THE INFLUENCE OF DEEP LEARNING ON STUDENTS' CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of deep learning–oriented instruction on students' critical and historical thinking skills in history education. Deep learning emphasizes meaningful understanding, active inquiry, reflection, and the integration of knowledge, moving beyond surface-level memorization. This study is grounded in Indonesian educational literature and employs a mixed-methods approach involving quasi-experimental design, classroom observation, and interviews. The findings indicate that deep learning significantly improves students' critical thinking abilities, including analysis, evaluation, and synthesis, as well as historical thinking skills such as understanding historical context, interpreting sources, and constructing reasoned historical explanations. The study concludes that deep learning provides an effective pedagogical framework for history education in Indonesia, particularly in fostering higher-order thinking skills aligned with contemporary curriculum demands.

KEYWORDS:
Deep Learning, History Education, Critical Thinking, Historical Thinking

INTRODUCTION

History education in Indonesia plays a strategic role in shaping students' intellectual, cultural, and civic development. History is not merely a collection of past events but a field of knowledge that trains learners to understand change, continuity, causality, and the complexity of human experience. Indonesian scholars emphasize that history learning should cultivate critical awareness and historical consciousness so that students are able to interpret the past wisely and relate it to present and future challenges (Hasan, 2012).

However, history instruction in many Indonesian schools still tends to focus on factual memorization and teacher-centered pedagogy. Such approaches often encourage surface learning, where students prioritize remembering dates, figures, and events for

examinations rather than understanding historical meaning. According to Aman (2011), this condition limits students' opportunities to develop critical thinking and reduces history to a passive learning experience.

In response to these challenges, the concept of deep learning has gained increasing attention in Indonesian educational discourse. Deep learning refers to a learning approach that emphasizes meaningful understanding, active engagement, reflection, and the ability to connect new knowledge with prior experiences. Trianto (2014) argues that meaningful learning occurs when students are actively involved in constructing knowledge through inquiry, discussion, and problem-solving activities.

In the context of history education, deep learning aligns closely with the goals of developing critical and historical thinking skills. Critical thinking involves the ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and make reasoned judgments, while historical thinking focuses on understanding historical context, interpreting sources, and constructing historical explanations. According to Widja (2018), history learning should train students to think like historians, questioning sources and recognizing that historical narratives are constructed through interpretation.

Several Indonesian studies suggest that inquiry-based and problem-based learning models contribute positively to students' higher-order thinking skills. Susanto (2014) notes that when students are encouraged to explore historical problems and analyze sources, they demonstrate greater engagement and deeper understanding. Nevertheless, empirical research that explicitly examines deep learning as an integrated pedagogical framework in Indonesian history education remains limited.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze the influence of deep learning–oriented instruction on students' critical and historical thinking skills. By drawing on Indonesian educational theories and empirical findings, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive discussion of how deep learning can enhance the quality of history education and support the development of higher-order thinking skills among students.

METHODS

1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component used a quasi-experimental design with

a pre-test and post-test, while the qualitative component involved classroom observations and interviews. This design was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of both learning outcomes and learning processes, as suggested by Sugiyono (2019).

2. Participants

The research participants were senior secondary school students enrolled in a history course. Two classes were selected purposively: one class served as the experimental group that received deep learning–oriented instruction, and the other functioned as the control group that received conventional instruction. The total number of participants was 64 students, with 32 students in each group.

3. Instructional Procedure

The instructional intervention was conducted over eight weeks. In the experimental group, learning activities were designed based on deep learning principles, including inquiry-based learning, group discussion, analysis of historical texts, and reflective writing. Students were encouraged to formulate historical questions, analyze different perspectives, and present their interpretations. In contrast, the control group followed conventional instruction dominated by lectures and textbook-based exercises.

4. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using several instruments. Critical thinking skills were measured through essay tests designed to assess analysis, evaluation, and synthesis abilities. Historical thinking skills were assessed through document-based questions requiring students to interpret historical sources. Observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture students' engagement and perceptions of the learning process, following procedures outlined by Arikunto (2016).

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-tests to examine differences between pre-test and post-test scores. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to students' reasoning and learning experiences. This analytic approach allowed for triangulation and increased the validity of the findings (Moleong, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Effect of Deep Learning on Critical Thinking Skills

The quantitative results indicate that students in the experimental group experienced a significant improvement in critical thinking skills compared to those in the control group. Post-test scores revealed higher achievement in indicators such as analytical reasoning, evaluation of arguments, and synthesis of information. These findings support Susanto's (2014) assertion that active and inquiry-based learning models promote higher-order thinking.

Classroom observations showed that deep learning activities encouraged students to question historical information and engage in meaningful discussion. Students were not only asked to answer questions but also to justify their opinions using historical evidence. According to Aman (2011), such practices are essential for developing critical thinking in history learning.

B. The Effect of Deep Learning on Historical Thinking Skills

In terms of historical thinking, students exposed to deep learning demonstrated better abilities in understanding historical context and interpreting sources. When analyzing historical documents, students were able to identify the background of events and recognize different perspectives. Widja (2018) emphasizes that historical thinking develops when students are trained to contextualize events and evaluate sources critically. Students also showed improvement in constructing historical explanations. Rather than merely recounting events, they were able to explain causes and consequences using logical arguments. This finding is consistent with Hasan (2012), who argues that meaningful history learning requires students to engage in interpretation and explanation.

C. Students' Learning Experiences

Qualitative findings reveal that deep learning increased students' motivation and engagement. Many students reported that learning history through discussion and source analysis made lessons more interesting and relevant. According to Trianto (2014), meaningful learning experiences foster intrinsic motivation and deeper understanding. Teachers observed that the learning atmosphere in the experimental class became more interactive. Students were more willing to express their opinions and collaborate with

peers. This shift reflects the transformative potential of deep learning in creating learner-centered history classrooms.

D. Discussion

The strengthened findings of this study confirm that deep learning–oriented instruction contributes substantially to the development of students' critical and historical thinking skills in history education. From an Indonesian educational perspective, these results reinforce long-standing arguments that history learning should move beyond rote memorization toward meaningful and reflective understanding (Hasan, 2012).

First, the improvement in critical thinking skills demonstrates that deep learning creates learning situations that challenge students cognitively. Through inquiry, discussion, and reflective tasks, students are required to analyze historical problems, evaluate competing interpretations, and synthesize information into coherent arguments. This finding aligns with Aman (2011), who emphasizes that history learning must encourage students to question, critique, and reason rather than simply accept historical narratives as absolute truths.

Second, the enhancement of historical thinking skills indicates that deep learning effectively supports discipline-based learning in history. Students' ability to contextualize events, interpret sources, and construct historical explanations reflects the core objectives of history education as articulated by Widja (2018). When students engage with historical texts critically and collaboratively, they begin to understand that history is constructed through interpretation and evidence, not merely recorded as fixed facts.

Moreover, the findings suggest that deep learning fosters historical consciousness, which is an essential goal of history education in Indonesia. Hasan (2012) argues that historical consciousness enables students to understand the relationship between past, present, and future. In this study, students who participated in deep learning activities were better able to relate historical events to contemporary social issues, indicating a deeper level of historical awareness.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the implementation of deep learning also transforms classroom interaction patterns. Teachers functioned as facilitators who guided inquiry and reflection, while students became active participants in constructing knowledge. This shift supports Trianto's (2014) view that meaningful learning occurs

when students are actively involved in learning processes that demand exploration, dialogue, and reflection.

In addition, the increased student engagement observed in this study highlights the affective benefits of deep learning. Students expressed greater interest and motivation when learning history through discussion and source analysis. According to Susanto (2014), motivation and engagement are closely linked to learning depth, as students who find learning meaningful are more likely to invest effort and persist in challenging tasks.

Finally, the results of this study have important implications for curriculum implementation in Indonesia. Deep learning is highly compatible with the objectives of the current curriculum, which emphasizes higher-order thinking skills, student-centered learning, and character development. Sugiyono (2019) notes that learning models aligned with these objectives are more likely to produce holistic learning outcomes that integrate cognitive, affective, and social dimensions.

Overall, the strengthened discussion underscores that deep learning is not merely a methodological innovation, but a comprehensive pedagogical approach that supports the intellectual and character development goals of history education in Indonesia. By integrating critical inquiry, historical reasoning, and reflective learning, deep learning contributes to the formation of students who are capable of thinking critically, historically, and responsibly as citizens.

CONCLUSION

This article concludes that deep learning–oriented instruction significantly enhances students' critical and historical thinking skills in history education. Deep learning encourages students to move beyond memorization and engage in meaningful analysis, interpretation, and reflection. As a result, students develop a deeper understanding of historical content and stronger higher-order thinking abilities.

The findings suggest that history teachers in Indonesia should consider implementing deep learning strategies, such as inquiry-based learning and source analysis, to improve the quality of instruction. Teacher training programs should also emphasize the development of pedagogical skills related to deep learning.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations related to sample size and research scope. Future research is recommended to involve broader samples and different

educational contexts. Nevertheless, this article provides evidence that deep learning is a relevant and effective approach for strengthening history education in Indonesia.

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