

Improving Student's Critical Thinking Through Recitation Method in Social Studies Classroom

by

Widiyanti Widiyanti^{1*}, Aman Aman², Primanisa Inayati Azizah³,
Rusyda Nasyita Rahman⁴

1234Faculty of Social Sciences and Politic Science, Universitas Negeri
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

widiyanti.2024@student.uny.ac.id

Article History Submitted: November 29th, 2025 Revised: March 31st, 2026 Accepted March 31st, 2026 Keywords: social studies classroom; recitation model; critical thinking skills	Abstract Developing students' critical thinking has become an important objective of social studies education, yet classroom instruction often provides limited opportunities for students to engage in inquiry, collaborative reasoning, and evidence-based argumentation. This study explored how structured recitation activities fostered students' critical thinking during social studies learning through a qualitative classroom inquiry. The study involved eight junior high school students and employed classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, students' learning artifacts, and classroom documentation as primary data sources. Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed four interconnected themes characterizing the development of students' critical thinking: (1) developing collaborative learning engagement, (2) building learning confidence through peer support, (3) developing evidence-based critical thinking, and (4) strengthening independent inquiry through structured recitation activities. Students gradually shifted from passive participation toward active engagement by collaboratively seeking information, discussing ideas, constructing arguments, and defending their conclusions using evidence. These qualitative findings were supported by improvements in students' critical thinking achievement throughout the learning process. The study concludes that structured recitation activities provide meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond improving academic achievement by promoting collaboration, learner autonomy, analytical reasoning, and reflective participation. The findings offer practical implications for social studies teachers seeking to design more student-centered learning environments that effectively foster critical thinking.
--	---

Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in the development of human resources. It is widely believed that the higher a person's level of education, the greater their awareness of various aspects of life (Dyoty, 2023, p. 41). Through diverse learning experiences and educational processes, education facilitates individual self-development and supports the realization of one's potential. Education is a deliberate and systematic effort to create learning environments and instructional processes that encourage students to actively develop their potential. Each student possesses unique capabilities that can be optimized when supported by appropriate learning conditions and effective instructional strategies. The development of individual potential—such as spiritual intelligence, general knowledge, self-regulation, and practical skills—is essential for preparing students to participate meaningfully in society.

According to Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, education is defined as a conscious and planned effort to create learning conditions and learning processes that enable learners to actively develop their potential. Article 1 paragraph 1 states that national education is organized as an integrated system consisting of all educational units and educational activities. Furthermore, Article 3 stipulates that national education aims to enhance the quality of Indonesian citizens who are faithful and devoted to God Almighty, possess noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, creative, independent, and capable of becoming democratic and responsible citizens.

Learning is defined as a process through which individuals make efforts to acquire new behavioral changes as a result of their experiences and interactions with the environment. From this perspective, the primary goal of learning is the emergence of positive behavioral changes in students.

Critical thinking has become one of the essential competencies required in twenty-first-century education. Beyond mastering disciplinary knowledge, students are expected to evaluate information critically, analyze complex issues, formulate evidence-based arguments, and make informed decisions in response to real-world challenges. Consequently, international educational initiatives such as the OECD Learning Compass 2030 and UNESCO's educational framework emphasize critical thinking as a core competency that should be systematically integrated into classroom instruction rather than treated as an additional learning outcome.

Within social studies education, critical thinking is particularly important because students are expected to interpret social phenomena, examine multiple perspectives, evaluate evidence, and construct reasoned explanations regarding contemporary social issues. Social studies therefore extends beyond the transmission of factual knowledge toward developing informed, reflective, and responsible citizens who are capable of participating in democratic society. These expectations require instructional approaches that actively engage students in inquiry, discussion, reflection, and collaborative problem solving rather than passive knowledge acquisition.

Despite these expectations, developing critical thinking remains a persistent challenge in classroom practice. In many junior high school classrooms, instruction continues to be dominated by teacher-centered approaches emphasizing lectures, textbook-based learning, and memorization. Such instructional practices provide relatively few opportunities for students to analyze authentic problems, evaluate alternative viewpoints, or defend their ideas using evidence. Consequently, classroom participation tends to be limited, while students become increasingly dependent on teachers as the primary source of knowledge rather than developing independent reasoning skills. Research consistently demonstrates that active learning environments are substantially more effective than traditional lecture-based instruction in promoting higher-order thinking and meaningful learning outcomes.

One instructional strategy that has the potential to foster active learning is the implementation of structured recitation activities. Unlike conventional homework that primarily focuses on task completion, structured recitation requires students to seek information independently, discuss findings collaboratively, present arguments publicly, and take responsibility for defending their conclusions. Through these interconnected learning activities, students are encouraged not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop analytical reasoning, communication skills, and reflective thinking.

The teaching and learning process involves the transfer and construction of knowledge from teachers to students. The success of this process can be reflected in students' learning outcomes. One of the most important components influencing the effectiveness of learning is the use of appropriate and effective instructional methods by teachers. Teaching and learning activities therefore involve dynamic interactions between teachers and students in order to achieve the predetermined learning objectives.

The teaching and learning process is not merely the delivery of instructional material from teachers to students. Rather, it also encompasses students' mental, emotional, and social engagement in acquiring changes in behavior, knowledge, and skills. In this context, teachers are not only responsible for delivering information but also for guiding, facilitating, and supporting students so that they can learn independently as well as collaboratively. According to (Sadirman, 2018, p. 15), in the context of learning interaction and motivation, the teaching and learning process is an educational activity because it involves interactions between teachers and students directed toward achieving instructional objectives. Therefore, the teaching and learning process can be understood as an interactive, planned, and goal-oriented activity carried out by teachers and students to produce positive changes in attitudes, knowledge, and skills through meaningful learning experiences.

However, various challenges remain in the Indonesian education system, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of classroom learning processes. Instructional approaches and methods are often insufficiently varied, with lecture-based teaching still widely practiced, especially in schools located in rural and remote areas. Such practices are increasingly considered less relevant to the evolving demands and challenges of contemporary education.

Preliminary classroom observations revealed several conditions indicating the need for instructional improvement. Students experienced difficulties in analyzing social issues, justifying opinions with logical arguments, and responding critically to classroom discussions. Most students tended to provide short descriptive answers or simply repeat explanations previously delivered by the teacher. Classroom discussions were dominated by only a small number of students, while the majority remained passive throughout the learning process. These findings suggest that existing instructional practices have not yet adequately supported the development of students' critical thinking.

Responding to these challenges, this study implemented structured recitation activities as an instructional strategy in social studies learning. The activities were designed to engage students in independent information seeking, collaborative discussion, presentation of findings, peer questioning, and reflective evaluation. Rather than focusing solely on students' academic achievement, this study seeks to explore how structured recitation activities foster the development of students' critical thinking during classroom learning. The findings are expected to provide practical evidence regarding the pedagogical

mechanisms through which structured assignments can support more meaningful and intellectually engaging social studies instruction.

Method

This study employed a qualitative classroom inquiry to explore how structured recitation activities fostered students' critical thinking during social studies learning. Rather than focusing solely on students' academic achievement, the study sought to understand the pedagogical processes through which structured recitation activities promoted analytical reasoning, collaborative learning, classroom participation, and evidence-based argumentation. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of students' learning experiences within their natural classroom setting.

The study was conducted in a junior high school social studies classroom in Barito, Kalimantan Tengah, Indonesia. Eight students participated in the study. The classroom was purposefully selected based on preliminary observations indicating that students demonstrated limited participation in classroom discussions, experienced difficulties in constructing evidence-based arguments, and tended to rely on teachers' explanations rather than developing independent reasoning. These classroom characteristics provided an appropriate context for investigating the development of critical thinking through structured recitation activities.

The instructional intervention consisted of structured recitation activities integrated into regular social studies instruction. Students engaged in a sequence of learning activities that included independent information gathering, collaborative discussion, classroom presentation, peer questioning, and reflective evaluation. The assignments required students to analyze authentic social issues, synthesize information from multiple learning resources, formulate evidence-based arguments, and communicate their conclusions during classroom discussions. Throughout the learning process, the teacher primarily acted as a facilitator by providing guidance, encouraging collaborative inquiry, and supporting students' reflective thinking instead of relying on direct instruction. Data were collected through multiple qualitative sources to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' learning experiences. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the implementation to document students' participation, questioning behavior, collaborative interaction, analytical reasoning, and argument construction.

The qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the study. Observation notes, interview transcripts, students' learning artifacts, and reflective field notes were coded to identify meaningful units related to students' critical thinking development. Similar codes were subsequently organized into categories and synthesized into broader themes representing changes in students' participation, analytical reasoning, collaborative learning, and evidence-based argumentation during structured recitation activities. The trustworthiness of the findings was established through methodological triangulation by comparing evidence obtained from classroom observations, interviews, students' learning artifacts, reflective field notes, and classroom documentation. Member checking was conducted with the classroom teacher to confirm the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations, while peer debriefing among the research team was employed to strengthen analytical rigor and minimize subjective bias during data interpretation.

Result and Discussion

The findings indicate that structured recitation activities gradually transformed students' participation from passive classroom attendance into active collaborative engagement. During the initial implementation, students worked in small groups of two to complete structured assignments requiring them to gather information from textbooks, worksheets, and online resources. Classroom observations showed that although collaboration had begun to emerge, active participation remained uneven, with only two students consistently initiating questions and contributing actively during classroom discussions.

Students' interview responses further illustrated how collaborative learning began to influence their engagement. One student explained: *Because there were only two of us, we had to think together to find the answers on Google about the utilization of the environment.*" (Student 1).

This statement demonstrates that structured recitation activities encouraged shared responsibility for learning rather than individual task completion. Instead of relying solely on teacher explanations, students were required to negotiate ideas and construct knowledge collaboratively.

As the learning activities progressed, collaborative engagement became increasingly evident. Classroom observations revealed that all students actively participated in group discussions, while four students demonstrated deeper analytical engagement by exploring the learning topic beyond the information provided in textbooks. Students were no longer merely completing assigned tasks but collaboratively constructing explanations based on multiple sources of information.

These findings support social constructivist perspectives that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaborative dialogue. Structured recitation activities provided opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, exchange perspectives, and jointly construct understanding, thereby creating learning experiences that promoted active engagement rather than passive knowledge reception.

Besides increasing classroom participation, structured recitation activities also contributed to the development of students' confidence in expressing their ideas during classroom discussions. Initial observations showed that several students hesitated to ask questions or express opinions despite demonstrating understanding of the learning materials.

One student admitted: *"Actually, I wanted to ask a question, but I was still unsure about how to formulate it, so I just listened to my classmates."* (Student 2)

This finding indicates that students' limited participation was influenced not only by their academic understanding but also by a lack of confidence in communicating their ideas.

Following the implementation of collaborative recitation activities, noticeable changes were observed. Students reported feeling more comfortable participating because peer support reduced their anxiety during classroom discussions. As one student explained: *"Working in a group of four was more enjoyable because we had more ideas. I became more confident to speak because my teammates supported each other when preparing the presentation."* (Student 2)

The classroom teacher also confirmed these observations: *"The number of students actively participating increased significantly. Almost no students remained passive during the discussion."* (Teacher)

Peer collaboration therefore functioned not only as an instructional strategy but also as social support that encouraged students to communicate ideas more confidently. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing that collaborative learning environments enhance students' self-confidence, willingness to participate, and classroom engagement, all of which contribute to the development of higher-order thinking.

The qualitative findings were consistent with students' learning achievement. The proportion of students achieving the expected level of critical thinking increased progressively from the initial implementation to the final stage of the intervention, suggesting that behavioral changes observed during classroom activities were accompanied by measurable improvements in learning performance.

The findings suggest that structured recitation activities contributed to the development of students' critical thinking by creating learning environments that emphasized collaboration, active participation, and shared responsibility. Rather than functioning merely as assignment-based instruction, structured recitation encouraged students to construct knowledge through interaction with peers, independent information seeking, and classroom dialogue. These learning experiences shifted students' roles from passive recipients of information toward active participants in the learning process.

The increased level of collaborative engagement observed throughout the study supports the social constructivist perspective proposed by Vygotsky, which argues that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and dialogue. Working in small groups required students to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, evaluate alternative viewpoints, and collectively formulate conclusions. Such collaborative processes are fundamental to the development of higher-order thinking because students are continuously challenged to justify their opinions and reconsider their understanding based on feedback from peers. Previous studies have similarly demonstrated that collaborative learning environments promote deeper conceptual understanding and improve students' critical thinking by encouraging active knowledge construction rather than passive information acquisition (Hmelo-Silver, 2004)

Another important finding concerns the gradual development of students' confidence in expressing their ideas. During the initial implementation, several students hesitated to ask questions despite understanding the learning materials. However, as structured recitation

activities continued, students reported feeling more comfortable participating because collaborative group work reduced their anxiety and provided opportunities to rehearse ideas before presenting them publicly. This finding indicates that peer interaction functioned not only as a cognitive support mechanism but also as social support that strengthened students' self-confidence. Such findings are consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes that supportive learning environments enhance learners' self-efficacy and encourage greater participation in challenging learning activities (Bandura, 1997).

The findings also demonstrate that structured recitation promoted independent inquiry, an important component of critical thinking. Students were encouraged to search for information from multiple learning resources rather than relying exclusively on teachers' explanations or textbooks. Interview data revealed that students actively sought additional information from online sources to strengthen their arguments during presentations. This behavior reflects an important transition from reproductive learning toward inquiry-oriented learning, where students evaluate information from different sources before constructing conclusions. According to (Facione, 2015), critical thinking involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation, all of which require learners to engage actively with available evidence instead of accepting information uncritically.

Furthermore, the improvement in students' ability to provide arguments during classroom discussions suggests that structured recitation facilitated evidence-based reasoning. Students no longer limited themselves to providing brief descriptive answers but increasingly justified their opinions by referring to information gathered during collaborative investigations. The teacher's observation that students presented deeper explanations and more critical arguments indicates that classroom discussions became opportunities for analytical reasoning rather than simple knowledge recall. These findings reinforce previous research suggesting that active learning strategies requiring discussion, presentation, and peer questioning are effective in developing students' higher-order thinking skills because they promote reasoning, reflection, and argument construction.

The qualitative findings were further supported by improvements in students' critical thinking achievement observed throughout the implementation. Although the quantitative results primarily served as supporting evidence in this study, the progressive increase in students' critical thinking performance was consistent with the behavioral changes documented during classroom observations and interviews. This convergence of qualitative

and quantitative evidence strengthens the interpretation that structured recitation activities contributed not only to measurable learning outcomes but also to meaningful changes in students' learning behaviors, participation, and critical thinking practices.

Overall, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of structured recitation activities extends beyond improving academic performance. More importantly, these activities create learning experiences that encourage collaboration, learner autonomy, evidence-based reasoning, and reflective participation, all of which represent essential dimensions of critical thinking in social studies education. The study therefore suggests that structured recitation activities can serve as a practical pedagogical strategy for creating more student-centered and intellectually engaging social studies classrooms.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that structured recitation activities fostered students' critical thinking by transforming classroom learning into a more collaborative, inquiry-oriented, and student-centered process. Rather than merely improving academic performance, the implementation of structured recitation activities encouraged students to participate more actively in classroom discussions, seek information independently, construct evidence-based arguments, and communicate their ideas with greater confidence. These findings suggest that the development of critical thinking emerged not only through task completion but also through meaningful interaction, collaborative reasoning, and reflective learning experiences. The qualitative findings further indicate that students' critical thinking developed.

Progressively as they became more engaged in collaborative learning. Small-group discussions, independent information seeking, peer questioning, and classroom presentations created opportunities for students to negotiate ideas, justify their arguments, and evaluate alternative perspectives. These learning behaviors represent important manifestations of critical thinking within social studies learning and were supported by improvements in students' learning achievement throughout the implementation.

The study highlights the pedagogical value of structured recitation activities as an instructional strategy capable of creating meaningful learning experiences that extend beyond content mastery. By integrating structured assignments with collaborative

discussion and reflective classroom dialogue, teachers can provide learning environments that encourage students to become active constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. Such learning experiences are particularly relevant to social studies education, where students are expected to analyze social issues critically, evaluate evidence, and formulate informed judgments.

This study was conducted in a single classroom involving a limited number of participants; therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study rather than generalized to broader educational settings. Future studies may further explore the implementation of structured recitation activities across different educational levels and learning contexts to examine how various classroom characteristics influence the development of students' critical thinking.

References

- Aidid, E. (2020). *Meningkatkan Prestasi Belajar Melalui Metode Resitasi*. CV. Bayfa Cendikia Indonesia.
- Alwy, S. (2011). *Pembelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial*. IAIT Press.
- Arikunto, S. (2008). *Penelitian Tindakan Kelas*. Bumi Aksara.
- Arikunto, S. (2019). *Penelitian Tindakan Kelas*. Bumi Aksara.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. W. H. Freeman.
- Dimiyati, & Mudjiono. (2013). *Belajar dan Pembelajaran*. Rineka Cipta.
- Djamarah, S. B., & Zain, A. (2010). *Strategi Belajar Mengajar*. Rineka Cipta.
- Djamarah, S. B., & Zain, A. (2019). *Strategi Belajar Mengajar*. Rineka Cipta.
- Dyoty. (2023). *Filsafat dan Konsep Dasar Pendidikan Modern*. Media Edukasi Nusantara.
- Ennis, R. H. (2011). *The Nature of Critical Thinking: An Outline of Critical Thinking Dispositions and Abilities*. University of Illinois.
- Erwandid, M. P. (2018). *Meningkatkan Prestasi Belajar Melalui Metode Resitasi*. Mitra Wacana Media.
- Facione, P. A. (2015). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts*. Insight Assessment.
- Halpern, D. F. (2014). *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking* (5th ed.). Psychology Press.

- Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2004). Problem-Based Learning: What and How Do Students Learn? *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(3), 235–266. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:EDPR.0000034022.16470.F3>
- Hmelo-Silver, C. E., Liu, L., Gray, S. A., & Jordan, R. (2015). Using Representational Tools to Learn About Complex Systems: A Story of Situated Cognition. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 52(1), 6–35. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21187>
- Kemmis, S., & Mc Taggart, R. (1988). *The Action Research Planner*. Deakin University.
- Kunandar. (2011). *Langkah Mudah Penelitian Tindakan Kelas Sebagai Pengembangan Profesi Guru*. Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Majid, A. (2013). *Strategi Pembelajaran*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Sage Publications.
- Prince, M. (2004). Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93(3), 223–231. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2168-9830.2004.tb00809.x>
- Sadirman, A. M. (2018). *Interaksi dan Motivasi Belajar Mengajar*. Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Sagala, S. (2013). *Konsep dan Makna Pembelajaran*. Alfabeta.
- Sapriya. (2009). *Pendidikan IPS Konsep dan Pembelajaran*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Sihotang, K. (2019). *Berpikir Kritis: Kecakapan Hidup di Era Digital*. Alfabeta.
- Suciono, W. (2021). *Berpikir Kritis: Tinjauan Melalui Kemandirian Belajar, Kemampuan Akademik, dan Efikasi Diri*. Deepublish.
- Sugiono. (2019). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Suryo Subroto, B. (2009). *Proses Belajar Mengajar di Sekolah*. Rineka Cipta.
- Sutama, A. S. (2023). *Panduan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas Berbasis Reflektif*. UNS Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wulan, I. (2016). Peningkatan Daya Berpikir Kritis Pada Mata Pelajaran IPS Berbentuk Media Pop Art Pada Siswa Kelas V SDN Klimput Kabupaten Madiun Tahun Pelajaran 2016/2017. *Jurnal Studi Sosial*, 1(2).
- Zakiah, L., & Lestari, I. (2019). Berpikir Kritis dalam Konteks Pembelajaran. *Erzatama Karya Abadi*.