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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CONTEXTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING MODEL IN IMPROVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SPATIAL LITERACY SKILLS

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Abstract
This study addresses the issue of low spatial literacy skills among elementary school students', particularly in map-related learning. Limited students' engagement and the lack of instructional models that support spatial literacy development are identified as contributing factors. The study aims to examine changes in students' spatial literacy skills following the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model. A pre experimental one-group pretest posttest design was employed involving 28 fifth-grade students' from a public elementary school in Sukasari District, Bandung City. Data were collected using an essay based spatial literacy test and analyzed using descriptive statistics, mean difference testing, and N-Gain analysis. The findings indicate an increase in students' spatial literacy scores from the pretest to the posttest, suggesting improved performance after the CTL-based instruction. However, due to the absence of a control group, the results should be interpreted cautiously and cannot be used to establish causal relationships. Despite this limitation, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on spatial literacy instruction by providing empirical evidence on the potential role of contextual learning strategies in supporting map-related understanding at the elementary level. Practically, the findings offer insights for Social Studies teachers on integrating contextual and experience-based approaches to enhance students' spatial reasoning within the framework of elementary education.
Keywords: *Contextual Teaching and Learning; Spatial Literacy; Social Studies Education*

Abstrak
Penelitian ini mengkaji rendahnya kemampuan literasi spasial peserta didik sekolah dasar, khususnya pada materi peta. Kurangnya keterlibatan peserta didik dalam pembelajaran serta terbatasnya penggunaan model pembelajaran yang mendukung pengembangan literasi spasial menjadi faktor yang melatarbelakangi penelitian ini. Penelitian bertujuan untuk menganalisis perubahan kemampuan literasi spasial peserta didik setelah penerapan model *Contextual Teaching and Learning* (CTL). Metode yang digunakan adalah pre eksperimental dengan desain *one group pretest–posttest* yang melibatkan 28 peserta didik kelas V di salah satu SD Negeri di Kecamatan Sukasari, Kota Bandung. Instrumen penelitian berupa tes esai literasi spasial, dengan data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif, uji perbedaan rerata, dan perhitungan N-*Gain.* Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan skor literasi spasial peserta didik dari *pretest* ke *posttest* setelah penerapan model CTL. Namun, mengingat desain penelitian tidak melibatkan kelompok kontrol, temuan ini perlu diinterpretasikan secara hati-hati dan tidak dimaksudkan untuk menyimpulkan hubungan sebab-akibat secara definitif. Meskipun demikian, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi empiris terhadap kajian literasi spasial dengan menunjukkan potensi pendekatan pembelajaran kontekstual dalam mendukung pemahaman peta pada jenjang sekolah dasar. Secara praktis, temuan ini dapat menjadi rujukan bagi guru IPS dalam merancang pembelajaran yang lebih kontekstual dan berbasis pengalaman guna memperkuat kemampuan literasi spasial peserta didik.
Kata Kunci: *Contextual Teaching and Learning;* Literasi Spasial; Pembelajaran IPS

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Introduction

Social, economic, and political transformations in Indonesia have led to significant progress in education. The *Merdeka Curriculum* is an important initiative aimed at enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia. Its goal is to empower educators to develop innovative teaching strategies that can be tailored to the diverse needs of students' and their learning contexts (Husnah et al., 2023). The *Merdeka Curriculum* encompasses both Science and Social Studies, commonly known as IPAS. The aim of IPAS is to provide students' with a comprehensive understanding of their environment. The focus of Science is primarily on understanding the universe and its components, while Social Studies focuses on human life and social activities. Therefore, the inclusion of IPAS in the *Merdeka Curriculum* serves as a means to enhance the quality of education and to equip students' to face global challenges.

Kemendikbudristek No. 033/H/KR/2022 stipulates that one of the IPAS learning outcomes at Phase C is for students' to use conventional or digital maps to recognize the location and geographical conditions of Indonesia. By using maps, students' can gain insights into the interconnections among various geographical elements, thereby enhancing their reasoning skills. The ability to read maps involves navigation and orientation skills, which are key components of spatial literacy.

The term *literacy* in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) is defined as "the ability to read and write; knowledge or skills in a particular field or activity; and a person's ability to process knowledge and information to acquire life skills." The term *spatial* in KBBI is defined as relating to space or place. Therefore, spatial literacy can be described as a person's ability to think critically in understanding and recognizing the conditions of a particular space. Furthermore, this ability can also be understood as a cognitive skill to transform and connect spatial information (Aliman et al., 2019).

According to Law No. 4 of 2011 concerning Geospatial Affairs, Article 1 defines "spatial" as the spatial aspects of an object or event, including its location, position, and placement. Sinton (2017) a geographer from Cornell University, defines spatial literacy as "the competent and confident use of maps, mapping, and spatial thinking to address ideas, situations, and problems within daily life, society, and the world around us". Consistently, Sari (2018) argues that spatial literacy is related to the understanding of space, encompassing objects, their relative positions, and the relationships among spatial objects.

The topic of maps seems to present a distinct challenge for students', as their understanding of the material remains limited. During lessons, students' often appear uninterested and unfocused when the teacher teaches map-related content. Consequently, students' academic performance in this subject is low (Pulungan & Dafit, 2023). This statement is supported by the results of interviews conducted by the researcher with a classroom teacher at an elementary school in Bandung, who stated that students' face learning difficulties in reading maps. Some of the obstacles identified include students' struggling to interpret maps, particularly in understanding the symbols and colors used. These issues arise due to the implementation of technology and the use of teaching models that are not yet aligned with the students' needs and potential.

In addition, several factors contribute to the low spatial literacy skills in elementary schools. These include students' limited ability to understand the purpose of the maps they create (Amrullah et al., 2022), students' often encounter difficulties in comprehending map material due to the complexity of the concepts involved ('Ain et al., 2024), in Social Studies

lessons, students' are not directly engaged in practicing what they have learned, and teachers tend to ask questions that mainly assess memorization (Budiman & Afni, 2020), students' struggle to learn and apply the concept of cardinal directions because they tend to rely on rote memorization (Munawir, 2020), students' lack sensitivity in analyzing the spatial coverage of an area and identifying objects depicted on a map (Amrullah et al., 2022), and Social Studies instruction focuses primarily on images without students' participation, resulting in students' very low ability to understand and interpret the information presented on maps (Hanum, 2020).

Therefore, the researcher selected the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model, which enables students' to engage with material that is highly relevant to real-life situations. This model allows students' to enhance their practical learning experiences, as the CTL approach provides more opportunities for active participation, enabling them to implement, experiment, and experience directly (learning to do) rather than merely absorbing information passively. Consequently, contextual learning emphasizes the importance of knowledge and experiences that are relevant to the real world (Hasibuan, 2014).

Theoretically, CTL aligns well with the development of spatial literacy skills. Spatial literacy requires learners to interpret spatial representations, analyze relationships between locations, and apply spatial reasoning in authentic contexts. The principles of CTL such as inquiry, learning community, and contextualization support these processes by engaging students' in map interpretation, discussion of spatial phenomena, and connections between geographic concepts and their surrounding environment. As a result, CTL has the potential to facilitate deeper and more meaningful spatial understanding.

Based on this rationale, this study aims to examine the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model in improving elementary school students' spatial literacy skills, particularly in map-related material in IPAS Chapter 6 Indonesiaku Kaya Raya. This study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the literature on spatial literacy instruction and the application of CTL in elementary education. Accordingly, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows, there is a significant difference in students' spatial literacy skills before and after the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model.

Research Methods

This study employed a pre-experimental research design using a one-group pretest–posttest format. While this design allows for examining changes in students' spatial literacy skills before and after the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model, the absence of a control or comparison group constitutes a key limitation. As a result, causal inferences regarding the effectiveness of the CTL model should be interpreted cautiously, as improvements in posttest scores may also be influenced by external factors such as instructional time, students' familiarity with the test format, or teacher related variables.

The research participants consisted of 28 fifth grade elementary school students from a public school in Sukasari District, Bandung City. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Although this sampling technique ensured alignment between the participants and the learning material under investigation, the relatively small and context specific sample limits the generalizability of the findings (Sugiyono, 2020). Therefore, the results are intended to provide an in-depth understanding of spatial literacy development within a particular instructional context rather than broad population-level conclusions.

The research instrument was an essay type spatial literacy test designed to measure students' abilities across four indicators: location, condition, comparison, and spatial relationships (aura). To ensure content validity, the test items were developed based on the IPAS learning outcomes stipulated in the Merdeka Curriculum and were reviewed by subject-matter experts in Social Studies education. This expert judgment process ensured that the items were conceptually aligned with spatial literacy constructs and appropriate for the cognitive level of elementary school students.

Regarding reliability, the essay responses were assessed using a structured scoring rubric aligned with each spatial literacy indicator. To enhance scoring consistency, the rubric was applied systematically across all responses. However, this study did not calculate statistical reliability coefficients such as inter-rater reliability, which represents another methodological limitation. Consequently, the interpretation of the results emphasizes descriptive trends rather than precise measurement accuracy.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean scores, mean difference analysis, and N-Gain calculations to describe changes in students' spatial literacy skills. Given the pre-experimental nature of the design, these analyses are intended to illustrate patterns of improvement rather than establish definitive causal relationships. Overall, while the research design provides preliminary empirical evidence on the potential role of the CTL model in supporting spatial literacy development, the findings should be viewed as exploratory. Future studies are recommended to employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs with control groups, larger sample sizes, and more robust reliability testing to strengthen causal inference and enhance the generalizability of results.

Result And Discussion

This study was conducted at an elementary school located in the Sukasari District, Bandung. The research subjects consisted of 28 Grade V (Phase C) students' who were selected as the sample for this study. The sample was chosen based on the focus of the material under investigation, namely map-related content in Chapter 6 of the IPAS subject, which covers the location and geographical conditions of Indonesia. The study was conducted over three days, specifically on May 7, 8, and 9, 2025, with each learning session lasting 2 × 35 minutes. To evaluate the effectiveness of the CTL model, pretests and posttests were administered, and the statistical data for the *pretest* and *posttest* are presented as follows:

Table 1. Statistical Data of Pretest and Posttest Results

	N	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev**
Pretest	28	5	60	28.57	15.145
Posttest	28	70	100	86.96	8.959

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' spatial literacy test scores before and after the implementation of the instructional intervention. For the pretest, the minimum score obtained was 5 and the maximum score was 60, with a mean score of 28.57 and a standard deviation of 15.145. For the posttest, the minimum score was 70 and the maximum score was 100, with a mean score of 86.96 and a standard deviation of 8.959. Table 2 presents the Normality Test data:

Table 2. Normality Test (*Shapiro-Wilk)*

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	0.942	28	0.125
Posttest	0.941	28	0.120

A Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted to examine the normality of the pretest and posttest scores. As shown in Table 2, the significance value for the pretest scores was 0.125, while the significance value for the posttest scores was 0.120. Both values were greater than 0.05, indicating that the pretest and posttest data were normally distributed. After confirming the normal distribution of the *pretest* and *posttest* scores, the next step was to perform the homogeneity test using Levene's test.

Table 3. Homogenity Test

		Levene Statitic	df1	df2	Sig.
Result	Based on Mean	5.782	1	54	.020

Following the normality test, a homogeneity test was conducted using Levene's test. As presented in Table 3, the significance value obtained was 0.020. Since this value was less than 0.05, the data did not meet the assumption of homogeneity. The next step involved testing the mean differences and calculating N-Gain. This was aimed at determining the extent to which the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model is effective in improving students' spatial literacy skills, based on *pretest* and *posttest* scores.

Table 4. Wilcoxon Test

	Posttest-Pretest
Z	-4.638[b]
Asym. Sg (2-tailed)	<,001

Due to the violation of the homogeneity assumption, a non parametric statistical test was applied. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to examine differences between pretest and posttest scores. The results of the Wilcoxon test are presented in Table 4. The analysis yielded a Z value of −4.638 with an asymptotic significance (two-tailed) value of less than 0.001, indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores.

Table 5. N-*Gain* Test

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Ngain_Score	28	54	1.00	.8128	.13742
Ngain_Persen	28	53.85	100.00	82.2840	13.74232
Valid N (listwise)	28				

To examine the magnitude of score improvement, an N-Gain analysis was conducted. As shown in Table 5, the mean N-Gain score was 0.81, equivalent to 81.28%, with a standard deviation of 0.13742. Based on Meltzer (2002) classification, the N-Gain score falls within the high category. The classification criteria for N-Gain values are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Klasifikasi N-*Gain*

N-*Gain* Score	**Classification**
N-*Gain* > 0,70	High
0,30 ≥ 0,70	Middle
N-*Gain* < 0,30	Low

Low spatial literacy skills among students' may be influenced by several interrelated factors. First, students' understanding of map-related material appears to be limited, which may be associated with the use of instructional models that are less aligned with the nature of spatial concepts. Second, in Social Studies lessons on map material, students' are often not directly engaged in hands-on or experiential activities that allow them to practice and apply what they have learned. Third, learning activities tend to be teacher-centered, encouraging students' to rely more on rote memorization than on meaningful, experience-based learning. Finally, students' may not yet fully recognize the relevance of map-related content to practical aspects of their daily lives. These conditions collectively may contribute to the low level of spatial literacy observed.

These findings are in line with previous studies. Maharani & Maryani (2015) uggest that students' difficulties in developing spatial literacy skills are closely related to limited learning activities and low student's engagement during instruction. Similarly, Putra et al., (2019) argue that learning practices that emphasize memorization tend to result in underdeveloped map concepts. Other studies have also highlighted that the limited use of innovative and student-oriented learning models may hinder the development of spatial abilities (Amrullah et al., 2022). In addition, instructional approaches that are abstract and insufficiently connected to real-world contexts may further constrain students' understanding of spatial information (Maulaya et al., 2025).

The implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model in this study followed the seven-stage framework proposed by Nasution & Yusnaldi (2024), namely Constructivism, Inquiry, Questioning, Learning Community, Modeling, Reflection, and Authentic Assessment. Within this framework, the Inquiry and Learning Community stages appeared to play a prominent role in supporting students' engagement with spatial concepts. Inquiry activities encourage students' to actively explore, observe, and analyze map based information, which may facilitate their ability to interpret symbols, identify locations, and understand spatial relationships. However, it should be noted that these observations are based on classroom implementation and cannot fully rule out the influence of other factors, such as teacher guidance or students' increased motivation due to exposure to a new instructional approach.

Inquiry based activities are most effective when complemented by the Learning Community stage, which emphasizes collaboration and discussion among students'. Through group work and peer interaction, students' have opportunities to exchange ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and collectively solve problems related to map interpretation. This collaborative learning environment may contribute to a more active and meaningful learning process. Nevertheless, the extent to which these stages independently influenced students' spatial literacy development cannot be determined conclusively due to the absence of a comparison or control group.

Previous studies support the potential benefits of inquiry-oriented learning. Khoirudin (2022) notes that inquiry-based instruction enables students' to develop a more meaningful understanding of subject matter through active involvement in investigating and drawing

conclusions. Pramono et al., (2022) also emphasize that inquiry within the CTL model helps students' connect academic content with real-life contexts. Similarly, Sriati (2013) explains that the Learning Community stage encourages communication, collaboration, and confidence, which may enhance students' engagement during the learning process. While these studies provide theoretical and empirical support, differences in research design and context suggest that direct comparisons should be made cautiously.

From a theoretical perspective, the CTL model aligns with Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, which emphasizes the integration of new knowledge with prior understanding. Meaningful learning occurs when students' are able to relate new concepts to existing cognitive structures rather than merely memorizing information (Darmayanti et al., 2023; Hamida et al., 2022). In the context of map learning, CTL potentially supports students' in understanding concepts such as location, direction, and symbols by linking them to their surrounding environment. However, the extent to which this theoretical alignment translates into long-term learning outcomes requires further investigation.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the Contextual Teaching and Learning model may contribute to improved students' engagement and understanding of spatial concepts in map-related instruction. Nevertheless, these results should be interpreted cautiously, as factors such as instructional time, assessment format, teacher influence, and the novelty of the learning model may also have affected students' performance. Consistent with studies by Nurhayati et al., (2017), CTL shows potential in supporting higher-order skills and contextual understanding. Future research employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs with control groups is needed to more clearly examine the causal relationship between CTL implementation and the development of spatial literacy skills in elementary school students'.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, the analysis shows that students' initial spatial literacy skills prior to the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model were relatively low, as reflected in the pretest mean score. This finding indicates that students' initially experienced difficulties in understanding spatial concepts and interpreting map-related information. Following the implementation of the CTL based learning activities, the posttest results revealed higher average scores, suggesting an observable improvement in students' spatial literacy performance.

Rather than indicating a definitive causal effect, these findings suggest that the use of contextual learning activities may support the development of students' spatial literacy by encouraging them to connect abstract spatial concepts with real-life experiences. The observed improvement across the four spatial literacy indicators location, condition, comparison, and spatial relationships highlights the potential role of contextual learning in facilitating students' spatial reasoning and conceptual understanding.

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports the view that spatial literacy is not merely a technical skill related to map reading, but a cognitive process that develops through meaningful interaction between prior knowledge, learning context, and real world experience. Practically, the findings imply that Social Studies teachers may benefit from incorporating contextual and experience based learning strategies when teaching map-related content, as such approaches can encourage active students' participation and deeper conceptual engagement.

However, the results should be interpreted cautiously due to the limitations of the research design. As this study employed a pretest posttest approach within a specific instructional context, the findings do not allow for broad generalizations or strong causal claims.

Further research using experimental or mixed-methods designs with larger and more diverse samples is recommended to explore the effectiveness of contextual learning models in enhancing spatial literacy more comprehensively.

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