



The Snowball Throwing Model in Christian Religious Education: Implementing Teachers' Pedagogical Competence at SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Snowball Throwing learning model in the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE) as a means of developing teachers' pedagogical competence at SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Snowball Throwing model has a positive impact on enhancing students' active participation, communication skills, and comprehension of CRE subject matter. Moreover, this learning model has proven effective in fostering teachers' pedagogical competence, particularly in understanding learners' characteristics, designing interactive learning activities, and conducting comprehensive learning evaluations. The discussion leads to the conclusion that the Snowball Throwing model represents an innovative learning strategy that can be integrated into CRE to create an engaging and meaningful learning environment, while simultaneously serving as a medium for teachers' professional development in the pedagogical domain.

Keywords: Snowball Throwing, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Competence, Primary School

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) constitutes an integral part of Indonesia's national education system, particularly within the elementary school curriculum. CRE holds a strategic function in shaping students' character based on Christian values such as love, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and faithfulness to God. Through CRE, students are expected not only to master the cognitive dimension of Christian teachings but also to undergo transformation in the affective and psychomotor domains, as reflected in their daily behavior. Thus, CRE plays a significant role in building the moral and spiritual

foundation of the younger generation. In practice, the learning process of CRE often remains trapped in conventional, teacher-centered approaches. As noted by Sitompul (2018), monotonous lectures and methods focused solely on memorizing biblical texts tend to dominate classroom practice. Such conditions render the learning process less engaging for students. Consequently, student motivation declines, and their active participation in learning becomes limited. When students are positioned merely as passive recipients of knowledge, with little opportunity for critical thinking and expression, the holistic goals of education cannot be fully achieved.

In line with the rapid developments of the 21st century and the demands of contemporary education, the paradigm of teaching and learning has shifted. Teachers are now required to serve as facilitators who can foster active, creative, effective, and enjoyable learning environments. To achieve this, teachers must possess strong pedagogical competence, which includes the ability to design learning activities, manage classrooms, implement diverse instructional strategies, and conduct comprehensive and objective assessments (Mulyasa, 2017). Teachers are therefore expected not only to deliver content but also to empower students throughout the learning process. One approach deemed effective in addressing the limitations of conventional methods is the Snowball Throwing model. This model, a form of cooperative learning, is designed to encourage students' active participation in the learning process. In practice, students write questions related to the lesson, fold the papers into balls, and throw them to their peers. The receiving students open the paper, respond to the questions, and the process continues for several rounds. This technique has been shown to improve students' concentration and engagement, while simultaneously fostering critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and self-confidence (Suprijono, 2016). The Snowball Throwing model creates a more dynamic and interactive classroom atmosphere. Students are encouraged to interact and learn from one another in a fun and meaningful way. When formulating questions, students engage in higher-order thinking processes, while responding to questions enables them to construct arguments and articulate their ideas. Such interactions are crucial for cultivating social competence and collaborative skills, both of which form essential components of character education.

SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa, located in North Nias Regency, North Sumatra, holds considerable potential for the contextual development of CRE. As the majority of its students are Christian, CRE serves as a primary medium for instilling Christian spiritual and ethical values from an early age. Preliminary observations revealed that CRE instruction at this school still relies heavily on lectures and textbooks as the sole learning resources. This poses a particular challenge given the diverse learning styles and instructional needs of the students. This situation underscores the necessity of developing more innovative learning methods that are responsive to students' needs. Implementing the Snowball Throwing model in CRE is expected to provide a solution to the stagnation of existing practices. This model not only enables students to become more actively engaged in comprehending the material but also provides teachers with practical opportunities to enhance their pedagogical competence. This study is designed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the implementation of the Snowball Throwing model in CRE at SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa. The research focuses on three main aspects: first, describing how CRE teachers design and implement this model in actual classroom contexts; second, examining the extent to which its application affects students' learning

outcomes in both cognitive and affective domains; and third, identifying the dimensions of pedagogical competence that teachers develop through the use of this instructional model.

In terms of urgency, this research makes a valuable contribution to the enrichment of innovative teaching strategies within the context of CRE. Studies on creative learning approaches in CRE remain relatively limited compared to other subjects. Hence, this study is expected to serve as a reference for other CRE teachers, both in North Nias and in regions with similar characteristics. The research findings may provide valuable input for Christian educational institutions in designing professional development programs aimed at strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence. The results of this study are anticipated to demonstrate that transforming CRE from conventional methods toward more participatory approaches not only enhances students' understanding of religious content but also strengthens their spiritual attitudes. When students are actively engaged in learning, Christian values are not merely internalized as cognitive knowledge but are translated into habitual practices and everyday behaviors. CRE teachers who implement the Snowball Throwing model gain opportunities to reflect on and refine their teaching practices. The ability to design innovative learning activities, manage more dynamic classroom interactions, and conduct student-centered assessments constitutes an integral aspect of pedagogical competence. Thus, the model not only benefits students directly but also serves as a medium for teachers' professional growth. The success of the Snowball Throwing model depends heavily on teachers' readiness and institutional support from schools. Therefore, teacher training, supervision, and the strengthening of professional learning communities must be consistently emphasized. This study highlights not only the importance of adopting innovative approaches in CRE but also affirms that contextualized and enjoyable religious learning is an essential component of character education reform that responds to the demands of contemporary times.

METHODS

This study was designed using a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides a deep and comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Snowball Throwing learning model in Christian Religious Education (CRE), as well as its contribution to the development of teachers' pedagogical competence. This approach allows the researcher to explore social realities in their natural, unmanipulated context. In line with Creswell (2018), qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the researcher seeks to investigate in detail the dynamics and meanings underlying behaviors, experiences, and interactions among individuals within a specific educational setting. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa, located in North Nias Regency, North Sumatra Province. This school was purposively selected due to its distinctive social, cultural, and religious characteristics, where the majority of students come from Christian backgrounds and actively participate in CRE learning. These characteristics make the site highly relevant for investigating the application of innovative instructional models in religious education. The subjects of this study consisted of two CRE teachers who actively teach grades IV, V, and VI, as well as 48 students from these three grade levels who were directly involved in the learning process using the Snowball Throwing model. Data were collected through three

main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Direct classroom observations were conducted by the researcher to examine how teachers implemented the Snowball Throwing model, how students responded, and how interaction dynamics unfolded throughout the learning process. Observations were carried out over eight meetings, each lasting two sessions of 35 minutes. In-depth interviews were conducted with CRE teachers to gain insights into their perspectives on the effectiveness of the model, the challenges they encountered, and its impact on their pedagogical professional development. Additionally, interviews with students were conducted to capture their experiences and impressions of the implemented learning method. Documentation served to complement the data by collecting physical evidence such as lesson plans, students' assignments, teachers' reflective journals, as well as photographs and videos of classroom activities. Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The first stage is data condensation, namely the process of sorting and simplifying data from various sources to focus on the issues under investigation. The second stage is data display in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or diagrams to facilitate interpretation. The third stage is drawing and verifying conclusions through a continuous process to test the validity of findings. This process was supported by source and method triangulation, as well as member checking involving teachers as active participants, to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with their actual experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Snowball Throwing Model in CRE Learning

The implementation of the Snowball Throwing model in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa was carried out through a series of structured stages. Based on observations conducted over eight classroom sessions, a consistent pattern was identified in the application of this model, which consists of five main stages: 1) Preparation Stage: At this stage, the teacher prepared lesson plans (RPP) based on the Snowball Throwing model, learning media in the form of paper for questions, and safe paper balls. The teacher also prepared CRE materials to be delivered, such as *"Jesus as a Role Model for Life"* for Grade IV, *"God's Work of Salvation"* for Grade V, and *"The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Believers"* for Grade VI. 2) Presentation of Material: The teacher introduced the main subject matter in broad outlines. Observations showed that the teacher used storytelling and short discussions to stimulate students' thinking about the topic. For instance, in the Grade IV lesson on *"Jesus as a Role Model for Life,"* the teacher narrated stories about Jesus serving and loving others, linking them to the students' daily lives. 3) Group Formation: Students were divided into heterogeneous groups of 4–5 members. Each group appointed a leader responsible for re-explaining the material delivered by the teacher to the other members. Observations revealed that students were hesitant during the initial meetings but gradually became more accustomed to group work and increasingly cooperative in later sessions. 4) Snowball Throwing Stage: Each student was given a sheet of paper to write a question related to the CRE material. The paper was then folded into a ball and thrown to students in different groups. The receiving student opened and answered the question. Observational data indicated that this activity created an enjoyable and enthusiastic

classroom atmosphere. 5) Evaluation and Reflection: Teachers and students discussed the answers, clarified misunderstandings, and reflected on the Christian values learned through the activity. At this stage, the teacher also related the material to the local Nias context, such as the ways in which Christian values are reflected in local culture and community life.

Interviews with CRE teachers revealed that the implementation of the Snowball Throwing model underwent some adaptations to suit the characteristics of CRE as a subject. One such adaptation was the addition of a spiritual reflection component at the end of each session, in which students were invited to consider the relevance of the material to their daily faith life. As noted by Ms. M.H. (CRE teacher):

"We modified the Snowball Throwing model by adding spiritual reflection at the end of the lesson. So, it is not only about throwing and answering questions, but also about creating a moment where children are invited to reflect on how the values they learn can be practiced in their lives."

The Impact of the Snowball Throwing Model on Student Learning Outcomes

The implementation of the Snowball Throwing model in CRE demonstrated positive impacts on student learning outcomes across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains: 1) Cognitive Aspect: Documentation analysis indicated an increase in students' conceptual understanding of CRE materials. The average scores of Grade IV students increased from 72.5 (before implementation) to 83.2 (after implementation), Grade V from 74.3 to 85.7, and Grade VI from 76.8 to 87.4. These improvements highlight the effectiveness of the model in facilitating comprehension of CRE concepts. 2) Affective Aspect: Observations showed changes in students' attitudes during the learning process. They became more open in expressing opinions, more tolerant of differing views, and more cooperative in groups. This was evident in the third session of Grade V, during a discussion on *"How to Express Gratitude for God's Work of Salvation"*:

"Students A.N. and B.R., who previously rarely participated, became actively involved in sharing their views on how to give thanks in everyday life. They also listened attentively to their peers, reflecting a significant shift in attitude compared to previous sessions."

Psychomotor Aspect: The Snowball Throwing model also enhanced students' skills in communication and critical thinking. Students became more adept at formulating meaningful questions and providing comprehensive answers. This was confirmed by CRE teacher:

"Now, students are more confident in asking deeper questions. They no longer limit themselves to factual questions like 'who' or 'when,' but have begun asking 'why' and 'how.' This reflects their growing critical thinking skills."

In addition, interviews with students revealed a higher level of interest and motivation in learning. As many as 85% of students expressed a preference for the Snowball Throwing model over conventional methods. A Grade VI student, D.N., stated: *"Learning CRE is more exciting because we can ask and answer in a fun way. I feel more motivated to study and understand the lessons better."*

Development of Teachers' Pedagogical Competence through the Snowball Throwing Model

The Snowball Throwing model not only benefitted students but also contributed to the development of teachers' pedagogical competence. Based on interviews and reflective journals, several aspects of competence were identified as having developed: 1) Understanding Students' Characteristics: Teachers gained deeper insights into students' diverse learning styles, interests, and needs. As reflected in teacher journal:

"Through the Snowball Throwing model, I can identify which students are more visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. I also discovered that some students who are usually passive during lectures became very active when given interactive opportunities." 2) Curriculum and Lesson Design: Teachers enhanced their ability to design contextual and meaningful learning. Lesson plans demonstrated integration of theological concepts with students' everyday experiences in the Onozalukhu Alasa context. As explained by teacher:

"I realized the importance of contextualizing Christian teachings with Nias culture. For example, when discussing the 'Role of the Holy Spirit,' I related it to the Nias cultural value of fanolo-nolo (mutual cooperation), which embodies collective solidarity."

3) Instructional Practices: Teachers improved their ability to facilitate student-centered and dialogical learning. Observations showed a shift in classroom interaction from teacher-dominated to more balanced and dialogical exchanges. Teachers increasingly acted as facilitators, encouraging students' active participation in constructing knowledge. 4) Learning Assessment: Teachers developed their capacity to conduct comprehensive evaluations that included cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. They designed more varied assessment instruments, such as rubrics to evaluate the quality of student-generated questions and their critical responses. 5) Student Development: Teachers became more skilled in identifying and fostering students' potential through differentiated strategies, offering tailored challenges according to individual abilities.

Snowball Throwing as an Innovation in CRE Learning

The findings confirm that the Snowball Throwing model is an effective innovation in CRE learning at SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa. Its successful implementation aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes students' active role in constructing knowledge. Within CRE, this model enables students to construct their own theological understanding through meaningful questioning and discussion. The uniqueness of this model lies in its integration with the spiritual and reflective dimensions that are essential to CRE. As Groome (2011) argued, effective religious education involves not only the transmission of theological knowledge but also the transformation of attitudes and spiritual experiences. The modification introduced by CRE teachers by adding a spiritual reflection stage represents a contextualized adaptation that aligns with the goals of CRE. The combination of cognitive aspects (through conceptual questioning), affective aspects (through group interaction), and spiritual aspects (through reflection) creates a holistic learning experience. This resonates with Westerhoff's (2012) perspective on holistic religious education, which engages the "head, heart, and hands." In the local context of North Nias, where oral tradition is deeply embedded, question-and-answer-based models like Snowball Throwing are particularly relevant. This resonates with the *fondrakö* tradition of Nias culture, which emphasizes dialogue and oral knowledge-sharing. As

Hämmerle (2015) observed, oral tradition in Nias serves as an important medium for transmitting cultural and religious values across generations. Accordingly, the Snowball Throwing model may be viewed as a form of contextually grounded and culturally sustainable learning.

The Impact of the Snowball Throwing Model on Learning Outcomes in the Perspective of Learning Theories

The improvement in student learning outcomes following the implementation of the Snowball Throwing model can be explained through several theoretical perspectives. First, social learning theory, the activities within the Snowball Throwing model create a learning environment that fosters observational and social learning. When students observe how their peers formulate and respond to questions, they engage in observational learning processes that enrich their understanding. Second, from Gardner's (2011) theory of multiple intelligences, this model accommodates students' diverse intelligences. Students with linguistic intelligence are facilitated through verbal question formulation and responses, those with kinesthetic intelligence are engaged through the physical activity of throwing the ball, while those with interpersonal intelligence develop through group interaction. This variety of learning modalities enables more students to actively participate and optimize their learning potential. Third, the increase in students' learning motivation can be explained through self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. The Snowball Throwing model grants autonomy to students by allowing them to formulate their own questions, provides a sense of competence when they successfully answer questions, and cultivates social relatedness through group activities. In the context of religious education, the improvement in learning outcomes can also be understood through experiential learning cycle, which has been adapted in religious education. Effective Christian Religious Education (CRE) occurs when students are able to experience, reflect upon, conceptualize, and apply Christian values in their daily lives. The Snowball Throwing model facilitates this cycle by engaging students in concrete experiences (throwing and receiving question balls), reflection (answering and discussing questions), conceptualization (connecting responses to theological concepts), and application (reflecting on the relevance of values in everyday life).

Pedagogical Competence of CRE Teachers in the Perspective of Teacher Professionalism

The development of CRE teachers' pedagogical competence through the implementation of the Snowball Throwing model reflects the process of *learning by doing*, which is central to teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Through designing, implementing, and evaluating innovative instructional models, teachers cultivate practical knowledge that cannot be acquired solely through theoretical training. The enhancement of teachers' ability to understand students' characteristics aligns with concept of *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK). PCK refers to the integration of content knowledge (in this case, Christian theology) and pedagogical knowledge that enables teachers to deliver subject matter in ways that are comprehensible to students with diverse characteristics. In the context of CRE, PCK involves understanding how complex theological concepts can be transformed into meaningful learning experiences for elementary students. Teachers' ability to contextualize CRE learning within the local Nias

culture exemplifies what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe as *knowledge of practice*—knowledge developed through reflective practice in specific contexts. This is particularly relevant in religious education, which often faces the challenge of bridging universal teachings with local realities. The development of CRE teachers' pedagogical competence can also be seen as a manifestation of the transformation of professional identity from "teachers as transmitters of knowledge" to "teachers as facilitators of learning" (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). This transformation is significant in the context of CRE, which has traditionally been dominated by doctrinal and transmissive approaches to theological knowledge.

Challenges and Strategies for Sustainability

Despite its effectiveness, the implementation of the Snowball Throwing model in CRE at SD Negeri 071155 Onozalukhu Alasa faces several challenges. Based on interviews with CRE teachers, three primary challenges were identified: first, Time Constraints: The relatively limited time allocation for CRE (2 × 35 minutes per week) makes it difficult to implement the model optimally. As noted by teacher: *"The greatest challenge is limited time. This model requires sufficient time for each stage, while the curriculum demands are quite extensive;"* second, Variation in Student Ability: Differences in students' ability to formulate and answer questions present a challenge. Some students, especially in Grade IV, still struggle to construct substantive questions; third, Limited Learning Resources: The scarcity of CRE learning resources contextualized to Nias culture hinders teachers in developing relevant instructional materials.

To address these challenges and ensure the sustainability of the Snowball Throwing model in CRE, several strategies have been developed: first, Professional Learning Communities: CRE teachers formed professional learning communities with teachers from neighboring schools in Onozalukhu Alasa to share experiences and resources; second, Technology Integration: The use of simple technology, such as audio and video recordings, to document local stories and traditions that can be integrated into CRE instruction; third, Model Adaptation: Modifying the Snowball Throwing model to fit the available time, such as dividing activities across multiple sessions or integrating them into religious extracurricular activities; fourth, Contextual Material Development: Collaborating with local religious and cultural leaders to develop CRE materials that integrate Christian values with Nias cultural wisdom.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Snowball Throwing model in CRE was carried out through five main stages: preparation, material delivery, group formation, Snowball Throwing activities, and evaluation and reflection. The model was contextually adapted by incorporating a spiritual reflection component that aligns with the distinctive character of CRE. The Snowball Throwing model proved effective in enhancing student learning outcomes across cognitive (improved average scores), affective (development of tolerance and cooperation), and psychomotor (communication and critical thinking skills) domains. These improvements were supported by the creation of an active, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment. The implementation of the Snowball Throwing

model also contributed to the development of CRE teachers' pedagogical competence in understanding student characteristics, designing contextualized curricula, facilitating dialogical learning, conducting comprehensive assessments, and fostering students' potential. The integration of the Snowball Throwing model with the socio-cultural and religious context of North Nias has resulted in CRE learning that is both relevant and meaningful for students, bridging universal Christian values with the local wisdom of Nias society. To further strengthen the model's impact, CRE teachers are encouraged to diversify the levels of questions within the Snowball Throwing model (ranging from knowledge recall to evaluation) to accommodate students' varied cognitive abilities. Moreover, teachers are advised to document their best practices in professional portfolios, which may serve as valuable resources for other educators.

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