Pedagogy p-ISSN: 2502-3802
Volume 10 Nomor 2 e-ISSN: 2502-3799

INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL MATHEMATICS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Abstrak

The persistently low mathematics learning outcomes at the elementary level remain a critical issue in basic education. Traditional teacher-centered instructional approaches often fail to foster students' conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills. This study aims to systematically analyze the effectiveness of the inquiry-based learning model in enhancing mathematics learning outcomes among elementary school students. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method was employed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant studies published between 2015 and 2025. Literature was sourced from Google Scholar using strict inclusion criteria. The results indicate that the inquiry-based learning model has a significant positive effect on students' mathematics achievement, particularly in improving conceptual understanding, problem-solving skills, and learning motivation. Variants of inquiry implementation—such as guided and open inquiry—were found to be effective in the context of elementary mathematics instruction. These findings highlight the importance of adopting inquiry-based learning as a pedagogical strategy to improve the quality of mathematics education at the primary level.

Kata Kunci: Inquiry-Based Learning, Learning Outcomes, Systematic Review

A. Preliminaries

Primary education plays a crucial role in laying the intellectual and character foundation of students. In an increasingly dynamic global context, mastering 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning has become an urgent necessity from an early age (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Mathematics, as a core subject in primary education, serves not only as a medium for learning numerical concepts but also as a platform for cultivating logical reasoning, precision, and systematic thinking. However, mathematics instruction at the primary level continues to face a range of complex challenges.

In various countries, including Indonesia, mathematics is often perceived as an abstract and difficult subject. This perception leads to low motivation and poor

academic performance among students (Kurniawan et al., 2020). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report has consistently shown that Indonesian students' mathematics competencies remain below the OECD average (OECD, 2019). These conditions highlight the urgent need for pedagogical innovation in primary mathematics instruction to ensure it becomes more meaningful, engaging, and effective.

One key contributing factor to students' underperformance is the dominance of traditional teaching approaches. Teacher-centered and lecture-based methods often render students passive and disengaged in the learning process (Suryani & Rizal, 2022). When students are not given the opportunity to explore concepts, ask questions, or engage in discussion, their conceptual understanding tends to be superficial and short-lived. This creates a significant barrier to mastering mathematics, which requires deep comprehension and application of abstract concepts.

To overcome these challenges, instructional approaches that promote student engagement and active participation are needed. Learning strategies that emphasize exploration, dialogue, and investigation have proven to be particularly relevant. One such approach is inquiry-based learning, which focuses on student-centered discovery and knowledge construction through authentic experiences (Pedaste et al., 2015). This model has been recognized for its potential to foster higher-order thinking skills that are essential in mathematics education.

Rooted in constructivist learning theory, inquiry-based learning encourages students to construct knowledge through active and reflective experiences. The process typically involves posing questions, designing investigations, collecting and analyzing data, and formulating conclusions (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). This structure allows students not only to recall facts but also to deeply understand and apply mathematical concepts in various contexts. In mathematics classrooms, inquiry-based learning has the potential to significantly enhance both conceptual understanding and problem-solving abilities.

Empirical studies have indicated that inquiry-based learning has a positive impact on students' mathematics learning outcomes at the primary level. For instance, Astutik and Suyadi (2023) found that guided inquiry effectively improved

students' comprehension of arithmetic and geometry. Additionally, this approach enhances students' learning motivation by providing them with autonomy and opportunities to express their ideas (Setiawan & Kartowagiran, 2022). Thus, inquiry-based learning influences not only cognitive outcomes but also affective engagement.

There are various forms of inquiry-based learning, including guided inquiry, open inquiry, and structured inquiry. Each type has its own characteristics and effectiveness. Guided inquiry, in particular, has been found more suitable for primary school students who still require support in developing investigatory strategies (Widodo & Jatmiko, 2021). As students' autonomy grows, teachers may gradually introduce more open-ended forms of inquiry. Choosing the right model based on students' readiness is critical for successful implementation.

Despite its potential, implementing inquiry-based learning is not without challenges. Teachers often face obstacles such as time constraints, lack of training, and insufficient availability of suitable instructional materials (Situmorang et al., 2021). Moreover, students may initially struggle with formulating questions or conducting investigations, especially in lower grades. Therefore, adequate support through teacher professional development and instructional resources is essential to ensure the model's effectiveness.

Although various studies have examined the general impact of inquiry-based learning, there is a notable lack of systematic reviews that specifically investigate its effectiveness in enhancing primary students' mathematics achievement, particularly over the last decade (2015–2025). Addressing this gap requires a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which can synthesize existing empirical findings while identifying current trends, challenges, and future prospects for the application of inquiry-based learning in mathematics instruction (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

Thus, the present study aims to systematically analyze the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning models in improving mathematics learning outcomes among primary school students. By employing the SLR methodology, this study seeks to identify relevant literature published between 2015 and 2025, examine the impact of various inquiry-based approaches, and provide practical recommendations for

teachers and policymakers. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more meaningful, student-centered, and conceptually robust mathematics instruction at the primary education level.

B. Research Method

This study employed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, a rigorous and transparent approach used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant research related to a specific research question. SLR aims to provide a comprehensive and unbiased overview of existing evidence on the topic (Kitchenham, 2004; Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). The methodology ensures reproducibility and minimizes bias through systematic search and selection processes (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). This approach is particularly suitable for educational research, where diverse studies and findings require integration to guide effective practices (Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). The procedures followed in this study include:

1. Formulation of Research Question

   How does the implementation of inquiry-based learning models improve mathematics learning outcomes among elementary school students?
2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
   a. Inclusion Criteria:
      1) Study Type: Peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings.
      2) Topic: Focus on the implementation of inquiry-based learning models in mathematics education.
      3) Target Population: Elementary school students.
      4) Outcome Variables: Reporting improvement in mathematics learning outcomes (e.g., conceptual understanding, problem-solving skills, test scores, learning motivation).
      5) Language: Publications in Indonesian or English.
      6) Publication Period: January 2015 to May 2025.
      7) Accessibility: Full-text available through Google Scholar.
   b. Exclusion *Criteria:*
      1) Studies that are not journal articles or conference proceedings.
      2) Studies that do not specifically address inquiry-based learning models in mathematics.

3) Studies targeting educational levels outside of elementary school (e.g., middle school, high school, university).
4) Studies not reporting student learning outcomes.
5) Publications outside the specified date range.
6) Abstracts or summaries without full-text access.

3. Literature Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted electronically using the Google Scholar database. Keywords in various combinations included:

1) "model pembelajaran inkuiri" AND "matematika SD" AND "hasil belajar"
2) "inquiry learning model" AND "elementary math" AND "learning outcomes"
3) "peningkatan hasil belajar matematika" AND "inkuiri" AND "sekolah dasar"
4) "effectiveness of inquiry-based learning" AND "primary mathematics"

4. Study Selection Process

The selection process was carried out in two stages:

1) Stage 1 (Title and Abstract Screening): All articles identified in the initial search were screened based on titles and abstracts to determine relevance according to the inclusion criteria.
2) Stage 2 (Full-Text Screening): Articles that passed the first stage were downloaded and read in full to confirm detailed eligibility. Studies not meeting criteria were excluded.

5. Data Extraction

Data extracted from each eligible study included:

1) Author(s) and publication year
2) Article title
3) Research methodology used (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, experimental, quasi-experimental)
4) Sample size and student characteristics
5) Research design
6) Implementation details of the inquiry-based learning model (variations, procedural steps)

7) Measured mathematics learning outcomes

6. Data Synthesis and Analysis

Extracted data were narratively synthesized to identify patterns, trends, and key findings regarding the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning models. The analysis also encompassed identification of factors influencing successful implementation, challenges encountered, and implications for educational practice and future research.

C. Result and Discussion

Bagian ini menyajikan hasil penelitian. Hasil penelitian dapat dilengkapi dengan tabel, grafik (gambar), dan/atau bagan. Pembahasan penelitian memaparkan hasil pengolahan data, menginterpretasikan penemuan secara logis, mengaitkan dengan sumber rujukan yang relevan.

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Summary of Research Findings
1	Kurniawan & Prasetyo (2024)	This study demonstrated that the inquiry learning model effectively enhanced critical thinking and collaboration skills in elementary math learning. Students showed increased engagement and problem-solving abilities.
2	Oliveira & Silva (2024)	The research highlighted the positive impact of digital inquiry-based learning on student engagement and achievement in elementary mathematics classrooms, emphasizing technology integration benefits.
3	Hassan & Ali (2022)	Inquiry-based learning significantly improved student motivation and mathematics achievement in Egyptian primary schools, with notable gains in conceptual understanding and attitude towards math.
4	Kim & Park (2022)	Guided inquiry learning was shown to effectively develop students' critical thinking skills, which are essential for solving complex mathematical problems in elementary education.
5	Dewi & Putra (2022)	The study confirmed the effectiveness of inquiry learning models in enhancing problem-solving skills among elementary students in mathematics, leading to measurable improvements in test scores and conceptual grasp.
6	Nguyen & Tran (2023)	Inquiry learning positively influenced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities among Vietnamese elementary students, fostering deeper mathematical understanding and student autonomy.
7	Lestari (2020)	Experimental research found that students taught through inquiry learning scored significantly higher in mathematical problem-solving compared to the control group, indicating the method's effectiveness.
8	Safitri & Lestari (2020)	Inquiry learning was associated with increased student confidence and improved mathematics achievement in elementary students, reinforcing the motivational benefits of active learning strategies.
9	Arifin & Sari (2021)	This research revealed that guided inquiry learning improved students' mathematical concept comprehension and learning activities, fostering more active classroom participation.

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Summary of Research Findings
10	Martinez & Garcia (2021)	The study showed the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning in elementary math education in Mexico, reporting improvements in student problem-solving skills and conceptual understanding.
11	Sari & Budi (2019)	Classroom action research indicated a gradual improvement in students' geometry concept understanding through inquiry learning, with increased student questioning and collaborative discussion.
12	Pratama & Wijaya (2017)	Positive correlations were found between learning motivation and academic achievement; inquiry learning increased motivation, which contributed to enhanced cognitive learning outcomes.
13	Hidayati & Wulandari (2023)	Free inquiry learning positively affected motivation and mathematics test scores in elementary students, encouraging learner autonomy and self-regulated learning behaviors.
14	Nuraini & Setiawan (2018)	The inquiry learning model led to a 25% average increase in math learning outcomes, with students displaying higher enthusiasm and better ability to identify properties of geometric shapes.
15	Lee & Choi (2020)	Inquiry-based learning improved problem-solving skills and fostered positive attitudes towards mathematics among Korean elementary students, contributing to higher academic engagement.
16	Dewi, Wulandari & Rahman (2021)	Inquiry-based learning enhanced mathematical reasoning skills and student interaction in elementary classrooms, supporting more meaningful and collaborative learning processes.
17	Fitria & Sari (2022)	The application of inquiry learning increased student creativity and conceptual mastery in elementary mathematics, showing statistically significant differences compared to traditional methods.
18	Hasanah & Putri (2023)	Inquiry learning models fostered better problem-solving performance and higher student motivation in elementary mathematics, promoting deeper conceptual understanding.
19	Indrawati & Rini (2021)	Inquiry learning was effective in improving student engagement and mathematics achievement through active experimentation and group discussions.
20	Nuraini & Setiawan (2018)	The inquiry learning model increased student enthusiasm and ability to identify flat shape properties, with a reported 25% improvement in math learning outcomes.

Based on the summary of research findings presented in Table 1, it is evident that the vast majority of studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 consistently demonstrate the positive impact of the inquiry-based learning model on improving mathematics learning outcomes among elementary school students. Across various studies, participants met the key components of inquiry learning implementation, which contributed to significant gains in conceptual understanding, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking skills, and learning motivation. These findings align well with the principles of constructivism, where students actively construct knowledge through exploration and discovery rather than passively receiving information (Bruner, 1961; Fosnot, 2013).

The observed improvements span multiple dimensions of mathematical competence. For instance, studies by Kim and Park (2022) and Hassan and Ali (2022) underscore the effectiveness of guided inquiry in developing students' critical thinking skills, which are essential prerequisites for solving complex mathematical problems. Similarly, research by Nuraini and Setiawan (2018) shows notable increases in students' ability to identify geometric properties through active measurement and classification tasks, reflecting deeper conceptual mastery. Moreover, motivation and engagement levels consistently rise when students are involved in authentic, relevant inquiry activities, supporting findings by Lestari and Indriani (2020) that highlight increased student enthusiasm as a key driver for improved academic performance.

The flexibility of the inquiry model, including variations such as guided and free inquiry, further supports its adaptability to different grade levels and student readiness. Guided inquiry, with its structured scaffolding, proves particularly suitable for lower elementary students or those new to inquiry processes, while free inquiry promotes greater autonomy and creativity among older or more advanced students (Hassan & Ali, 2022; Nguyen & Tran, 2021). This gradation emphasizes the necessity for educators to carefully tailor inquiry approaches based on students' developmental stages and the complexity of the learning material.

Teacher facilitation remains a crucial factor in the successful implementation of inquiry-based learning. Teachers act not merely as content deliverers but as facilitators and guides who design stimulating questions, provide adequate resources, and foster supportive learning environments conducive to exploration and dialogue (Wilson et al., 2021). Challenges such as time management, preparation of teaching aids, and handling unpredictable student inquiries highlight the need for comprehensive professional development focused on both the philosophy and practical execution of inquiry methods.

Furthermore, the benefits of inquiry learning extend beyond cognitive outcomes to include essential 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, and adaptive problem-solving (OECD, 2020). These competencies are increasingly vital in a rapidly changing world and underscore the broader educational value of inquiry-based mathematics instruction. Thus, integrating

inquiry learning in elementary mathematics not only elevates test scores but also prepares students to become lifelong learners who think critically and adapt effectively to future challenges.

In summary, the systematic review of recent literature provides strong evidence supporting inquiry-based learning as an effective pedagogical approach in elementary mathematics education. The model's emphasis on active student engagement, scaffolded autonomy, and critical reflection corresponds well with contemporary educational goals, making it a valuable strategy for improving both academic outcomes and essential life skills.

D. Conclusion

Based on a systematic literature review of studies published between 2015 and 2025, it can be concluded that the implementation of the inquiry-based learning model is a highly effective strategy to improve mathematics learning outcomes among elementary school students. This model consistently shows positive impacts on enhancing students' understanding of mathematical concepts, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking skills, as well as increasing student motivation and engagement in learning.

The success of the inquiry-based learning model heavily depends on appropriate adaptation to the students' context and the subject matter, with adjustments between guided inquiry and free inquiry approaches. The role of the teacher as a skilled facilitator who stimulates questioning and guides the students' discovery process is also a crucial factor in achieving optimal results.

Practically, these findings provide strong recommendations for educators, curriculum policymakers, and instructional material developers to integrate inquiry-based learning into elementary mathematics teaching. It is advised that teacher training and support focus on mastering inquiry techniques and classroom management that fosters active exploration and discussion. Additionally, the development of relevant learning resources and teaching aids should be enhanced to support effective inquiry implementation. With proper application, the quality of mathematics education is expected to improve, producing students who not only

master concepts but also develop higher-order thinking skills essential for the digital era.

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