Instilling Critical Thinking for Empowering Students Contribution Toward SDGs Realization

Ferdi Nazirun Sijabat[1]; Muhammad Ridha Ramli[2]; Suri Amilia[3]; Rahmad Tantawi[4]

[1,2]*Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Sabang, Indonesia*
[3,4]*Universitas Samudra, Indonesia*
[1]*Email Korespondensi: fnsijabat@gmail.com*

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Abstract

Critical thinking is a fundamental skill necessary for addressing global challenges, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper explores strategies to instill critical thinking among students, empowering them to actively contribute to SDGs realization. By integrating critical thinking into education, students develop problem-solving abilities, ethical reasoning, and innovative mindsets. This study employs a qualitative approach, analyzing teaching methodologies and their impact on students' engagement with SDGs-related projects. The findings indicate that critical thinking fosters greater awareness and proactive behaviors, enabling students to tackle SDGs challenges effectively. The paper concludes with recommendations for integrating critical thinking into curricula to sustain long-term contributions to SDGs.

Keywords: *Critical Thinking, Empowerment, Students' Contribution.*

Abstrak

Berpikir kritis adalah keterampilan mendasar yang diperlukan untuk mengatasi tantangan global, termasuk Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (SDGs). Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi strategi untuk menanamkan pemikiran kritis di kalangan siswa, memberdayakan mereka untuk berkontribusi aktif terhadap realisasi SDGs. Dengan mengintegrasikan pemikiran kritis ke dalam pendidikan, siswa mengembangkan kemampuan pemecahan masalah, penalaran etis, dan pola pikir inovatif. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, menganalisis metodologi pengajaran dan dampaknya terhadap keterlibatan siswa dengan proyek terkait SDGs. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa berpikir kritis menumbuhkan kesadaran yang lebih besar dan perilaku proaktif, sehingga memungkinkan siswa untuk mengatasi tantangan SDGs secara efektif. Makalah ini diakhiri dengan rekomendasi untuk mengintegrasikan pemikiran kritis ke dalam kurikulum untuk mempertahankan kontribusi jangka panjang terhadap SDGs.

Kata Kunci : *Berpikir Kritis, Pemberdayaan, Kontribusi Siswa.*

A. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced by the United Nations as a universal call to action to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity by 2030. These 17 interconnected goals serve as a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. Each goal addresses the global challenges we face, including inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. The SDGs are not only aimed at governments but also encourage businesses, civil societies, and individuals to take action and contribute towards a shared vision.

Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, ensuring quality education, and fostering gender equality are crucial components of this agenda. By focusing on these areas, the SDGs strive to create a more equitable society, where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive and contribute to their communities. The implementation of these goals requires collaboration and partnership across all sectors. It calls for innovative solutions, investment in sustainable technologies, and a commitment to sharing resources and knowledge. By working together, countries can leverage their strengths and address the challenges of today, paving the way for a greener and more sustainable tomorrow.

As we progress towards 2030, it is vital to monitor our advancements and hold ourselves accountable. Every action counts, no matter how small, and collective efforts can lead to significant change. By championing the SDGs, we take a stand for justice, equity, and a thriving planet, ensuring that no one is left behind as we move forward into an uncertain future.

Education plays a pivotal role in achieving these goals, particularly by equipping students with critical thinking skills essential for analyzing complex issues and implementing solutions (UNESCO, 2017). Moreover, education fosters creativity and innovation, vital components for addressing the pressing challenges of our time. By encouraging students to think outside the box, educational institutions can inspire the next generation of problem-solvers who will tackle global issues such as climate change, poverty, and inequality.

According to the World Economic Forum (2020), fostering an environment that promotes collaboration and interdisciplinary learning is crucial for developing a holistic understanding of these multifaceted problems. Additionally, by integrating real-world experiences and service learning into the curriculum, students gain practical insights and can see firsthand the impact of their actions on their communities, further solidifying their commitment to positive change. Thus, it becomes imperative for educators and policymakers to prioritize and enhance educational frameworks that nurture these essential skills.

However, despite growing awareness of SDGs, many students lack the cognitive tools required to make meaningful contributions. This gap in understanding can be attributed to several factors, including an educational framework that often prioritizes rote memorization over critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As a result, students may be familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on a superficial level, but lack the analytical

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capabilities to engage with the complexities and interconnections inherent in these global challenges.

To bridge this divide, educational institutions must prioritize the integration of interdisciplinary curricula that not only illuminate the SDGs but also foster the necessary cognitive competencies. Engaging students in project-based learning, allowing them to tackle real-world issues related to sustainability, can cultivate a deeper sense of agency and responsibility.

Moreover, encouraging collaborative learning environments will help students recognize the value of diverse perspectives and approaches, leading to more innovative and effective solutions. By equipping young minds with these essential tools, we can inspire a generation that is not just aware of the SDGs, but actively committed to achieving them. Ultimately, the responsibility lies with educators, policymakers, and communities to create supportive ecosystems that promote critical engagement with the SDGs, ensuring that students are empowered to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development and societal progress.

Critical thinking involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information systematically (Paul & Elder, 2019). This cognitive process requires not only the recognition of underlying assumptions but also the questioning of the validity and relevance of evidence presented. By engaging in critical thinking, individuals can distinguish between fact and opinion, recognize biases, and weigh the consequences of different perspectives. This systematic approach to reasoning enhances one's ability to make informed decisions and solve complex problems effectively. Moreover, it fosters a deeper understanding of diverse viewpoints, enriching the discourse in both academic and everyday contexts. Ultimately, the development of critical thinking skills is essential for navigating an increasingly complex world, where discernment and sound judgment are paramount (Paul & Elder, 2019).

It is a cornerstone for informed decision-making and problem-solving, enabling students to identify patterns, assess risks, and propose innovative solutions. This foundational skill cultivates critical thinking and analytical abilities, empowering students to navigate complex scenarios with confidence. By fostering a mindset of curiosity and inquiry, learners are equipped to not only evaluate existing information but also to synthesize new ideas and approaches. Collaboration among peers further enriches this process, creating a dynamic environment where diverse perspectives enhance creativity and innovation. Ultimately, this approach not only prepares students for academic success but also equips them with the tools necessary for thriving in an ever-evolving professional landscape. In this way, they become not just consumers of knowledge, but active contributors to a future defined by informed choices and meaningful impact.

The purpose of this paper is to explore methods to instill critical thinking in students, empowering them to address challenges related to SDGs and fostering long-term engagement with sustainable development efforts. To achieve this objective, it is essential to integrate critical thinking methodologies into the curricula of educational institutions at all levels. By doing so, we can cultivate a

generation of learners who are not only aware of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also equipped with the analytical skills necessary to evaluate and propose viable solutions to complex global issues.

One effective approach is to implement project-based learning, where students work collaboratively on real-world challenges linked to sustainable development. This immersive learning experience encourages them to investigate, analyze, and reflect on the implications of various sustainable practices and policies. Through this hands-on engagement, students can develop a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic factors that influence sustainability.

Moreover, fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue and debate is crucial in nurturing critical thinking. Encouraging students to articulate their opinions, question assumptions, and confront differing viewpoints can enhance their analytical capabilities. Workshops, seminars, and discussions led by experts in sustainability can provide students with diverse perspectives and encourage them to refine their ideas, all while building their confidence in addressing complex issues.

Another pivotal strategy is the incorporation of interdisciplinary approaches. By integrating fields such as economics, environmental science, ethics, and social studies, educators can help students recognize the multifaceted nature of sustainable development. This holistic perspective not only enriches their learning experience but also empowers them to draw connections between various disciplines and apply critical thinking skills across different contexts.

Furthermore, leveraging technology and digital platforms can significantly enhance students' engagement and critical analysis. Access to a wealth of information and resources enables learners to conduct thorough research, evaluate sources, and present informed arguments. Online forums and collaborative tools can facilitate interaction and exchange of ideas among peers, fostering a vibrant community of young thinkers committed to sustainable development.

In conclusion, instilling critical thinking in students is paramount for addressing the complexities surrounding sustainable development. By employing innovative teaching methods, promoting interdisciplinary learning, and encouraging active participation, we can equip future leaders with the essential skills to navigate and resolve the pressing challenges posed by the SDGs. Through these efforts, we not only prepare students for the intricacies of sustainable development but also inspire their long-term engagement in creating a more equitable and sustainable world.

B. Metode

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on case studies from educational institutions implementing critical thinking programs aligned with SDGs. Data collection methods include:

1. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with educators and students.
2. Observations: Classroom observations to assess teaching practices and student interactions.

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3. Document Analysis: Review of curricula, lesson plans, and project outcomes.

Participants were selected from secondary schools and universities integrating SDGs into their syllabi. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and evaluate the effectiveness of critical thinking strategies in promoting SDG engagement.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The study revealed the following key findings:

a. Enhanced Problem-Solving Skills
Students exposed to critical thinking activities demonstrated improved abilities to identify and address issues related to SDGs, such as climate change and poverty.

b. Collaborative Learning Outcomes
Group projects encouraged teamwork and diverse perspectives, fostering holistic approaches to sustainability challenges.

c. Increased Awareness and Agency
Students reported higher levels of awareness about SDGs and felt empowered to act as change agents in their communities.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of experiential learning in enhancing engagement and retention of knowledge. Participants who engaged in hands-on projects, such as community clean-up initiatives and local sustainability workshops, exhibited a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding SDGs. This practical approach not only solidified theoretical concepts but also allowed students to witness the tangible impact of their efforts.

Interdisciplinary Integration: The findings also underscored the importance of integrating multiple disciplines in the exploration of sustainability topics. Students benefitted from incorporating knowledge from fields such as economics, environmental science, and social studies, which enriched their understanding and provided comprehensive solutions to challenges.

Long-term Commitment to Sustainability: The exposure to critical thinking and collaborative projects has instilled a sense of commitment among students. Many expressed intentions to pursue careers aligned with sustainable development, recognizing the urgency of these global issues and their role in addressing them.

Overall, the research demonstrates that fostering critical thinking and collaboration within educational frameworks serves not only to empower students but also to cultivate a generation ready to tackle the pressing challenges of our time in a meaningful and informed manner.

2. Discussion

The results underscore the importance of integrating critical thinking into education as a tool for SDG realization. Critical thinking enables students to approach problems systematically, consider ethical dimensions, and evaluate potential solutions critically.

Key pedagogical strategies include:

a. Inquiry-Based Learning

Encouraging questions and explorations related to SDG themes. What innovative approaches can we adopt to enhance sustainable energy access for all communities? How might we leverage technology to improve educational outcomes in underserved regions? In what ways can we foster collaboration between local and global stakeholders to combat climate change effectively? How do we envision the role of youth in advancing the agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment? Are there unique opportunities to integrate traditional knowledge with modern practices to promote sustainable agriculture? What steps can we take to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of clean water and sanitation?

Can we explore creative strategies to boost economic growth while safeguarding our planet's resources? What role do you think art and culture play in raising awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals? How can we empower marginalized communities to take charge of their own development in alignment with the SDGs? How can partnerships between governments, businesses, and civil society be strengthened to drive progress towards these critical global goals? Are there lessons we can learn from successful case studies that exemplify holistic approaches to sustainable development? How do personal actions contribute to the broader narrative of achieving the SDGs, and what can we collectively do to amplify our impact?

b. Problem-Based Learning

Engaging students in real-world problems requiring critical analysis. Engaging students in real-world problems requiring critical analysis not only fosters a deeper understanding of the subject matter but also cultivates essential skills that are invaluable in today's society. By presenting challenges that mimic those encountered in professional fields, educators can encourage learners to think critically, collaborate effectively, and develop innovative solutions.

Through project-based learning, students can explore issues like climate change, social justice, and economic inequality. This hands-on approach invites them to gather and evaluate data, consider multiple perspectives, and synthesize information to form reasoned conclusions. For instance, a project centered around sustainable energy solutions could empower students to research various technologies, conduct experiments, and ultimately propose actionable plans for reducing their community's carbon footprint.

Moreover, incorporating interdisciplinary tasks encourages students to draw connections across subjects, enhancing their overall perspective. A task that integrates science, mathematics, and social studies could challenge students to analyze the impact of urban development on biodiversity. As they wrestle with the

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nuances of this multifaceted issue, they not only gain academic knowledge but also learn to appreciate the complexities of real-life dilemmas.

Involving community stakeholders can further augment this learning experience. For example, students might collaborate with local businesses or non-profits to address specific needs within their community. This partnership not only lends authenticity to their work but also instills a sense of responsibility and civic engagement. Ultimately, the goal is to prepare students not merely for exams but for life beyond the classroom. By engaging them in real-world problems that require critical analysis, we can inspire a generation of thinkers, problem-solvers, and leaders who are equipped to navigate and contribute positively to an ever-changing world.

c. Project-Based Activities

Promoting hands-on experiences to apply theoretical knowledge not only enhances understanding but also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By immersing students in practical applications, they can bridge the gap between abstract concepts and real-world situations. This approach encourages exploration and experimentation, allowing learners to engage with the material in a meaningful way. Collaborative projects, simulations, and fieldwork can serve as valuable platforms for students to test hypotheses, analyze outcomes, and refine their techniques. Such dynamic environments cultivate a deeper appreciation for the subject matter and prepare learners to tackle challenges with confidence and creativity. Integrating these experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum ultimately enriches the educational experience, paving the way for lifelong learning and adaptability in an ever-evolving landscape.

These strategies not only support cognitive skill development but also nurture values such as empathy, responsibility, and sustainability awareness (Facione, 2015). As educational frameworks evolve, the integration of these values into learning experiences fosters an environment where students become not only critical thinkers but also conscientious citizens. By engaging in collaborative projects, they learn to appreciate diverse perspectives while honing their problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, incorporating real-world issues into the curriculum encourages students to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications. This approach cultivates a sense of agency, empowering learners to contribute positively to their communities and champion causes that promote equity and sustainability. Ultimately, such comprehensive educational strategies pave the way for a generation equipped with both intellectual rigor and a strong moral compass, ready to tackle the complex challenges of our world.

D. Conclusion

Instilling critical thinking skills in students is a transformative approach to empower them to address global challenges and contribute to SDG realization. This

study highlights the effectiveness of inquiry-based, problem-based, and project-based learning methodologies in fostering critical thinking and sustainability awareness. Future research should explore scalable models for integrating these strategies across diverse educational settings. Policymakers and educators are encouraged to prioritize critical thinking within curricula to sustain long-term contributions to global sustainability goals.

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