



## CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN SOCIAL STUDIES : STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY

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**Abstract** : In the 2013 curriculum in Indonesia requires students to actively construct knowledge through the process of observing, asking, trying, reasoning, and communicating knowledge. If observed this method is an attempt to develop critical thinking of students. In social studies learning, students develop critical thinking skills by using controversial issues as material in social studies learning in the classroom. During this time social studies learning was seen as a burdensome learning with memorization and lecture methods used by teachers, especially in junior high school. This happens because the teacher is still trapped in the demands of teaching that are material intensive in a very limited time, besides that the teacher is limited to using the material in the textbook. In order for social studies learning to be a learning that makes students think critically, then one alternative approach that can be used by teachers is to use controversial issue in social studies learning. Through learning to use issue material, it will help students develop critical thinking.

**Keywords** : controversial issues, social studies , critical thinking ability

### I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important element in the formation of character and progress of a nation. With education, a nation will have quality human resources to advance its nation. To carry out education, each country has its own education system that is tailored to the national personality and goals of the country. Likewise Indonesia, which regulates its national education system in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System.

Social Sciences aims to make students able to possess and master knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, so that students are expected to be able to solve and make decisions from every problem they face.

According to Saxe (in Sapriya, 2011) the purpose of social studies education is to educate students as good citizenship, constructive and productive citizens; namely citizens who understand themselves and their communities, are able to feel as citizens, think as citizens, act as citizens, and if possible also be able to live as citizens.

In general, social studies learning only focuses on the cognitive development of students at the level of mastery of basic knowledge, namely cognitive abilities "remember" (C1). According to Bloom (Kuswana, 2012) that "remembering" is the lowest level in the level of thinking development. Bloom divides the domain of knowledge (cognitive) into 6 levels, namely: (C1) knowledge, (C2) understanding, (C3) application, (C4) analysis, (C5) synthesis, and (C6) evaluation. By practicing higher-order thinking skills, social studies learning will become more meaningful, because in addition to teaching about remembering facts, it also



trains the ability to understand, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate which will require students to think critically.

The problem of low critical thinking skills experienced by students is closely related to the problem of using material that is only glued to the textbook. Packaging the material that became the topic of discussion when it made students not interested in criticizing it. The questions that arise from students mostly only ask about what, who, when and where, which if seen the questions submitted by the student are included in the type of question at the lowest category level according to Bloom's taxonomy.

In addition students were unable to argue to strengthen their answers during the discussion and provide further explanation regarding the material used in the discussion topic. To develop students' critical thinking skills in social studies learning can be done by presenting controversial issues in the social studies learning process.

There are steps in learning that use controversial issues which according to Wiriaatmadja (in Komalasari, 2013,) are as follows:

- a. Teachers and students brainstorm on controversial issues that will be discussed.
- b. Students in groups choose one case to study
- c. Students do inquiry, invite speakers, read books, collect other information.
- d. Students present / discuss the results of inquiry, submit arguments, listen to counter-arguments or other opinions.
- e. Students apply concepts, generalizations, social science theories to academically analyze problems.

With these learning steps, it is hoped that the teacher must pay close attention. Then the teacher must also be ready and able to carry out these activities, besides that the teacher must be able to lead students to be able to submit their opinions related to the existing controversial issues to stimulate students' critical thinking skills.

## **II. METHOD AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research is a type of literature study research by looking for theoretical references relevant to the issues raised. The theoretical references obtained by the way of literature study research are used as a basic foundation. This study examines several books and journals related to Controversial Issues in Social Studies Learning: Strategies for Developing Students' Critical Thinking Ability. The results of various literature reviews will be used to describe them.

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **3.1 Social Studies learning**

Essentially learning is the process of interaction between students and their environment, resulting in changes in behavior towards a better direction (Mulyasa, 2007: 255). Whereas according to Komalasari (2013) learning is a system or process that teaches students / learners who are planned or designed, implemented, and evaluated systematically so that learners can achieve learning objectives effectively and efficiently. So, learning is an interaction between students and educators and learning resources to achieve the learning objectives of these students.

Learning requires a conscious process and changes in behavior. In this process there is a recall of information which is then stored in memory and cognitive



organization. Furthermore, these skills are realized practically on the activeness of students in responding and reacting to events that occur in students or their environment (Thobroni, 2015: 17). Based on the various opinions above it can be concluded that learning is an activity carried out by teachers to actively teach students who emphasize the provision of learning resources.

Social studies examines events, facts, concepts and generalizations related to social issues. This can be a vehicle for students to develop their positive character so that they can become democratic, responsible, and peaceful citizens.

NCSS defines social studies as follows:

*Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.* (dalam Sapriya, 2011, hlm. 10)

From the understanding according to NCSS it can be understood that from every discipline contained in Social Studies as well as anthropology, sociology, history and others cannot be separated simply because from there there is an integrated relationship, forming a systematic scientific structure to be studied in a learning process.

Social Studies as a subject basically has the aim of preparing students as citizens who are not only able to master knowledge, skills but also able to master the attitudes and values that are useful in the lives of students.

Through the teaching of Social Knowledge, students are also directed, guided, and assisted to become effective citizens of Indonesia and citizens of the world. To be an Indonesian citizen and an effective citizen of the world is a formidable challenge, because the global community always changes every time. The purpose of Social Sciences is basically according to Sapriya (2011) namely: To prepare students as citizens who master skills knowledge, attitudes and values that can be used as the ability to solve personal problems or social problems and the ability to make decisions and participate in various social activities so that become a good citizen.

From the explanation above it can be understood that basically the main learning source of Social Studies is the condition and environment of the surrounding community. From here students can find events that are full of value, for example students are faced with social problems about the destruction of the environment around students from these problems students can take the value that damage that occurs other than due to natural factors is caused also by human intervention.

Social studies learning in the global era is not only demanded to be able to provide knowledge to students both in theory and practice but also to pay attention to aspects of thinking and also the development of reasoning patterns of students.



With the development of these patterns of reasoning and thinking, we will automatically be able to develop thinking skills. The development of thinking skills and the emphasis on values are very important to be carried out by students in carrying out a learning.

Social studies learning should be directed at mastering competency not only in knowledge but also in the culture of scientific thinking that is critical, creative and independent. This is what teachers often pay less attention to, which is to equip students with the scientific thinking culture. Teachers often only focus on mastering the basic competencies of science alone and not teaching ways of thinking. In fact, by providing the provision of scientific thinking competence critically, creatively and independently, students will be able to obtain and develop knowledge with their own efforts.

### 3.2 Controversial Issue

The main object of IPS is people's lives. Community life is dynamic and tends to be controversial. According to Lickona in his book "Educating for Character" most schools avoid material controversy, because teachers worry about discussions that are out of control, about parents' objections. As a consequence, controversy tends to be drawn out in the curriculum, an opportunity for high-quality moral discussion and education for its democratic population has been lost.

A controversial issue is something that is easily accepted by a person or group, but also easily rejected by someone or another group. The tendency of a person or group is based on certain considerations of thought (Musseig in Hasan, 1996, p. 202). A similar opinion was explained by Stradling that "Controversial issues are topics in learning that are politically sensitive that can cause turmoil of anger in society". Based on these two expert opinions, it can be concluded that the controversial issue is news or news that is not yet clear, but has the potential to cause conflict in the community. Furthermore, this controversial issue can lead to conflicts between individuals, as well as between groups if not addressed wisely.

Learning controversial issues is very important to be developed in social studies learning, this is based on raising controversial issues that will train students' mindset, so that they will learn how to express opinions, learn to express their experiences and knowledge, learn different opinions, learn to respect and respect opinions even maintain opinions in accordance with what he believes for obvious reasons.

Based on this explanation, the learning of controversial issues in PIPS is also a learning approach or strategy by displaying controversy issues that arise in the lives of the community or students themselves which is then raised into a learning material in learning activities in schools. Through this activity students are invited to search, analyze and solve problems based on their own perceptions even though it will lead to differences in perceptions with other students, precisely with that students will be stimulated to think critically.

As stated by Stradling et al. that: *Some teachers include controversial issues in their teaching because they are topical and maybe directly relevant to student lives*



*or because they are major social, political, economic, or moral problems of our time and consequently aspects of life which students ought to know something about.*

The explanation confirms that many teachers include controversial issues in learning, because the topics are relevant to students' lives both in terms of social, political, economic and moral aspects, where students will find and find it. It's just that you need to remember in learning controversial issues as well as other teaching materials in social studies, so controversial issues taught to students must be adjusted to the age level and development of students' abilities.

The same thing was expressed by Syamsudin, that: "It does not matter to present controversial issues in the history of the nation to students, it will make them critical, it's just that it needs direction. The teacher must be careful and try to adjust the material to the level of students' thinking. Elementary and junior high school students usually think concretely, so efforts are made to package material to suit their development that is different from the way students think.

In this connection Teaching through controversial issues in social sciences education is considered very important. Controversial issues are something that can be found in many cases regarding theories or opinions in the social sciences. The theory that is built based on certain field data is often considered not to represent the reality of the field in certain places. Such reality always lives in the social sciences, therefore the controversial issue is a natural thing in the social sciences education and other benefits that people can develop better new opinions. For these differences of opinion, the dynamics of academic and social life are well guaranteed. Students who are accustomed to a variety of different views will be able to place themselves and contribute their thoughts as members of the community as well. The differences of opinion they often experience in class will also be the basis for them to get used to such conditions, so that when they become members of the community, they no longer feel alienated. They can be obtained through different opinions.

Learning controversial issues in PIPS as a strategy and learning approach basically seeks to develop students' critical thinking and self-confidence and are happy with challenges that will later become students who have reflective critical thinking. The controversy usually requires complex knowledge, self-awareness and feelings towards the balance of identity and uncovers commitment and neutrality without coercion.

It should be understood that in making decisions or solving problems of controversy issues, it may eventually produce differences of opinion and can even continue to be left to those differences as long as their opinions are supported by clear and correct arguments. In line with that, Hasan said that everyone could be a defender or attacker of an opinion. What the teacher does with students is drawing conclusions about similarities and differences of opinion, weaknesses and advantages of each opinion.



In addition there are three principles that must be held by the teacher in the presentation of controversial issues such as those presented by Wiriaatmadja, namely: balance, neutrality, and Commitment.

### 3.3 Critical thinking

According to Sardjiyo (2009) IPS is a field of study that studies, studies, analyzes social symptoms and problems in the community by reviewing various aspects of life or a combination. Meanwhile, according to Waspodo and Suhanadji (2005: 5) social science is applied science ("applied science"), whereas it is an obligation for the social sciences to always develop "body of knowledge". From some of the opinions above, it can be concluded that IPS is applied knowledge that is carried out in instructional activities in schools in order to achieve educational and teaching goals, besides that IPS also learns about the real life of people who need critical thinking skills.

Dewey (in Fisher, 2007, p. 2) defines critical thinking as "active consideration, persistent, and thorough about a belief or form of knowledge that is taken for granted seen from the point of reasons that support it and conclusions- continued conclusions that are the tendency. In line with that opinion Johnson (in Sapriya, 2011, p. 183) "Critical thinking is a directed and clear process that is used in mental activities such as solving problems, making decisions, persuading, analyzing assumptions, and conducting scientific research". Based on these two opinions, it can be concluded that someone who thinks critically, the knowledge or information he receives is not necessarily taken for granted. The information he considered was the truth through various points of view continuously and thoroughly to create decisions about what actions to take,

According to Amri (2010: 62) critical thinking is one of the stages of high-level thinking. Meanwhile, according to Johnson (2010: 183) critical thinking is a directed and clear process that is used in mental activities such as solving problems, making decisions, persuading, analyzing, assumptions and conducting scientific research. According to Ennis (in Sapriya, 2009: 144) states that critical thinking is a term used for a reflective activity to achieve goals that contain rational beliefs and behavior. He also has identified five key elements of critical thinking, namely, practical, reflective, rational, reliable, and in the form of action.

Based on this thought, he formulated a definition that critical thinking is an activity of thinking in a reflective and rational manner that is focused on determining what must be believed or done. This definition emphasizes how to make decisions or considerations. Based on the opinions of some of the figures above, it can be concluded that critical thinking is a process of reflective thinking that requires carefulness in making decisions through a series of procedures to analyze, test, and evaluate evidence and be carried out consciously.

The indicators of students' critical thinking that must be possessed are (1) Analyzing skills is a skill to describe a structure into components so that they know the organization of the structure. In these skills the main purpose is to understand a global concept by describing or detailing the globality into smaller and more



detailed parts; (2) Synthesis skills are skills that are opposite to analyzing skills. Analyzing skills is the skill of connecting parts into a new form or arrangement; (3) Skills to recognize and solve problems, these skills are conceptual applicative skills to several new notions. This skill challenges the reader to understand reading critically so that after the reading activity is over the student is able to capture some of the main points of reading, so that they are able to pattern a concept. The purpose of this skill is to make the reader able to understand and apply concepts to new problems or scope; (4) Concluding skills are the activities of the human mind based on the understanding / knowledge (truth) that they have can move to reach new understanding / knowledge (truth); (5) evaluation skills, these skills require careful thinking in determining the value of something with various existing criteria. Valuing skills require the reader to provide an assessment of the value measured using certain standards.

However, this ability to think rarely gets immediate attention to be developed in classroom learning. Teachers in this case feel that the ability to think is not necessarily developed specifically in learning, because the ability to think students have also been trained through the learning activities they do everyday even though indirectly. This mistaken assumption that often makes students' thinking ability to be undeveloped.

### **3.4 Developing Students' Critical Thinking Ability Through Controversial Issues in Social Studies Learning**

Referring to the basic competencies established in the 2013 and 2006 curricula, in the field of social studies, there are several controversial themes and materials. Some of these materials are found in the study of history, sociology, economics and geography, such as the problem of urban slum relocation, forest management, contemporary Indonesian historical material, management of mineral resources for development, free trade, and so on. Controversy materials are very effective to foster a critical spirit of students.

The organization of controversy materials is very necessary in order to form the intelligent and critical character of students. The formation of intelligent and critical characters is greatly assisted by the environment which tends to provide space for children to discuss.

Social studies learning students need to be faced with learning the issues that exist in society to be studied and students are expected to be able to draw the values contained in the issue. As discussed in the previous discussion when students face or study controversial issues and also process existing issues, then after that students must be able to position themselves where they are. And when students have chosen their position, in this case of course each student has a different value.

In learning to use controversial issues is a natural thing if there is a difference. This is because the learning using controversial issues alone does not require an agreement in the case of solving the same problem, the most important thing is that they or in this case students have views or opinions about what they believe, related to controversial issues based on scientific basis.



As a teacher who acts as a facilitator in learning, teachers are required to be able to be mediators or able to bridge the opinions expressed by students. And the teacher must be able to stimulate students to be responsible for their opinions. This is in accordance with the opinion of Hasan (1996, p. 204), namely the thing that needs to be interpreted by a teacher when choosing controversial issues, namely as follows:

- a. The issue may not cause tribal, religious or racial conflict;
- b. Controversial issues should be close to the lives of today's students;
- c. The controversial issue should be something that has become the property of the community;
- d. Controversial issues can be related to local, national or international issues.

Thus, a teacher must be able to have an attitude that is not biased in the opinions expressed by students. Teachers must be able to develop controversial issue learning in accordance with its principles. For news that is used in learning controversial issues, a teacher can take it from a public source that already exists or the teacher can develop a problem that is indeed found in the community.

The use of controverical issues in social studies is seen as suitable for realizing students to be able to think critically and constructively. Johnson (2007: 185) argues that: Critical thinking is a systematic process that allows students to formulate and evaluate their own beliefs and opinions. Critical thinking is an organized process that allows students to evaluate evidence, assumptions, logic, and language that underlies the statements of others seen from the implementation.

The learning process by using Controversial Issues learning models that present the actual problems that are happening are associated with learning materials so as to encourage students to bring up alternative problem solving through students' thinking processes that lead to critical thinking skills.

Use of controverical issues in social studies learning is a way that can enable students to actively participate in the learning process as well as through the controversial issues model students become able to ask or answer questions with logical reasons, students are able to appreciate different opinions, students are able to find information well. so that students can understand learning material and the results achieved will be optimal. This is because in the learning process students are given the opportunity to seek information through different media or facilities that are not only from the teacher so that the information obtained by students is varied,

The use of controverical issues in social studies learning influences students' critical thinking skills is also supported by the opinion of Solihatin (2012: 94) who argues that "controversial issues can directly arouse one's thinking ability. Through reading or hearing about an event, students spontaneously react decisively to which party he is.

In accordance with the opinion of the viewer, the researchers prove that the controversial learning model has an effect on the ability of students to provide arguments from the observation indicator of the ability to think in the second





indicator, namely the ability to give the arguments described in the observation table at each meeting always increases.

As has been known beforehand, in social studies, the scope is human in a social context. The process of giving views from students indirectly will lead to disagreements between other students. Differences of opinion expressed by students can lead to opinions that are pros and cons among students. With this happening indirectly students must be able to account for their opinions. Therefore, students must be able to solve it so that it does not become a controversial issue that is prolonged.

Through differences of opinion about an issue, the content of controversial issues directly evokes the thinking ability of a person or student. Through reading or hearing about an event, he spontaneously reacts to determine which party he is in. Maybe someone also needs a few moments to be able to determine his position. (Hasan, 1996, p. 203)

From the above quotation, it can be understood that when students are faced with controversial issues indirectly they will stimulate students to think, process and study the issue until finally he decides which position he is in, whether in the pro or in the counter position. When students have positioned themselves in the position where they are at that time students must act according to their position. Thus, the existence of controversial issue learning can indirectly train students to be able to be responsible for the opinions or views they have chosen. Of course this is supported by the facts.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Through the development of learning controversial issues in social studies learning will be able to develop students' critical thinking skills. Where students are trained to find their own answers or understanding of the issues developed. With differences of opinion students are encouraged to seek and develop their ideas based on their understanding and knowledge. Controversial issues are raised based on material whose position tends to be debated, in this case students are encouraged to dare to argue in accordance with the study of knowledge in response to the matters raised.

One of the main aspects which is the implication of learning controversial issues is influencing students' thinking skills. The freedom given by the teacher and the democratic classroom climate will influence students to participate and be actively involved in learning. Awareness of differences and democratic attitudes. Through learning controversial issues, tolerance will be embedded, respect and respect for the rights of others. The habits of students differing opinions and respecting these differences is a task that must be carried out by the teacher.

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