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Implementation of the Inquiry Learning Model in Improving Critical Thinking Skills of Grade VII Students of SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the planning, implementation process, and impact of the inquiry learning model in improving the critical thinking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa. The study is based on initial findings showing that students tend to be passive, less enthusiastic, and rely on memorization, indicating low learning motivation and creative thinking skills. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving Indonesian language teachers and seventh-grade students. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, with the researcher as the main instrument supported by observation and interview guidelines. The results show that the inquiry learning model effectively improves students' critical thinking skills, as seen in their ability to generate ideas, express opinions confidently, and produce original work. Supporting factors include teacher readiness, availability of learning media, and a conducive classroom environment. Therefore, the inquiry learning model is an effective strategy to enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes and outcomes.

Keywords: Implementation, Inquiry Learning Model, Improving, Critical Thinking Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Students' critical thinking skills in Indonesian language learning at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa show concerning issues. Based on pre-research observations conducted in November 2025, it was apparent that many seventh-grade students tended to be inactive in learning activities, lacked enthusiasm during discussions, and preferred note-taking and memorizing material rather than understanding it thoroughly. When given open-ended assignments or projects requiring creativity, students appeared confused and demonstrated a low ability to develop new ideas or solve problems creatively.

Signs of students' low critical thinking skills are evident in their

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minimal effort to engage in learning activities, their rapid loss of interest, and their lack of resilience in completing assignments.

Furthermore, students' creative thinking skills have not fully developed. They rarely ask in-depth questions, are reluctant to express their views, and tend to rely on a single answer without exploring alternatives. Indonesian language learning is flexible, dynamic, open, follows norms, and is highly context-dependent.

This problem is inseparable from the continued dominance of traditional classroom learning methods, particularly the lecture approach, which considers the teacher the primary source of information. This method tends to focus on memorization and doesn't provide opportunities for students to ask questions, discuss, or discover knowledge through their own experiences. As a result, students become passive and unmotivated to construct their own learning understanding. Meanwhile, in accordance with the objectives of the Independent Curriculum, Indonesian language learning should be designed contextually, involve participation, and focus on students to develop critical and creative thinking skills (Hasna, 2022:48).

According to Maulana (2023:1-8), in the constructivist theory proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky, learning is considered meaningful when students take an active role in constructing knowledge through direct experience and social interaction. This theory suggests that cognitive development will not proceed effectively if students only passively receive information. Similarly, Bandura, in his social-cognitive theory, explains that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling in active and dynamic social situations.

In the process of learning Indonesian in secondary schools, significant challenges remain in increasing student motivation and creativity. This language learning places too much emphasis on memorizing facts and concepts that have little relevance to everyday life, often being overlooked by students. This is evident in students' low interest in learning Indonesian, which ultimately dampens their enthusiasm for learning. Besides impacting student achievement in class, this condition also hinders the development of critical thinking skills within the subject. An education system that focuses on memorization typically limits students' creativity and prevents them from thinking independently and exploring new ideas.

As a solution to this problem, the inquiry learning model has emerged as a beneficial option for Indonesian language learning. This approach encourages students to question things, seek answers through exploration and observation, and draw conclusions from the learning outcomes they discover themselves (Indriwati et al., 2021: 1397). With this approach, students not only understand the Indonesian language material but also develop curiosity, the courage to ask questions, critical thinking skills, and creativity in problem-solving.

According to Anggraini et al. (2024: 1), the inquiry learning paradigm includes steps such as asking questions, presenting hypotheses, collecting data, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions. To effectively understand the learning process, students need to develop critical and analytical thinking skills at every stage. Through this approach, students learn how to collaborate and communicate.

Based on the aforementioned issues, this study aims to describe the planning process, implementation, and impact of the inquiry learning model in improving the critical thinking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the theoretical and practical aspects of developing relevant, motivating learning strategies that focus on the graduate profile dimensions that constitute the national education goals: faith and piety, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, independence, health, and communication.

RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

The author acknowledges that this is not the first research in the field of education. This literature review serves as a comparison to assess the strengths and weaknesses of previous research. Furthermore, previous studies also play a significant role in obtaining additional information related to the proposed research. The literature review used as initial references in conducting this research includes:

1. A thesis by Dina Aulia from the Graduate School of Economics Education, University of Indonesia, in 2019, entitled "The Application of Project-Based Learning and Inquiry Learning Methods to Critical Thinking Skills (Quasi-Experimental) in the Economics Subject of Cooperatives and the Concept of Business Entities in the Indonesian Economy at SMAN 8 Bandar Lampung." This study used a descriptive analytical approach, focusing on understanding the concepts of Project-Based Learning and Inquiry Learning methods formulated by experts to improve critical thinking skills. The results of this study indicate an overview of the concepts, procedures, steps, and indicators of Project-Based Learning and Inquiry Learning on critical thinking skills. Previous research focused on the analysis and application of two active learning methods to improve students' critical thinking skills in Economics learning, while the current research focuses on the implementation of the inquiry learning model to improve students' critical thinking skills.
2. An article by Rein Almadani et al. from the University of Mataram, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Department of PPKN, in 2023, entitled "The Impact of Implementing the Inquiry Learning Model in PPKN Learning on Students' Critical Thinking Skills." This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach, focusing on analyzing the impact of the inquiry learning model on developing critical thinking skills in Civics (PKn) in seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Labuapi. The results of this study indicate that the inquiry learning model is used in PPKN (Civics) learning for seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Labuapi. Its use involves several complicating and supporting variables, as well as stages of planning, implementation, and assessment. Previous research focused on analyzing the impact of the inquiry learning model on developing students' critical thinking skills in PPKn for seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Labuapi, while the current study focuses on implementing the inquiry learning model to enhance students' critical thinking skills.
3. Journal by Rai Kaino Sola from Lambung Mangkurat University, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Department of Chemistry Education, 2025, entitled "The Effect of the Inquiry Learning Method on Students'

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Critical Thinking Skills." This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, focusing on assessing the impact of inquiry learning on students' critical thinking skills during the learning process. The results of this study indicate There is a positive influence on the critical thinking skills of senior high school students after implementing the inquiry learning method. Furthermore, there is an increase in student learning outcomes and a positive response from students to inquiry-based learning. Previous research has focused on assessing the influence of the inquiry learning method on students' critical thinking skills in the learning process, while the current research focuses on implementing the inquiry learning model to improve students' critical thinking skills.

METHODS

The type of research used is a qualitative descriptive case study approach. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand complex situations and gain insight by providing detailed descriptions. According to Arianto (2024:40), descriptive research was applied because it aligns with the research objective, which is to factually demonstrate how question models are used in the classroom. The purpose of descriptive research is to present a picture or description of an existing phenomenon without interpretation or modification of variables.

The data in this study are qualitative. Prastowo (2020:204) explains that qualitative data consists of words, not numbers. There are various methods for collecting qualitative data, such as interviews, document analysis, and observation. In this study, data were collected directly from relevant sources, including school information found in various literature related to this research topic. The data analysis technique used in this study follows the method developed by Miles and Huberman. They are researchers who created a qualitative analysis technique often referred to as pattern analysis. Miles and Huberman developed an interactive analysis model, which was implemented during and after data collection and continued until the research was completed.

The data for this study were obtained from several sources. A seventh-grade Indonesian language teacher served as the primary informant regarding the application of the inquiry learning model. Seventh-grade students served as the primary subjects, directly experiencing the learning experience and serving as an important source of information regarding students' critical thinking skills. Furthermore, school documents served as valuable secondary data sources. Therefore, the data collected in this study is comprehensive and provides a complete picture of how the inquiry learning model can improve students' critical thinking skills in Indonesian.

Data analysis based on the Miles and Huberman model was used by the researcher in this study. In qualitative research, data analysis is conducted both during data collection and over a specific period. The researcher began analyzing the data as the interviews progressed, based on the answers provided by the informants. If the interview answers were insufficient, the researcher could ask additional questions or move on to the next question. The qualitative data analysis process is carried out continuously and interactively until sufficient data is obtained. The following are the stages of data analysis techniques according to Miles and Huberman: Data Collection, Data Reduction, Data Presentation, and Conclusion Drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION RESULTS

1. Inquiry Learning Implementation Planning

Lesson planning is the first step in any learning activity. This step serves as the basis for teachers to determine the learning objectives, materials, methods, and assessments to be used during the learning process. In Indonesian language learning in grade VII of SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa, teachers implemented the inquiry learning model in a structured and gradual manner. This process encompasses three essential elements: planning, implementation, and assessment.

Parts of the preliminary, core and closing activities can be seen through the learning plan in the table below.

Table 1 : Learning Planning for the Introduction

No	Activity
1.	The teacher greets the students.
2.	Before starting the lesson, the teacher and students pray together.
3.	The teacher checks student attendance and prepares the learning atmosphere.
4.	The teacher provides an apperception by reviewing the previous material and relating it to the topic to be taught, as well as asking students preliminary questions.
5.	The teacher displays a picture, and students will give their opinions about the picture.
6.	The teacher explains the learning objectives and the importance of the material in everyday life.

Table 2 : Learning planning is part of the core activities

No	Activity
1.	Syntax 1 (Basic Introduction/Material Delivery): Students listen to the teacher's explanation of news text analysis delivered through a PowerPoint presentation.
2.	Syntax 2 (Problem Formulation): Students are divided into groups of four. They are then tasked with formulating various problems related to news texts in their area of residence and identifying the elements and structure of the news text.
3	Syntax 3 (Hypothesis Formulation): Students are asked to formulate a tentative answer to the formulated problem.
4	Syntax 4 (Data Collection): Students are asked to leave the classroom and observe the environment around Kalama village.
5	Syntax 5 (Hypothesis Testing): Students compare their tentative answers with the data they collected in the field. They will then present their findings to the class in their respective groups in an observation report.
6	Syntax 6 (Evaluation and Conclusion): The teacher assesses the infographics they have created and provides feedback to each group. After that, the teacher concludes the lesson that has taken place.

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Table 3 : Closing lesson plan

No	Activity
1.	Students receive assistance from the teacher in summarizing the material they have learned by highlighting key points.
2.	The teacher asks students about anything they still don't understand.
3.	The teacher encourages students to reflect on each stage of the learning activity.
4.	The teacher rewards students who have contributed effectively to the learning process.
5.	The teacher reinforces the material taught.
6.	The teacher leads a prayer to close the lesson.
7.	The teacher closes the learning session with a greeting.

2. Inquiry Learning Implementation Process

Core learning activities play a crucial role in the overall learning plan. The implementation of Indonesian language learning for seventh-grade students at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa follows the steps of the inquiry learning model, which provides opportunities to enhance students' critical thinking skills. Based on interviews, observations, and lesson planning documents, the learning implementation is designed in three stages:

1)Preliminary activities

Preliminary activities are crucial for initiating a better learning process. Teachers strive to build an emotional connection with students, pique their interest in the lesson, and encourage their active participation during the activity. The following are the steps for preliminary learning activities: a) The teacher greets the students, before the lesson begins, b) The teacher and students pray together, led by the class representative. c) The teacher checks student attendance and begins to create a learning atmosphere. d) The teacher displays a picture, and students provide their opinions about the picture. e) The teacher conveyed the learning objectives and the benefits of the material learned for everyday life.

2)Core activities

Core learning activities are defined as the stages in which students interact with the subject matter, the teacher, and their peers. Of course, these core activities should be aligned with the module being used. Based on observations conducted on January 22, 2026, the learning activities consisted of several steps, including the following: a). Orientation, b) Formulating the Problem, c) Determining Hypotheses, d) Collecting Data, e) Hypothesis Testing, f) Conclusion.

3)Closing Activities

At the end of the lesson, the teacher provided a summary of the material covered that day. Then, the teacher asked if there was anything unclear about the lesson. The seventh-grade students responded by stating that they had understood the material.

The module requires teachers to reflect on the lesson, but in practice, no reflection was observed. To conclude the lesson, the teacher asked the class leader to lead a closing prayer and then closed the lesson with a greeting.

4)Evaluation

Evaluation in this learning process focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also encompasses students' affective and psychomotor aspects. In this case, teachers assess students' motivation through their engagement in discussions and direct observations. Furthermore, students' creative thinking is assessed based on the tasks they complete in the Student Worksheet (LKPD), which include the ability to formulate hypotheses, process information, and present research results in a structured manner. This assessment provides a comprehensive overview of the success of implementing the inquiry method in improving students' critical thinking skills in Indonesian language classes.

In the module, teachers are supposed to conduct test assessments as part of the cognitive evaluation. However, it appears that these test assessments were not carried out by the teachers. Furthermore, the module does not provide assessment tools or grade sheets for students.

3. Impact of Implementing Inquiry Learning

Observations conducted on January 24, 2026, showed that the implementation of the inquiry learning model in seventh-grade students at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa significantly improved students' critical thinking skills. With this approach, students were encouraged to directly observe their surroundings, such as rice fields and gardens. After conducting thorough field observations, they discussed their findings in groups, a crucial step in fostering the exchange of ideas and critical thinking. Students are considered to possess critical thinking skills if they meet certain criteria for critical thinking.

The first indicator showed that students could answer and ask questions relevant to the material. The majority of students were able to prepare reports on their observations based on the teacher's instructions in the Student Worksheet (LKPD). This was evident when students answered questions from the teacher, participated in discussions, and asked questions during the presentation of their observation reports.

The second indicator showed that students could convey ideas or opinions relevant to the material, both in writing and orally. Observations on January 24, 2026, showed that students were active in group discussions. They were able to convey ideas or thoughts when formulating hypotheses related to problems set by the teacher.

The third indicator demonstrates that students can create work both individually and in groups. Observations conducted on January 24, 2026, showed that most students actively participated in the group preparation of observation reports. This activity helped students learn to collaborate, share tasks, and take responsibility for producing quality work together.

The fourth indicator demonstrates that students can use their imagination to create a product. When compiling an observation report conducted on January 22, 2026, students successfully used their critical thinking skills to produce an engaging visual product. The fifth indicator shows that students can convey their work in detail. During the presentation, several seventh-grade students were able to explain their work in depth. They were able to describe how they created the work, explain their reports, and clearly connect them to the Indonesian language learning material, so that the audience could understand their work well. However, to achieve this, teachers need to reward students who successfully

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present to the class.

Based on observations, teacher interviews, and student responses, it can be concluded that the implementation of the inquiry learning model in grade VII of SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa significantly improved students' critical thinking skills and learning motivation. Students were actively involved in observing their surroundings, discussing in groups, asking and answering questions, and compiling observation reports according to teacher instructions. They were able to convey relevant ideas or opinions both in writing and orally, although some still felt a lack of confidence during presentations.

Furthermore, students learned to work collaboratively in groups, divide tasks, take responsibility, and use their imagination and creativity to produce engaging and meaningful work. Students' ability to explain their work in detail and relate it to the learning material also improved, primarily due to teacher support through feedback and rewards.

The hands-on, contextual, and interactive learning activities encouraged students to be more motivated, enthusiastic, and willing to participate actively. Thus, the learning process became lively, engaging, and effective. The inquiry learning model not only encouraged students to gather information but also trained them to think critically, collaborate, be creative, and express their thoughts logically and systematically.

DISCUSSION

1. Inquiry Learning Implementation Planning

The Indonesian language teacher designed the implementation of the inquiry learning model at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa by developing learning tools such as learning objectives, lesson plans, and student worksheets (LKPD) focused on inquiry learning. This planning took into account the students' conditions, the environment, and the current curriculum. Teachers designed learning activities that encouraged students to be active and independent in exploring social issues.

According to Lubis et al. (2024:7899), based on the constructivism theory proposed by Piaget, this planning facilitates the assimilation and accommodation processes in learning. This occurs because students connect new information with their existing schemas. Furthermore, Vygotsky emphasized the importance of learning planning, which must consider the social support or scaffolding provided by teachers to students, in accordance with their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

According to Octavina (2024:50-63), within the framework of educational sociology theory, this planning embodies the values of social interaction and collective responsibility, as explained in symbolic interactionism theory. Education is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but also the process of socializing values and social roles.

Based on the analysis data above, the researcher concluded that the planning for implementing the inquiry learning model in Indonesian language instruction at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa was carried out systematically, contextually, and based on strong educational theory. The planning focused not only on achieving academic goals but also took into account student characteristics, the learning environment, and its suitability to the applicable curriculum.

2. Inquiry Learning Implementation Process

The process of implementing the inquiry learning model is carried out in stages through six steps: orientation, problem formulation, hypothesis formulation, data collection, hypothesis testing, and conclusion. In this case, teachers use appropriate teaching materials and student worksheets related to students' daily lives. Learning activities involve group discussions, field observations, and presentations of the results. For example, when discussing the topic of economic activities, students are invited to observe buying and selling activities in a small shop or the activities of farmers in the fields. Based on these experiences, they are asked to generate questions, discuss in groups, and draw conclusions from their observations.

According to Giawa et al. (2023:61), an inquiry-based learning model oriented toward guidance can encourage students to be more active in asking questions, making predictions, and evaluating information for themselves. This learning approach makes the learning process more meaningful because students feel directly involved. Connecting learning to the real world can help students understand the material better because they can relate the learning to their surroundings. An example of this implementation can be seen at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa.

Saputro et al. (2021:339) explain this in accordance with Piaget's constructivism theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is formed through direct experience and exploration of the environment. Vygotsky also added that social interaction and teacher assistance are crucial in supporting students in reaching the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Suryana et al. (2022:80) state that, from a sociological perspective, this process is a type of learning based on symbolic interactionism theory. Through interaction and learning experiences, students create meaning from social knowledge. Functionalism theory is also important, as inquiry-based learning helps develop social skills necessary in society.

Hidayanti (2024:50) states that in this context, the role of the teacher is crucial. Teachers function as guides, not as sole instructors. They provide support when students encounter difficulties but also encourage students to try first. Discovery-focused learning can still take place even with limited facilities, as long as the teacher can provide adequate direction and the classroom environment supports exploration. In other words, the implementation of inquiry learning in this school is not merely theoretical, but is truly implemented, taking into account the students' characteristics and the school's circumstances. Teachers develop student worksheets (LKPD), utilize the surrounding environment, and provide opportunities for students to think independently or work in groups.

Based on the data analysis above, the researcher concluded that the implementation of the inquiry learning model at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa was implemented in stages and contextually through learning activities involving direct experience, social interaction, and teacher guidance as facilitators. This allows students to actively formulate problems, propose hypotheses, collect and analyze data, and draw conclusions. This process aligns with the constructivist theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, which emphasize the formation of knowledge through experience and social support. It is also supported by a sociological perspective that views learning as a process of creating meaning and developing social skills. Therefore, inquiry learning not only

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enhances conceptual understanding but also develops students' independence, critical thinking, and collaboration skills, in accordance with the characteristics and conditions of the school.

1. Impact of Implementing Inquiry Learning

Students' critical thinking skills developed, as evidenced by their ability to put forward ideas, create projects such as infographics and reports, and propose solutions to social problems. This demonstrates the success of the inquiry-based approach in fostering divergent and reflective thinking.

When asked to report on observations, students didn't simply copy from books or online sources. They actually wrote reports based on their experiences and conversations. This process involved analyzing, organizing ideas, and drawing conclusions, requiring collaboration and critical thinking. According to Wahyuni (2022:12), implementing the inquiry-based learning method can encourage students to be more creative because they are challenged to find and present information independently.

Sulfa et al. (2025:131) state that the inquiry-based learning model plays a significant role in shaping students' character to become more independent and responsible. In this process, students learn how to manage their time, structure arguments, and express their opinions, which are clearly beneficial for their future academic development. Zebua (2024:83-89) states that in the sociology of education, an active learning environment can foster creative thinking, based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Conversely, the functionalist perspective emphasizes the importance of creativity as a social resource for addressing challenges in today's society.

Based on the analytical data above, the researcher concluded that the implementation of an in-depth learning approach with an inquiry learning model effectively improves students' critical, creative, and reflective thinking skills. This is evident in students' ability to express ideas, compile reports based on real-life experiences, create works, and offer solutions to social problems in their environment. The inquiry learning process encourages students to learn independently, collaboratively, and responsibly, in line with Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes the importance of active interaction in constructing knowledge. Thus, the inquiry learning model not only positively impacts students' academic achievement but also contributes to character development and their readiness to face the challenges of future social life.

CONCLUSION

Based on research findings at SMPN Satap Kalama Mamasa, it can be concluded that:

1. Teachers plan the implementation of the inquiry learning model through the development of lesson plans, worksheets (LKPD), media, and assessment tools, taking into account student needs and learning objectives.
2. The implementation process takes place in six stages (orientation, problem identification, hypothesis, data collection, verification, conclusion), with the teacher acting as a facilitator, encouraging active student involvement and critical thinking.
3. The implementation of this model improves students' critical thinking skills, learning interest, participation in discussions and projects, and creativity in problem-solving and producing work, as evidenced by observations, interviews, and learning documentation.

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