ground qualitative interpretations.

Data validity was assessed using source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and temporal triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the madrasah principal, teachers, and students. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. Temporal triangulation was conducted by examining the consistency of the data across different collection time points.

Data analysis was conducted following interactive qualitative procedures in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, data were selected based on the research focus. The selected data were then presented in a structured format. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the relationships among observational data, interview data, and documentary evidence.

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of the "Connected" Integrated Learning Model

The Connected model was implemented in Indonesian language instruction over a two-week period, with one session per week. Instruction focused on descriptive texts. The teacher connected the material to the students immediate environment, such as the classroom, the schoolyard, and the facilities at the madrasah, fulfilling Islamic educational principles of contextualizing wisdom (al-hikmah) using tangible creations of God (ayat kauniyah) . (Mubin & Aryanto, 2023). These activities provided students with the opportunity to use real objects as sources of observation and material for developing descriptive texts. The use of objects familiar to the students' experiences aligns with the principles of Indonesian language learning, which place students' experiences and context as an important part of the learning process.

During the planning stage, teachers prepare teaching modules, learning objectives, reading materials, newspaper or magazine clippings, worksheets, as well as activities such as reading, observing, discussing, and writing. The selection of clippings is tailored to topics relevant to students lives. Teachers also design connections between Indonesian language material and science, social studies, and life skills. This demonstrates that interconnections in learning are planned from the outset, rather than arising by chance. This planning aligns with the characteristics of "Connected" integrated learning, which emphasizes relationships between concepts or skills that remain interconnected within a single learning experience. (Rahmat, 2017)

During the implementation phase, the teacher began the lesson with an aperception activity and questions related to the surrounding environment. The teacher then provided examples of information from news clippings on environmental themes. Students were divided into four groups (ta'awun). Each group received old newspapers and worksheets. Students searched for articles, pictures, or news stories related to a clean environment, community cooperation, or recycling. The clippings are pasted and decorated, and then students write descriptive texts based on the information they have gathered. This activity demonstrates the application of learning that connects concrete experiences, information acquired by students, and language activities within a single learning process. Learning that links content to students experiences and environment can provide greater opportunities for active student engagement.(Ansori, 2020)

Group activities are not limited to writing. Students read information, discuss the content of the text, observe objects or pictures, compose written pieces, decorate their scrapbook pages, and then present their work. During the presentation, students read the descriptive text aloud and explain how the content relates to science, social studies, and life skills. The teacher provides feedback and helps students see the connections between the different subjects.

During the evaluation phase, the teacher assesses how well the text follows the descriptive structure, the accuracy of the content compared to the news source, the creativity of the news clipping layout, and the students cooperation. Students are also asked to find other news stories about the environment at home and write a one paragraph description. In this way, the learning activity continues through an assignment that is still related to the material.

This approach aligns with the "Connected" framework, which emphasizes the interconnections between concepts in learning. Students do not learn to read, write, speak, and listen as separate activities. These four skills emerge within a single sequence of activities. This finding is consistent with research on integrated learning, which indicates that the interconnectedness of content can help students gain a more meaningful understanding. (Fogarty, 1991 ; Rusydi & Abdillah, 2018)

2. Development of Students' Literacy

Before the implementation of the Connected model, Indonesian language activities in fifth grade tended to be teacher- and textbook-centered. Students read texts and then answered questions or completed assignments. This situation limited students' opportunities to discuss and express their ideas. Some students also still struggled to understand the content of the readings and to develop their own writing based on their own ideas. This situation highlights the importance of Indonesian language instruction that provides students with opportunities to actively use their language skills through reading, discussion, and writing activities. (Ali, 2020 ; Khair, 2018)

After the Connected model was implemented, changes in student activities became apparent. During reading activities, students not only read texts but also searched for key information and discussed the content with their groups. "Students are no longer waiting for answers to be written on the board; they actively cross-examine news clippings and debate key meanings within their groups." Students became more accustomed to paraphrasing information in their own words. These activities enhanced reading comprehension because students had the opportunity to read and discuss the meaning of the text simultaneously. Reading activities that involve understanding, discussing, and restating information provide students with a more active literacy experience. (Amalia & Yaqin, 2022; Saddhono et al., 2019)

In terms of writing skills, students gain experience writing based on their observations and the information they have read. Students begin to compose descriptive texts in a more organized manner and use their own words. Writing becomes easier because students have material they can observe and discuss. This aligns with the learning of descriptive texts, which requires the ability to observe objects and develop that information into writing. (Utari et al., 2025)

In terms of speaking skills, students had the opportunity to present their group work. This activity helped students become more confident in expressing their opinions and explaining their written work. One student remarked: "At first I was nervous speaking in front of everyone, but because we built the scrapbook together, I felt proud explaining our findings." Meanwhile, listening skills were developed as students listened to the teacher's explanations and presentations by other groups. Thus, the improvement in literacy observed in this study was evident in the interconnected activities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The findings show that the use of simple media does not hinder literacy learning. Newspaper clippings, worksheets, colored paper, and the surrounding environment can be used as learning resources. What is more important is how teachers structure activities so that students read information, process it, and then use it to produce their own work. These findings reinforce previous research showing that integrated learning can increase student engagement and provide a more active learning experience. (Ansori, 2020;Dewi et al., 2022)

However, the developments identified in this study are understood as qualitative developments. The study did not use quantitative pre-tests and post-tests. Therefore, the term "improvement" in this article refers to changes in students' activities, abilities, and engagement as observed through observations, interviews, and documentation. The use of a qualitative approach allows for an understanding of the development of a learning process through descriptive data obtained from various sources and data collection techniques, which are then compared through a process of triangulation. (Sugiyono, 2013 ; Rijali, 2018)

Table 1. Summary of Students' Literacy Development

Aspect	Conditions prior to implementation	Developments following implementation
Reading	Read more to answer the questions.	Be more proactive in seeking information and explaining the content of what you read.
Writing	The writing is still simple and tends to follow examples.	Be better able to write descriptive texts in their own words.
Speaking	Some students still lack self confidence.	Be more confident in presenting your work and opinions.
Listening	Attention isn't always consistent.	Be more focused when listening to explanations and presentations.

Source: Compiled from observations, interviews, and research documentation.

3. Supporting Factors and Hindering Factors

Several factors support the implementation of the Connected model. First, teachers are prepared to develop learning materials and media. Teachers not only prepare the content but also design activities that integrate reading, observing, writing, and discussion. Second, student enthusiasm is quite high because the activities use materials different from those in regular lessons. Third, the use of simple media ensures that activities can still take place even with limited digital resources. Fourth, the class size still allows teachers to provide guidance to small groups.

On the other hand, there are several challenges. Differences in literacy skills mean that students read and write at different paces. Students with stronger skills can complete tasks more quickly, while those who are still struggling require more support. Teachers need to divide their attention so that all students can keep up with the activities. Differences in students characteristics and abilities are a key factor to consider during instruction, so teachers need to adapt their guidance and teaching strategies to meet students needs. (Rusman, 2017)

Time constraints also pose a challenge. Activities such as researching, reading, discussing, writing, creating scrapbooks, and giving presentations require a significant amount of time. If time is not managed properly, the final phase of the learning process may be cut short. In addition, students who are not yet accustomed to learning that involves a lot of group work need guidance at the beginning of the activity.

Limitations in digital resources are also a factor that must be taken into account. However, in this study, these limitations did not hinder learning activities. Teachers chose non-digital media available in their immediate surroundings. This demonstrates that the success of these activities is determined not only by technology but also by teachers ability to adapt their strategies to the school's circumstances.

Overall, these supporting and hindering factors indicate that implementing Connected requires simple yet clear planning. Teachers need to set objectives, select appropriate media, break down activities into stages, and manage time effectively. With such preparation, integrated learning can still be carried out even under conditions of limited facilities. This aligns with the principles of integrated learning, which emphasize planning, the interconnectedness of content, and activity management as essential components in achieving learning objectives. (Fogarty, 1991b ; Rusydi & Abdillah, 2018)

4. Discussion

The research findings indicate that the Connected model can be used to make Indonesian language learning more closely connected to students experiences. This is evident in the sequence of activities, which begins with reading information,

observing, discussing, writing, and presenting the results. These activities align with the research objectives because students not only learn about descriptive texts but also use the language in real world contexts.

The interconnectedness of activities is an important part of learning. When students read news clippings, they gain information. This information is then discussed as a group. The results of the discussion serve as the basis for writing. The written work is then read aloud and explained during a presentation. This sequence makes one activity the foundation for the next. This pattern aligns with the "Connected" approach, which links concepts and skills to make learning more meaningful. (Fogarty, 1991a).

The findings are also consistent with research on the Connected model, which shows that integrated learning can help improve student engagement and skills. (Oktari et al., 2023), For example, discussing the application of "Connected" in enhancing motivation and critical thinking skills. Another study on "Connected" in Indonesian language learning shows that linking the material to students experiences can help students become more active learners. In this study, that connection is specifically focused on developing language literacy through descriptive texts.

The difference between this study and several previous studies lies in the context and the media used. This study was conducted in a madrasah with limited digital facilities and utilized simple media such as newspaper clippings, worksheets, colored paper, and objects from the surrounding environment. Thus, the study illustrates that the implementation of the Connected model does not necessarily require the use of digital technology. Teachers can adapt the model to the school conditions and still achieve learning objectives through contextual activities. A teachers ability to adapt instruction to the available conditions and resources is a crucial aspect of implementing integrated learning. (Ansori, 2020 ; Dewi et al., 2022)

From a language literacy perspective, research findings indicate that reading, writing, speaking, and listening can be developed through a single series of activities. This is important because language skills are fundamentally interconnected. Students read to obtain information, listen when receiving explanations, speak during discussions and presentations, and write when composing texts. Learning that integrates these four skills provides students with more opportunities to use language in real-world contexts. (Saddhono et al., 2019)

Thus, the "Connected" model in this study serves not only as a way to integrate content but also as a way to organize students learning experiences so that they are interconnected. The teachers role remains crucial as a planner and guide. Teachers select appropriate materials, guide students, provide feedback, and help students understand the connection between the activities they perform and the learning objectives.

D. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the "Connected" integrated learning model in Indonesian language instruction for fifth-grade students at MI Darul Ulum 02 Ngembalrejo, Kudus, was carried out through the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The model was applied to descriptive text material by linking Indonesian language activities with science, social studies, and life skills. The main activities included newspaper clippings, worksheets, environmental observation, group discussions, writing descriptive texts, and presentations.

Students literacy development is evident in changes in their reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities. Students have become more active in comprehending information, writing descriptive texts in their own words, presenting their work, and listening to explanations. Because this study employed a

qualitative approach, this development was assessed based on observable changes in the learning process, students work, interviews, and documentation, rather than on statistical calculations.

The implementation of the model was supported by the teachers readiness, the students enthusiasm, the use of simple teaching aids, and classroom conditions that remained manageable. Obstacles encountered included differences in students literacy skills, time constraints, limited resources, and students prior habit of participating primarily in teacher-centered learning. Overall, the Connected model can serve as a simple, contextual alternative for teaching Indonesian that can be adapted to the conditions of madrasahs with limited digital facilities, standing as a viable, highly adaptable, and replicable low-tech pedagogical solution.

Consequently, teachers can use objects or information found in the students surroundings as learning resources to develop language literacy. Future research could expand on this study by including a larger sample size or using a quantitative approach to measure the development of literacy skills more objectively.

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