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Application of Constructivist and Experiential Learning Theory in Social Studies Learning: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives

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Abstract: *Contextual Social Studies (IPS) learning is very important to connect the material with students' daily lives, so that learning becomes more meaningful. The experiential learning approach, which emphasizes direct experience, can increase student involvement in understanding IPS concepts. The four stages of experiential learning are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Constructivist theory supports this approach by emphasizing the active role of students in building knowledge through experience and reflection. The method used in this study is a literature study, with the aim of exploring how experiential and constructivist-based IPS learning can enrich students' understanding and skills. This learning is expected to create more relevant and applicable learning.*

Keywords: Experiential, Social Studies, Constructivist

1. INTRODUCTION

The education system aims to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable students to recognize and achieve their potential to become members of society. Technological developments direct students to have the 21st century competencies needed so that students can face challenges globally. The 21st century competencies needed are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to compete in the world of work, participate appropriately in an increasingly diverse society, use a series of new technologies, and face a rapidly changing workplace [20]. Changes in the world of work accompanied by complexity make school institutions, especially teachers, equip students with 21st century competencies.

The study by Rios, Ling, Pugh, Becker, and Bacall (2020) revealed that 21st-century competencies needed in the world of work include critical thinking, communication, and collaboration competencies [18]. Meanwhile, Gomez (as cited in Obi, Ile, & Chibuzo, 2020) emphasized that the most effective and efficient method for assessing and developing skills and competencies for the 21st century is through direct and experiential learning exercises or Experiential Learning [15]. Experiential learning occurs when someone involved in an activity looks back and evaluates it, determines what is useful or important to remember, and then uses that information to carry out other activities [11]. Experiential learning is essentially an active learning process in which students develop knowledge, transferable skills, and attitudes from direct experiences inside or outside the classroom environment. Experiential learning supports a more participatory and student-centered approach to learning and places great emphasis on direct involvement, rich learning activities, and the construction of meaning by learners [1]. Gentry in Elam and Spotts (2004) highlighted several activities in experiential learning including case discussions, group cases, simulation games, descriptive/analytical field projects, computer-assisted instruction, internships, and live cases [6]. Therefore, experiential learning activities can be observation activities, hands-on activities, assessment activities, among others, which ultimately help students in building knowledge that results in meaningful learning.

Experiential learning can be integrated into existing subjects in schools, for example Social Studies (IPS) learning. Social studies learning must be a strong and effective lesson based on meaningful, integrative, value-based, and challenging student learning. IPS is a combination of various social science disciplines covering a wide and potential range of content. The content involves students in a comprehensive process of dealing with social phenomena and encourages students to reflect on social issues, think critically, and make individual or group decisions based on information from various perspectives. An accommodating IPS curriculum provides complete and comprehensive learning activities and strategies. The learning must involve students with significant, brilliant ideas, and encourage them to relate what they learn to their previous knowledge and current issues, think creatively and critically about what they learn, and apply it to authentic situations. This is reinforced by research on experiential learning in other subjects. First, research by Khairati., et al (2021) entitled "Implementation of STEM-Based Experiential

Learning to Improve Critical Thinking Skills on Ecosystem Materials" explains that there is a significant difference in improving students' critical thinking skills in ecosystem materials with the implementation of STEM-based Experiential Learning. Experiential Learning influences students' learning outcomes which can produce critical thinking skills which are students' competencies after following the learning process for a certain period of time [8]. Second, research by Kistoro., et al (2023) entitled "Probing Experiential Learning Approach In Islamic Religious Education" explains that Experiential Learning can be used to connect their daily life experiences as valuable references for understanding religious education lessons [9]. Experiential Learning will be more effective if it uses stimuli in the form of illustrative cases from students' personal experiences or other sources, along with visual aids such as films, can provide a more real understanding of the subject matter. The urgency of this research is to examine theoretically and practically the application of constructivist and experiential learning theories in social studies learning which can be used as an alternative to develop contextual and meaningful social studies learning.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 *Experiential Learning*

Based on the concept of "learning by doing" by psychologist John Dewey, Kolb and Rogers built their model for experiential learning. Rogers (1961) highlighted the importance of experiential learning, which is about application knowledge, as opposed to cognitive learning, which is academic knowledge such as vocabulary learning. Rogers believed that experiential learning addresses individual needs and desires and is related to student change and growth [19]. Experiential learning is a continuous process in which students will bring individual learning needs and experiences to the learning environment and student community [13]. This learning involves the acquisition of knowledge through the capture and transformation of concrete experiences, which give rise to new abstractions and applications. This learning results in changes at the cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal levels in students [4]. In addition, this learning offers opportunities to practice the knowledge gained in real situations, modeling appropriate behaviors and procedures to be carried out [10].

Kolb explains that experiential learning has six main characteristics [13]:

- Learning is best understood as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
- Learning is a continuous process based on experience.
- Learning requires resolving conflicts between dialectically opposed ways of adapting to the world (learning is inherently full of tension).
- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
- Learning involves transactions between people and the environment.
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge which is the result of transactions between social knowledge and personal knowledge.

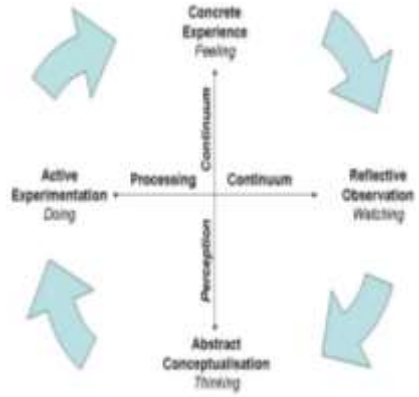
Kolb's learning theory defines four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. In this respect, Kolb's model differs from others in that it offers a way to understand individual learning styles, called the "Learning Styles Inventory" (LSI), as well as an explanation of the experiential learning cycle that applies to all students [12].

Kolb's learning model is based on two continuums that form quadrants:

Source : Kolb (2007)

- Processing Continuum: Our approach to a task, such as whether we prefer to learn by doing or watching.
- Perceptual Continuum: Emotional responses, such as preferring to learn by thinking or feeling.

This Experiential Learning presents a continuous learning model, consisting of four stages as shown below. A learner can enter the process at any stage and follow each one sequentially:



Source : Kolb (2007)

- Concrete experience (Involving yourself in active learning experiences)
- Reflective observation (Observing the results and reflecting on them)
- Abstract conceptualization (Thinking rationally and conceptualizing)
- Active experimentation (Application)

Kolb's four-stage learning model gives us a brief idea of how experiences are interpreted through reflection into concepts, which in turn are used as guidelines for active experimentation and the choice of new experiences. The first stage, concrete experience, is where the learner actively experiences direct learning that can occur in a formal setting or an informal experience. The second stage, reflective observation, involves the student reflecting on the experience attentively. The third stage, abstract conceptualization, is where the student attempts to conceptualize a theory or model from what was observed. The fourth stage, active experimentation, is where the student attempts to evaluate their learning and is able to apply and relate it to real-world situations. The learning cycle can begin at any of these four points and should be approached as an ongoing cycle.

Kolb claimed that concrete experience and abstract conceptualization reflect right-brain and left-brain thinking respectively. Kolb theorized that the four combinations of perception and processing determine one of four learning styles of how people prefer to learn. Kolb believed that learning styles are not fixed personality traits, but relatively stable patterns of behavior that are based on their background and experiences. Thus, learning styles can be thought of more as learning preferences. Here is his explanation [12] :

- **Divergent (Concrete, Reflective)**
    - Emphasizes innovative and imaginative approaches to doing things
    - Viewing concrete situations from multiple perspectives and adapting by observation rather than action
    - Interested in people and tend to be feelings oriented
    - Enjoys activities such as cooperative groups and brainstorming.
- **Assimilation (Abstract, Reflective)**
    - Pulling together a number of different observations and thoughts into an integrated whole. Likes to reason inductively and create models and theories.
    - Like designing projects and experiments
- **Convergent (Abstract, Active)**
    - Emphasizes practical application of ideas and problem solving
    - Enjoy decision making, problem solving, and practical application of ideas.
    - Prefers technical problems to interpersonal problems
- **Accommodative (Concrete, Active)**
    - Using trial and error instead of thinking and reflection
    - Adaptable to changing circumstances; solves problems in an intuitive, trial-and-error manner, such as discovery learning.
    - Also tend to feel comfortable with other people.

2.2 Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is essentially a theory based on scientific observation and study, of how people learn. It states that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experience and reflection on that experience [2]. When we encounter something new, we must reconcile it with our previous ideas and experiences, perhaps changing what we believe, or perhaps discarding the new information as irrelevant. In any case, we are active creators of our own knowledge. To do this, we must ask questions, explore, and assess what we know. In the classroom, a constructivist view of learning can lead to a number of different teaching practices. In the most general sense, this usually means encouraging students to use active techniques (experimentation, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then reflect on it. The teacher makes sure that he or she understands students' pre-existing conceptions, and guides activities to address and then build on them [16]. The central idea of constructivism is that human learning is constructed, that learners build new knowledge on a foundation of previous learning. Three important figures in the formation of constructivism theory are Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey.

Basic Characteristics of Constructivist Learning Environments

The following four basic characteristics of a constructivist learning environment, should be considered when implementing constructivist teaching strategies [22]:

1) Knowledge will be shared between teachers and students.
2) Teachers and students will share authority.
3) The role of the teacher is as a facilitator or guide.
4) Study groups will consist of a small, heterogeneous number of students.

Pedagogical Goals of Constructivist Learning Environments

The seven pedagogical goals of a constructivist learning environment are [7]:

1) Provides experience with the process of knowledge construction (students determine how they will learn).
2) Provides experience and appreciation of multiple perspectives (evaluation of alternative solutions).
3) Embedding learning in realistic contexts (authentic tasks).
4) Encourage ownership and voice in the learning process (student-centered learning).
5) To embed learning in social experiences (collaboration).
6) To encourage the use of multiple modes of representation (video, audio, text, etc.)
7) To encourage awareness of the process of knowledge construction (reflection, metacognition)

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a library research method by utilizing library sources to obtain research data. Research with literature studies is research conducted by collecting data from books, reading, recording, and processing research materials. Literature studies are research conducted based on written works, including research results that have been published or not. The data needed in the study can be obtained from library sources or documents.

4. RESULT

4.1 Implementation of Experiential Learning in Social Studies Learning

Implementation of Experiential Learning can be done through the following steps [21]:

1. Clarifying Teaching Objectives and Assessment Methods

Teachers need to create learning objectives that the class includes the learning steps that will be carried out in the lesson plan. This will help teachers to be more efficient with time. The lesson plan includes opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in the real world. This can be achieved through project-based assessments, students are assigned to research and present a specific history topic. By applying their understanding of social studies learning to meaningful contexts, students can develop higher-order thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the subject.

2. Providing a Balanced Curriculum in the Classroom

Before starting the learning process, teachers can determine the learning method to be used. Teachers can combine several learning methods. For example, teachers can combine experiential learning and computational thinking methods. Experiential learning, such as inquiry-based learning and learning by doing, allows students to explore and investigate on their own, fostering a spirit of inquiry and long-term understanding of knowledge. On the other hand, computational thinking combines experimentation and learning by doing to improve students' problem-solving skills, mastery of logical transformations, and technical language. By combining these pedagogical methods, students can gain a deeper understanding of social studies learning, while improving their problem-solving and logical thinking skills.

3. Changing the Role of Teachers and Teacher-Student Relationships

First, teachers must shift from being the primary source of knowledge to being facilitators of learning. Teachers must encourage students to actively participate in learning through hands-on activities and discussion exercises, rather than simply lecturing or letting students gather information on their own. This allows students to be actively involved in the learning process and gain better understanding.

Second, the relationship between teachers and students must become more collaborative and interactive. Teachers must create a democratic classroom atmosphere that makes students comfortable to express their opinions and respect the opinions of others. In addition, teachers must integrate real problems into social studies learning. For example, in discussing history, teachers and students together conduct field trips to historical sites, invite guest speakers, or use primary sources and artifacts. By bringing history to life and relating it to students' own experiences, teachers can make the subject more interesting and relevant. Experiential learning can be used effectively in the learning process in schools by changing the role of teachers and fostering collaborative and interactive relationships between teachers and students. This approach not only increases students' understanding and engagement with the subject matter but also prepares them to think critically and solve problems in the real world.

Table 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Stages in Social Studies Learning

Kolb's Experiential Learning Stages	Implementation
Concrete experience	Concrete experiences are a stage in the experiential learning cycle that involves engaging in new experiences or interpreting previous experiences in new ways. In social studies, concrete experiences can be used to teach concepts through activities such as projects, puzzles, games, field trips, and hands-on activities.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Stages	Implementation
Reflective observation	Reflective observation is a learning method that involves observing others or reflecting on one's own experiences. Students are invited to analyze and synthesize a social phenomenon in the surrounding environment.
Abstract conceptualization	Abstract conceptualization is a way to create new ideas by reflecting on an experience. In social studies learning, students are directed to formulate problem solutions, discuss, and debate together.
Active experimentation	Active experimentation is a stage in the experiential learning cycle that helps students apply new knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios. Students are facilitated to complete case studies and role plays.

4.2 The Relationship between Experiential Learning and Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is seen as a theory about the nature of knowledge and the human part of learning. Constructivist theory understands the activities of individuals creating or constructing their own new understanding or knowledge through the interaction between what they already know and believe with the ideas, events, and activities they encounter [17]. Knowledge, as seen here, is acquired through engagement with content, not through imitation or repetition [14]. Learning activities in a constructivist environment are characterized by active involvement, inquiry, problem solving, and engagement with others. Thus, the role of the teacher in such an environment is not merely a disseminator of knowledge. The teacher here is a guide, facilitator, and co-explorer who encourages learners to question, challenge, and formulate their own ideas, opinions, and conclusions. Teachers tend to create a learning environment in which students

Implementation of Constructivist Theory can be realized by implementing Experiential Learning. Experiential learning is direct interaction and involvement with the phenomenon being studied rather than simply considering the possibility of doing something about it. Kolb describes learning as a four-step process. He identified the steps as follows: 1) watching; 2) thinking; 3) feeling; 4) doing, thus he draws his ideas and conclusions mainly based on the work of Dewey and Jean Piaget who emphasize the need for learning based on experience formulated in Constructivist Theory [5].

Kolb explains that learners have direct concrete experiences that allow us to reflect on new experiences from multiple perspectives. From this reflective observation, students are involved in creating abstract concepts, creating generalizations or principles that culminate in our observations into strong theories. These generalizations or theories act as guides for further action. Direct active experimentation allows us to test what we learn in new and more complex situations.

Kolb stated that new knowledge and skills are acquired through the relationship between concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and subsequent active experimentation. First, students go through some type of concrete experience. This stage can be a simulated experience developed specifically for the learning situation, such as a case study or role play, or an exercise that involves students experimenting with the skill to be learned or a previous experience. Second, students spend time engaged in reflective observation. Students ask questions about the experience: What did I observe? What did I notice? What did this experience mean to me? How might this experience be different? Third, students use the insights gained through reflective observation to make abstract conceptualizations. This is where students ask: What principles seem to apply here? What general ‘rules of thumb’ have I learned here? What new insights does this experience reveal about myself, or others, or how things work in a particular situation? Finally, students apply the new learning through active experimentation. Learners ask, What will I do next time? How will I adapt this principle to other contexts? New understandings are tested in similar situations, then in different situations, and the learner continually revises and reshapes the learning based on what happens through other experiments. The learner may not actually test the new skill, but may simply think about its application.

The Experiential Learning implementation model combined with Constructivist Theory was also put forward by Caffarella and Barnett (1994). This model refers to four basic elements that are considered by every educator, namely understanding the differences and needs of students, applying the concept of reflection to concrete experiences, using experiential methods and techniques, and assessing learning in a way that values experience. Here is the explanation [3]:

1. Characteristics and Needs of Learners
   Teachers need to pay attention to the learner's prior knowledge and experience, process, and background of each student.
2. Conceptual Foundations of Experiential Learning
   The conceptual foundation consists of a constructivist understanding of learning, particularly Kolb's theory of concrete experience with reflection on that experience.
3. Methods and Techniques for Engaging Students in Experiential Learning Activities
   Teachers design classroom activities, design field experiences, and create situations in which students' past experiences are discussed and processed.

4. Assessment Process and Results
   Teachers provide portfolios and other self-assessment practices that value individual experiences and the personal knowledge built from them.

5. CONCLUSION

Experiential learning is a very effective approach in improving students' learning process. This learning emphasizes direct experience that allows students to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be applied in real life. In the context of Social Studies (IPS) subjects, experiential learning can be applied by integrating elements such as investigation, problem solving, and collaboration in teaching and learning activities. This approach is in line with the principle of constructivism, where students are actively involved in the learning process, not only as recipients of information, but also as explorers and shapers of their own knowledge.

According to Kolb, experiential learning allows students to gain concrete experiences that form the basis for reflection and development of theories or principles. This reflection then produces generalizations or theories that can be tested in more complex situations, which in turn enriches students' understanding and ability to act more appropriately in the future. Thus, the role of teachers in experiential learning is not only as a transmitter of information, but as a facilitator who helps students develop critical and independent thinking skills through direct experience. Experiential learning that is value-based and challenging can make social studies learning more meaningful and applicable for students.

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