



Original Article

Meaningful History Learning through the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Approach Based on Otanaha Fortress

Ismaul Fitroh^{1*}, Moh. Imron Rosidi²

^{1,2}Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia

Correspondence Author: ismaulfitroh@ung.ac.id[✉]

Abstract:

History education plays an important role in building historical awareness, cultural identity, and character among students. However, history teaching practices in schools are still dominated by memorisation of facts and chronology, making them less meaningful and contextual. An approach to learning is needed that can relate historical material to the real lives of students. The Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach is a relevant alternative, especially through the use of local historical sites. This study aims to examine meaningful history learning through the CTL approach based on the Otanaha Fort as a source of local history learning. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method of articles and books published between 2017 and 2025 that are relevant to history learning, CTL, and the utilisation of historical sites. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. The results of the study indicate that the application of CTL based on Otanaha Fort is capable of creating contextual and meaningful history learning through authentic learning experiences. The utilisation of local historical sites also strengthens historical understanding, instils local wisdom values, and builds the identity and character of students.

Keywords: Meaningful History Learning, Contextual Teaching and Learning, Otanaha Fortress.

Introduction

History education plays a very important role in the education system, particularly in building historical awareness, cultural identity, and character among students. History not only serves as a means of learning about past events, but also as a medium for reflection to understand the dynamics of human life and society. Through history education, students are expected to be able to learn from past experiences in order to face the challenges of present and future life (Lubis, 2025). However, this ideal goal has not been fully achieved in the practice of history education in schools.

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One of the main problems in history learning is the tendency for learning to still be oriented towards memorising facts, figures, and the chronology of events ([Januardi & Superman, 2024](#); [Muis et al., 2023](#)). Learning is often presented in a textual and abstract manner, so that students are only required to remember information without being invited to understand the meaning and relevance of history in real life. This condition causes history to be perceived as a boring, difficult subject that has no direct connection to the lives of students. As a result, history learning is less able to foster historical awareness and reflective attitudes in students.

To overcome these problems, a learning approach is needed that can link historical material to the real-life context of students. The Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach is one relevant alternative that can be applied in history learning. CTL emphasises a learning process that connects subject matter with the experiences, environment and social reality of students ([Hasudungan, 2022](#)). Through this approach, students do not only receive knowledge passively, but build understanding through the process of connecting, experiencing, and reflecting on learning in a meaningful context. The CTL approach in history learning allows students to understand that history is not just a story of the past that is separate from their lives. Instead, history is seen as a process that shapes social, cultural, and value conditions that are still felt today. This is in line with research ([Muis et al., 2023](#)) which states that contextual learning can help learners study past history with real situations around them. Not only that, linking the teaching and learning process at school with everyday life will make learning more meaningful and stimulate higher-order thinking processes ([Gunawan & Daulay, 2024](#)). In addition, it turns out that the application of the CTL approach is effective in improving student achievement in madrasahs ([Dewi et al., 2024](#)).

One concrete form of applying the CTL approach in history learning is through the use of local historical sites as learning resources. Historical sites provide authentic learning experiences that allow students to interact directly with relics of the past ([Mursidi & Soetopo, 2019](#)). Through observation, discussion, and reflection on historical sites, students can build a more contextual and realistic understanding of history. The use of local history also strengthens the connection between classroom learning and the social and cultural environment of students. In the context of Gorontalo's local history, Otanaha Fort is one of the historical sites that has great potential as a source of historical learning. Otanaha Fort is a historical relic that represents the political, defence, and social dynamics of Gorontalo society in the past. The existence of this fort not only has historical value, but also contains values of struggle, unity, resilience, and local wisdom that are important to instil in students ([Sunarti et al., 2022](#)).

Based on previous research, there has been no study on the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach based on Benteng Otanaha that specifically examines the use of this local historical site as a source of meaningful historical learning. Existing studies generally still focus on the general application of CTL or the use of historical sites without being systematically linked to a contextual learning approach based on local wisdom. Therefore, this research is important to fill this gap. Research on the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach based on Otanaha Fort is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of a contextual and local wisdom-based history learning model, as well as practically to teachers in utilising local historical sites as a source of meaningful learning.

Methods

This study used a qualitative approach with a literature study method to examine meaningful history learning through the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach based on Benteng Otanaha. The literature study was conducted through a series of data collection activities from various relevant sources, followed by a process of reading, recording, and processing information as research analysis material ([Supriyadi, 2016](#)). The data sources included scientific articles and books published between 2017 and 2025 related to history learning, the CTL approach, and the use of local historical sites as learning resources. The data was obtained through topic mapping using various sources, such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, books, and scientific journals. The analysis technique used was content analysis to obtain a valid and reliable understanding of concepts, findings, and ideas relevant to meaningful history learning based on local wisdom ([Wimmer & Dominick, 2006](#)). To ensure data accuracy, the researchers reviewed the selected sources so that the research results were free from misinformation.

Results

1. The Concept of Meaningful History Learning in the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Approach

Meaningful learning is one of the important concepts in learning theory proposed by David Ausubel, an educational psychologist who paid great attention to how knowledge is understood and stored by learners. Ausubel emphasised that the most decisive factor in the learning process is what learners already know before receiving new knowledge. According to Ausubel, learning will be meaningful if new information or concepts are linked to the knowledge that students already have. His famous statement, 'The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows,' emphasises that students' prior knowledge is the main foundation in the learning process ([Baharuddin, 2020](#)). Therefore, in meaningful learning, students do not only passively receive information from teachers, but also play an active role in connecting new knowledge with their existing experiences and understanding.

In learning practice, meaningful learning requires the active involvement of learners ([Rahmawati et al., 2025](#)). Learners are expected to understand learning objectives, engage in discussions, group work, and reflective activities that encourage them to think critically and analytically. Educators act as facilitators who ask open-ended questions, encourage the exploration of ideas, and provide a variety of relevant learning resources. The use of diverse learning resources, such as books, journals, digital media, the surrounding environment, and resource persons, enables learners to gain a richer and more contextual learning experience ([Afianti et al., 2025](#); [Heasdiana et al., 2026](#)). In this way, learning is not detached from the reality of learners' lives, so that the knowledge gained becomes more meaningful and applicable.

Meaningful learning provides a number of important benefits for learners. Information that is learned meaningfully tends to be stored longer in memory because it is connected to existing knowledge structures ([Fatmawaty, 2024](#)). In addition, knowledge that is constructed meaningfully facilitates the further learning process because it forms the basis for understanding subsequent material. Even when some information is forgotten, the knowledge structure that has been formed continues to help learners in studying similar concepts in the future. Furthermore,

meaningful learning also encourages learners to understand concepts in depth, be able to answer basic questions such as what, why, and how, and internalise this knowledge into their attitudes and behaviour.

The concept of meaningful learning is closely related to the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach. The CTL approach emphasises linking learning materials to the real lives of students so that the knowledge they acquire is relevant and meaningful. In contextual learning, knowledge is not abstract, but can be applied in various everyday situations. The stronger the connection between the material and the students' life experiences, the more meaningful the learning will be. Through CTL, teachers help students connect academic knowledge with the realities of life, encouraging students to experience and discover for themselves the meaning of what they are learning (Nuryana, 2021). Thus, CTL is in line with Ausubel's view, which emphasises the importance of linking new knowledge with prior knowledge to create meaningful learning.

In contextual learning, teachers no longer act as the sole source of knowledge, but rather as facilitators who guide students in the process of discovering and constructing knowledge (Rumahenga et al., 2025). Learners are encouraged to learn actively through inquiry, questioning, discussion, problem solving, and group work. This approach emphasises active learning that involves the physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional aspects of learners. By experiencing the learning process first-hand, learners not only understand the material cognitively, but also develop attitudes, values, and skills that are relevant to real life.

Contextual learning also has characteristics that are in line with meaningful learning, including concepts built from real situations relevant to students' prior knowledge, students being given the opportunity to collect and analyse data independently, and students actively participating in learning groups. Such a learning process encourages students to think critically, creatively, and reflectively, while also connecting the subject matter to the actual problems they face. In this way, learning becomes more interesting, enjoyable, and less boring.

In the context of history learning, the CTL approach is highly relevant for realising meaningful history learning. History learning is often considered abstract and oriented towards memorising events, figures, and dates (Fitroh, 2025). Through a contextual approach, historical material can be linked to the real lives of students, their surroundings, and values relevant to their social and cultural conditions. By linking past events to the present context, students can understand the meaning of history more deeply and realise its relevance to present and future life.

Thus, meaningful history learning through the CTL approach is an effort to make history learning not only focus on cognitive aspects, but also on shaping the attitudes, values, and character of students. By linking new knowledge with real experiences and students' prior knowledge, history learning can help students build a deep historical understanding, develop critical thinking skills, and internalise the values contained in historical events. Ultimately, meaningful history learning based on CTL contributes to the achievement of holistic educational goals, namely producing students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have character and are able to interpret history as an important part of their lives.

2. Utilisation of Otanaha Fort as a Source of Historical Learning

Otanaha Fort is one of the local historical sites in the Gorontalo region that

has high historical, cultural, and educational value. Otanaha Fort actually comes from two words, ota and naha. Ota means fort and naha is the name of the person who discovered it. Thus, Otanaha is the fort discovered by Naha ([Baruadi & Eraku, 2017](#)). The existence of Otanaha Fortress not only reflects the physical remains of the past, but also preserves various local wisdom values related to the history of struggle, defence systems, and the social life of the Gorontalo community in the past. Therefore, Otanaha Fortress has great potential to be used as a meaningful source of historical learning.

The use of local historical sites such as Otanaha Fort in history lessons gives students the opportunity to learn directly from their surroundings. Learning is no longer abstract or solely dependent on textbooks, but becomes more concrete as students can observe, experience, and understand historical relics first-hand. Through this direct experience, students find it easier to connect historical material with real life, resulting in a deeper and more meaningful understanding. In addition, studying the history of Fort Otanaha helps students recognise the identity and character of the Gorontalo community, fosters love for their region, and instils an appreciation for cultural heritage as part of character building and the main objectives of history learning.

In practice, Otanaha Fortress can be used as a learning resource through the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach. CTL is an approach that integrates learning with real-life experiences, enabling students to see the relevance of the material they are learning to their lives (Ester et al., 2023). In the context of history education in Gorontalo, particularly in relation to Otanaha Fort, the implementation of CTL will help students not only to understand historical facts, but also to relate them to their daily lives. Otanaha Fort, as one of the important historical sites in Gorontalo, can be used as a concrete example for applying the principles of CTL. Through this approach, students can develop a deeper understanding of local history, while applying the values contained in that history to their social, cultural, and economic contexts.



Figure 1. Otanaha Fortress

Source: <https://detikntb.com/2016/07/08/wisata-di-benteng-otanaha-gorontalo/>, diakses 5 Agustus 2024



Figure 2. Stairs of Otanaha Fortress

Source: <https://www.blj.co.id/index.php/2015/11/03/menengok-benteng-otanaha-di-gorontalo/> diakses 7 Agustus 2024

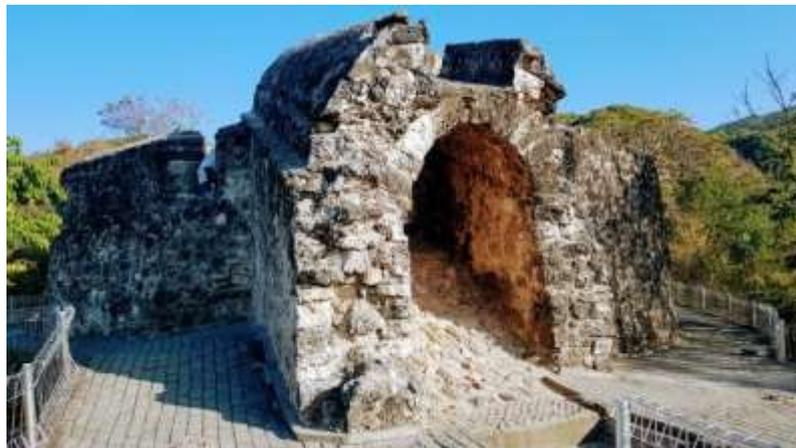


Figure 3. Ulupahu Fortress is Located at the Highest Peak of Otanaha Fortress.

Source: <https://kumparan.com/banthayoid/foto-wisata-sejarah-benteng-otanaha-di-gorontalo-1rrow1iWAS7/1>, diakses 7 Agustus 2024

1. Engaging Students with Local Context

The CTL approach emphasises the importance of connecting learning materials to students' real lives. In this case, teachers can relate the history of Otanaha Fort to the local context, such as the struggles of the Gorontalo people in the past to defend their territory. For example, students can learn how Otanaha Fort was built as a defensive fort against colonial threats and how the values of courage and unity contained in this history are still relevant today. To strengthen student engagement, a field trip to Otanaha Fort can be organised so that students can see and experience this historical site first-hand.

2. Using Contextual Issues

One of the main principles of CTL is to use contextual issues that are relevant to students' lives. In learning about the history of Otanaha Fort, students can be invited to analyse various issues that arise in relation to the fort, such as its role in defending the Gorontalo region and its impact on the social structure of society at

that time. In addition, students can be invited to discuss the relevance of this fort in a modern context, for example, how historical sites such as Fort Otanaha can be part of cultural preservation and tourism efforts in Gorontalo.

3. Application of the Constructivist Approach

In CTL learning, students are not merely recipients of information, but also play an active role in constructing their own knowledge. Therefore, collaborative projects can be implemented, where students work in groups to prepare presentations or creative works about Otanaha Fortress. They can make miniature models of the fortress, design historical maps, or even make documentary videos that describe the history of the fortress and its connection to the development of Gorontalo. This approach provides opportunities for students to think critically and creatively, as well as enhance their understanding of history.

4. Connecting with the Real World

CTL encourages students to see the connection between learning and the real world. In the context of the history of Otanaha Fort, students can be encouraged to reflect on the values contained in this history, such as the spirit of struggle and unity. Discussions can be held on how these values can be applied in their daily lives, such as the importance of maintaining harmony and working together to preserve Gorontalo's cultural diversity. In addition, students can also discuss how the preservation of historical sites such as Otanaha Fortress can support the development of tourism and the regional economy.

5. Multisensory Application

In CTL learning, the use of various media and multisensory approaches is highly recommended to help students understand the material more deeply. In the case of Otanaha Fort, teachers can use pictures, documentary videos, or audio recordings that tell the history of the fort. This can help students who have visual or auditory learning styles to understand the material more easily. In addition, listening to stories from elders or community leaders who have knowledge about local history can also enrich the learning experience of students.

6. Reflection and Evaluation

After completing the lesson, it is important to give students time to reflect. Students can be asked to reflect on what they have learned about Otanaha Fort and how it relates to their lives today. Evaluation can be done through projects that involve students in activities that connect historical learning with real life. For example, they can be asked to write an essay or report discussing how Otanaha Fort influenced the social and political development of Gorontalo, or how this historical site can be preserved for future generations.

Conclusion

Meaningful history learning through the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach is an effective approach to improving the quality of history learning. This approach emphasises the connection between new knowledge and students' prior knowledge, so that history learning is not only oriented towards memorisation, but also towards understanding the meaning and relevance of historical events in real life. By placing students as active subjects, CTL encourages contextual, reflective and meaningful learning processes.

In history education, the CTL approach is able to overcome the abstract nature of learning by linking historical material to the social and cultural

environment and the daily experiences of students. Through this approach, students not only understand past events, but are also able to interpret historical values and relate them to present and future life. This process supports the development of historical awareness, critical thinking skills, and reflective attitudes in students.

The use of Otanaha Fort as a source of history learning based on local wisdom strengthens the application of CTL in history learning. As a local historical site, Otanaha Fort provides a real context that makes learning more concrete and authentic. Through the use of this site, students can understand the values of struggle, unity, and cultural identity of the Gorontalo community, while fostering a love for the region and an attitude of appreciation for cultural heritage as part of the objectives of history learning.

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