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Development of Project-Based Short Story Reading Module to Enhance 21st Century Skills of Junior High School Learners

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to develop a project-based short story reading module to improve 21st-century skills in junior high school students. In the Merdeka Curriculum, students are required to master the 4Cs—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—through active and meaningful learning. Short stories were chosen because of their simple structure, appeal, and ability to foster analytical skills and moral understanding. The project-based approach encourages students to engage in collaborative activities, problem solving, and creative work. The research used the Research and Development (R&D) method with the ADDIE model. Data was obtained through pre-tests and post-tests as well as interviews with teachers and students. Expert validation of the material, language, media, and cultural aspects showed an average suitability of 93.98% (very suitable). Limited trials with 60 students showed a significant increase in 4C skills, especially collaboration and communication. Student responses showed an average of 87.5%, indicating that the module was easy to understand, increased interest in reading, and fostered confidence in presentations. Overall, this project-based short story reading module proved to be valid, practical, and effective in supporting the development of 21st-century skills and creating more engaging and meaningful reading learning.

1. Introduction

The focus of education in the Independent Curriculum Era, shifts to developing 21st century skills which include creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. 21st century skills help learners adapt to these changes, and prepare them to face future challenges, both in the academic world and the world of work. With critical thinking skills and creativity, learners are able to find innovative solutions to problems they face in the real world. To be able to think critically, learners must be familiar with challenges, or with problems that they must solve with the right solution.

Printed modules are a form of independent teaching material that is systematically arranged in the form of books or printed sheets. This module is designed so that students can learn independently, gradually, and according to their own learning pace, either with or without teacher assistance, (Situmorang, 2023). Printed modules usually contain learning instructions, material descriptions, exercises, tasks, and evaluations that allow students to understand and master certain competencies thoroughly. Maulidah, (2024) who developed social learning theory, read fables. Fables, including short stories, stimulate learners' imagination and allow them to "experience" different lives, events, and places.

Short stories often present conflicts or problems that require readers to analyze situations and find solutions. Tanjung, (2019) states that reading short stories has an important role in education because it provides many benefits that support the development of students' cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Yuliana (2015) states that reading short stories helps learners to develop critical thinking skills because the concise story structure requires readers to quickly understand the context, characters, and themes.

The simple structure of short stories allows learners of different reading levels to understand the text more easily and focus on the meaning, language, and morals of the story (Hadian, 2018). According to Widayati (2020) reading literature, including short stories, plays an important role in developing a sense of empathy because it invites readers to see the world from the point of view of different characters. According to Khulsum (2018), short stories also have practical advantages as they can be read in a short period of time.

Project-based learning is a learning approach that focuses on engaging learners in complex, collaborative and challenging projects, (Ibrahim, 2024). According to Trianasari, (2024) one of the pioneers of project-based learning, learning should focus on real experiences that are relevant to the lives of learners. Sarumaha (2018) argues that effective learning occurs through a cycle of direct experience, reflection, and action. Anjeliani (2024), says that project-based learning involves sourcing information from various media, including scientific articles, books, magazines, or even interviews.Erlia, (2024), states that cooperation in small groups improves motivation and learning outcomes. Project-based learning in group work is an important element, as projects often involve multiple roles and responsibilities that must be shared between members of the learning group. Project-based learning can be summarized as an approach that actively involves learners in projects that are meaningful and relevant to the real world (Dianti, 2023).

According to Wijaya (2016) 21st Century skills are a set of abilities that are considered important for success in the world of work and life in the modern era marked by rapid technological development, globalization, and economic change. The 21st Century Skills component is grouped into three main categories, which include learning and innovation skills, information and technology literacy skills, and life and career skills (Muhali, 2019).

In accordance with previous research written by Irfana, (2024) The results showed that the application of PBL significantly increased students' learning motivation and the ability of creative thinking skills and creativity of students. In line with the results of Hidayati, (2018) mentioned that short stories can also be a very effective tool for improving learners' critical and reflective thinking skills, which are important aspects of 21st century skills. From these previous studies, it is known that the similarities that can be seen are the results of research in improving 21st century skills. The approach used in learning is the difference in the research that the researcher will conduct, including the expected skills, especially collaboration and communication skills.

This research aims to develop a project-based short story reading module that can improve 21st century skills in junior high school students. Based on the experts' opinions above, reading short stories in education is very important because it helps learners improve their communication and collaboration skills. Through short stories, learners can also experience more enjoyable and meaningful learning, which overall supports their intellectual and emotional development. Utilizing short stories in various disciplines allows learners to better understand complex concepts and engage in rich and reflective discussions.

2. Methodology

This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method focuses on collecting and analyzing data in the form of numbers such as pretests and posttests. The qualitative method focuses on student and teacher responses after using the developed module in the learning process. The data was collected in the form of student and teacher responses to the development of the Project-Based Short Story Reading module to Improve 21st Century Skills of Junior High School Learners. Data obtained from the results of student and teacher interviews. This study uses a research and development (R&D) approach with the ADDIE model, so that the data analysis technique is adjusted to the type of data collected at each stage of development. can be seen in Figure 1.

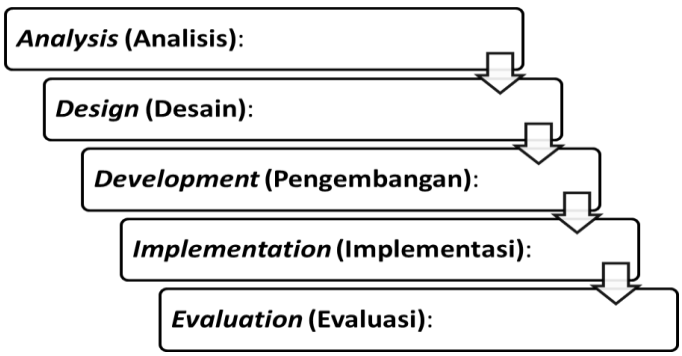

Figure 1. ADDIE Development Model

This research uses the Research and Development (R&D) method, which is a research method that aims to develop new learning products or models and then test

their effectiveness. The model used for the R&D method in this study is the ADDIE development model. Sutisna (2020) said that data analysis is a part that must be done by a researcher in completing his research project. There are two types of data analysis that are generally used in the research process, namely qualitative data analysis and quantitative data analysis.

The number of students in each class is 30 students, 180 people from SMP 11 Mandau, 300 people from SMP 10 Mandau. The total of 480 students can be seen in the table below. According to Suriani (2023), population is the entire amount consisting of objects or subjects that have certain characteristics and qualities set by researchers to be studied and conclusions drawn.

Tabel 2. Population

Grade IX SMP Negeri 11 Mandau	**Number of students SMPN 11 Mandau**	**Grade IX SMP Negeri 10 Mandau**	**Number of students SMPN 10 Mandau**
Class IX. 1	30	Class IX.A	30
Class IX. 2	30	Class IX.B	30
Class IX. 3	30	Class IX.C	30
Class IX. 4	30	Class IX.D	30
Class IX. 5	30	Class IX.E	30
Class IX. 6	30	Class IX.F	30
-		Class IX.G	30
-		Class IX.H	30
-		Class IX.J	30
-		Class IX.K	30
Total Students	**180 Students**	**Total Students**	**300 Students**
	Total Overall Population		**480 Students**

Based on the population, the researcher used the Purposive Sampling technique. Questionnaire Analysis Technique Students' responses to the module using descriptive statistical analysis techniques can be seen in the table below.

Table 3. Student Response Questionnaire Instrument to the Module

No.	**Statement**	**SS**	**S**	**TS**	**STS**
1	This module made me more interested in reading short stories.				
2	This module helped me think critically about the content of the story.				
3	I learned more by making projects than just reading.				
4	This module encouraged me to work well in groups.				
5	I felt more confident presenting my project results.				

The results of the validation test on the developed module can be described in several sentences (Arikunto, 2009). Input from the validator who validated the module shows the effectiveness of the developed module. The following is the scale used as the assessment criteria for the developed module: 1 = Very Inappropriate, 2 = Inappropriate, 3 = Quite Appropriate, 4 = Appropriate, 5 = Very Appropriate. Sutisna (2020) said that data analysis is a part that must be done by a researcher in completing his research project.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis

The results of observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers and learners show that learning to read short stories is still dominated by conventional teacher-centered methods. Reading activities are considered monotonous and do not provide space for learners to develop 21st century skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. To find out the needs of teachers and learners for the development of this short story reading module, researchers asked several questions to teachers and learners through interview questionnaires about the experience of teaching and learning to read short stories. Questions were presented relating to the conditions of the learning process of reading short stories, project-based activities in learning to read short stories, as well as statements that describe 21st century skills, especially collaboration and communication in learning to read short stories. Researchers also asked for suggestions and opinions from students, so that they were more creative and in groups in learning.

Design

Data collection was conducted through learner and teacher needs analysis, as well as literature study related to project-based learning and 21st century skills. It was found that students need learning media that is interesting, contextual, and challenging. Teachers as one of the learning resources expressed difficulty in providing an understanding of short story material, due to the lack of facilities and infrastructure available at school. Lack of media availability in the form of varied story books based on Malay culture in the school library. Students are forced to provide their own by buying or borrowing from their friends interesting storybooks that they can use as a learning resource for reading short stories at school. Lack of socialization of project-based assignments to students, resulting in monotonous learning. Creating an anthology of short stories is an example of project-based learning in learning to read short stories that can improve 21st century skills, especially collaboration and communication.

Development

The results of the development at this stage produced a product in the form of a project-based short story reading teaching module. This module consists of 4 main learning activities:

a. Reading Activity: Reading and analyzing 3 selected short stories with an approach to character analysis, plot, setting, and moral values.
b. Critical Discussion Activity: Students discuss social issues from the story and relate them to the context of their lives.
c. Collaborative Project Activity: Each group creates a project product such as a video review, digital poster, or literary podcast.
d. Reflection and Presentation: Students reflect on the learning process and present their projects.

The designed module was validated by 8 expert validators. The aspects validated were aspects of material, language, culture and media. Each aspect was assessed by 2 expert validators. The following is a table of expert validators for the Development of a Project-Based Short Story Reading Module to Improve 21st Century Skills for Junior High School Students. The completed module was designed according to the needs of teachers and students, validated to test its feasibility. The following are the results of the validation recapitulation that has been carried out by the validator for the development of project-based short story reading modules to improve 21st century skills in junior high school students.

Table 4. Results of the Recapitulation of Material Validation

Language Aspects	Validator I		Validator II	
Statement	Score	Average	Score	Average
P1	5		5	
P2	5		4	
P3	5	97,14	5	97,14
P4	5		5	
P5	5		5	
P6	4		5	
P7	5		5	
	Category	Very Worthy	Category	Very Worthy

The use of language and learning steps need to be improved so that the module material can be understood well. Evaluation aspects must be added to measure students' understanding of the material presented. Thus, the author added an evaluation sheet to the developed module. The average value of the validation results of the two material expert validators showed a figure of 97.14% with a feasible category. The module can be used with minor revisions. The following is the evaluation sheet in the module.

Table 5. Recapitulation of Language Validation Results

Language Aspects	Validator I		Validator II	
Statement	Score	Average	Score	Average
P1	5		5	
P2	5		5	
P3	5	94,28	5	97,14
P4	4		5	
P5	4		4	
P6	5		5	
P7	5		5	
	Category	Very Worthy	Category	Very Worthy

Overall, the use of language in the developed module is classified as communicative and easily understood by students. However, further development is still needed by adding relevant contextual examples to clarify the material and support understanding. In addition, the use of punctuation in the module needs to be revised so that it is in accordance with the applicable linguistic rules, especially in terms of

the placement of periods, commas, and the use of capital letters. This improvement is important to improve the readability and accuracy of information in the module.

Table 6. Recapitulation of Media Validation Results

Language Aspects	Validator I		Validator II	
Statement	Score	Average	Score	Average
P1	5		4	
P2	4		4	
P3	5	90,66	4	88
P4	4		4	
P5	4		4	
P6	5		5	
P7	5		5	
P8	4		4	
P9	5		5	
P10	5		5	
P11	4		4	
P12	4		4	
P13	5		5	
P14	4		4	
P15	5		5	
	Category	Very Worthy	Category	Very Worthy

In general, the learning media developed has been assessed as good and suitable for use in field trials. However, the validators gave some important notes that need to be considered in order to improve the quality of the media display. They agreed that the layout and visual appearance aspects still need to be improved to be more aesthetically appealing and support the readability of the material. One of the main suggestions made was the addition of interesting and harmonious coloring elements, so as to increase the interest and focus of students when using the media. With improvements in this visual aspect, it is hoped that the media will not only be informative, but also fun to use in the learning process. Researchers also made improvements to the module layout based on feedback from both media validators. The suggestions given included aspects of readability, design consistency, and placement of visual elements to make it more attractive and easily understood by students. After the revision, the module was declared suitable for use in the learning process because it had met the eligibility standards with only minor improvements.

Figure 1. Module Display Before and After Revision

These adjustments are expected to increase the effectiveness of material delivery and comfort in use. The following diagram presents the results of the recapitulation of the validation of cultural aspects which are an important part in the preparation of this module.

Table 7. Results of Culture Validation Recapitulation

Language Aspects	Validator I		Validator II	
Statement	Score	Average	Statement	Score
P1	5		5	
P2	5		4	
P3	4	92,5	4	95
P4	4		5	
P5	5		5	
P6	4		5	
P7	5		5	
P8	5		5	
	Category	Very Worthy	Category	Very Worthy

Modules that have been validated and deemed suitable for use are then produced and tested in the classroom. The development process involves creating teaching materials in the form of module books and other supporting media. Once the modules are complete, limited trials are conducted in the classroom to evaluate their suitability and effectiveness in supporting the learning of short stories.

Table 8. Module Validation Recapitulation Results

Validator	Assessed Aspect	Score (%)	Criteria
Material Expert	Relevant, collaboration, communication, appropriateness, easy and challenging	97,14	Very Worthy
Language Expert	Clarity, appropriateness, easy, appropriate, simplicity, use of terms, effectiveness.	95,71	Very Worthy
Media Expert	Clarity, appropriateness, easy, appropriate, simplicity, use of terms, effectiveness.	89,33	Decent
Cultural Expert	Diversity, relevant, traditional, project learning, regional culture, character building.	93,75	Very Worthy
Average		**93,98**	**Very Worthy**

The validation results showed that the module was included in the “feasible” category for use in learning, with an average overall validation score of 93.98%. The module was tested on 30 students of class IX SMP Negeri 11 Mandau and 30 students of class IX SMP Negeri 10 Mandau, for 3 meetings (3x120 minutes). Assessment of 21st century skills was conducted using the 4C skills observation sheet and learner response questionnaire. Based on the observation results, there was a significant increase in the four 4C skills after the students learned to read short stories using specific actions. Collaboration and communication skills showed the highest improvement, followed by critical thinking and creativity. The results of the limited trial conducted on 60 junior high school students consisting of 2 experimental classes showed that the use of modules had a positive impact on 21st century skills. The results of observations and responses from students and teachers

showed that students were more enthusiastic, able to convey ideas more confidently, and able to work well in teams in table 9.

Table 9. Recapitulation of 4C Skills Observation Results Before and After Action

No	4C Skills	Observed Indicator	Number of learners showing the indicator (before)	Percentage (%)	Number of learners showing the indicator (After)	Percentage (%)
1	Critical Thinking	-Able to identify conflicts in short stories	42 learners	35%	83 learners	69,16%
2	Creativity	- Give logical reasons for the character's actions	36 learners	30%	70 learners	58,33%
3	Collaboration	- Put forward alternative ending ideas	48 learners	40%	90 learners	75%
4	Communication	- Arrange settings and characters from new perspectives	42 learners	35%	94 learners	78,33%

The learner response questionnaire was given to the experimental class, the class that was given the action, using the module developed by the researcher. The number of students in the experimental class is 60 people consisting of 2 classes, each class totaling 30 people. The following is a recapitulation of students' responses to the module developed.

Table 10. Recapitulation of the Results of the Recapitulation of Learners' Response to the Developed Module

No.	Statement	Percentage
1	This short story reading module is easy for me to understand.	90%
2	I became more interested in reading short stories because there are project activities in this module.	85%
3	My involvement in the project made me more confident in public speaking.	80%
4	I liked the group activities and project presentations in this module.	95%
	Average	**87,5%**

The table above shows that 54 students easily understood the developed module. As many as 51 students out of 60 were interested in using the module in learning. Generally, students feel confident to speak in public after learning to read short stories based on projects. With an average value of 87.5%, it can be concluded that the project-based short story reading module is categorized as Very Eligible according to student responses. The module is assessed:

a. Easy to understand by students,

b. Increases interest in reading through project-based activities,

c. Encourages confidence in speaking through active involvement,

d. Students like the collaboration and presentation aspects of the project.

This shows that the module is not only effective in terms of content, but is also liked and relevant to the needs and characteristics of junior high school students in developing 21st century skills. Based on the results of validation and limited trials, this module has proven to be feasible and effective in improving 21st century skills. The structure and form of the project-based module development that was developed were specifically designed to encourage mastery of 21st century skills, namely critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. This module emphasizes active learning processes through text exploration, problem solving, teamwork, and project presentations.

At this stage, students are trained to develop critical and analytical thinking skills through reading and analyzing short stories. The cognitive aspect includes the process of understanding the content of the story, identifying intrinsic elements, namely: theme, characters, plot, setting, point of view, and morals, and interpreting messages or values implied in the story. Students are also invited to analyze conflict, characterization of characters, language style, and the relevance of the story to everyday life. Through this activity, students do not only read passively, but think actively and reflectively, which strengthens advanced reading literacy skills and higher order thinking skills (HOTS), such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Discussion

The results showed that the development of a project-based short story reading module can be an innovative solution to improve 21st century skills in junior high school students. First, in terms of content feasibility, the module has met the demands of the curriculum and the needs of students. The selected short stories not only contain literary aesthetic values, but also contain moral and social values that encourage critical thinking. Second, the project-based learning model in the module provides space for learners to be actively involved in the learning process. This approach is in line with constructivistic theory which emphasizes that knowledge is built through real experience. Third, the module implementation results show an increase in 21st century skills, which is shown through the active involvement of learners in discussion activities, problem solving, and project presentations. 21st century learning should include the competencies of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication. Thus, the developed module is not only feasible in terms of content and appearance, but also effective in improving 21st century skills in learners through meaningful reading activities and creative projects.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results, the project-based short story reading module developed with the ADDIE model proved to be very feasible based on expert validation. The module proved effective in improving learners' 21st century skills (4Cs), with a significant increase in the aspects of critical thinking and collaboration and the module also received very positive responses from learners, especially in the aspects of engagement, text comprehension, and creativity development.

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