



The Implementation of the Discovery Learning Model in Christian Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the implementation of the Discovery Learning model in the subject of Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo. Discovery Learning is a constructivist-based instructional approach that positions students as active agents in the learning process, guiding them to discover new concepts and understandings through exploration, observation, and independent analysis. This model encourages students to think critically and creatively, as well as to connect their personal experiences with the subject matter, particularly in understanding Christian religious values. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing data collection techniques such as direct classroom observation, in-depth interviews with Christian Religious Education teachers and selected students, and document analysis of the instructional materials used. The findings indicate that the implementation of Discovery Learning can enhance students' active participation, strengthen their analytical thinking skills, and deepen their understanding of the Christian teachings and values conveyed in the PAK subject. However, several challenges were identified, including limited time allocation within the available lesson hours and the varying abilities of students to independently process and internalize information. Teachers are therefore required to adapt their strategies and provide appropriate guidance to ensure that the discovery process is optimal for all students. Overall, this study makes a significant contribution to the development of innovative and relevant teaching methods in the context of Christian Religious Education at the junior high school level. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for improving the quality of PAK learning processes to make them more active, reflective, and meaningful.

Keywords: Discovery Learning, Christian Religious Education, Constructivism, Active Learning

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (PAK) at the junior high school level plays a highly strategic role in shaping students' character, spiritual attitudes, and moral understanding from an early age. During adolescence, students are in a phase of identity formation, including the exploration of personal beliefs and life values. Consequently, PAK is not merely a cognitive subject but also serves as a means of spiritual formation and faith strengthening in

students' daily lives. However, the PAK learning process in many schools still faces significant challenges, particularly in methodological aspects. Conventional teaching methods—such as lectures, rote memorization of Bible verses, and an emphasis on theoretical mastery—are often ineffective in addressing the affective and psychomotor domains of students. This condition results in low levels of active student engagement and a lack of internalization of Christian values in their everyday behavior (Sidjabat, 2019). In response to these challenges, various innovative teaching approaches have been introduced into PAK classrooms. One approach that offers a promising solution to these methodological issues is the Discovery Learning model, developed by Jerome Bruner in 1961. This model emphasizes the importance of students discovering concepts on their own through active engagement in the learning process. In Discovery Learning, the teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding students to find meaning and concepts through direct learning experiences, rather than simply delivering information. This approach aligns with constructivist learning principles, which posit that knowledge cannot be directly transferred to students but must be constructed by them through interaction with the learning environment (Bruner, 1961).

In the context of Christian Religious Education, Discovery Learning can provide students with deeper and more contextualized learning experiences. For example, instead of merely memorizing biblical content, students are encouraged to explore the meaning of biblical texts in relation to their own life realities. This approach fosters stronger personal reflection, deeper understanding of religious values, and enhanced critical thinking and moral problem-solving skills relevant to everyday life (Groome, 2011). Consequently, PAK becomes more meaningful and has a tangible impact on the development of students' faith and character. SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo is one of the schools that has attempted to implement the Discovery Learning model in Christian Religious Education. The school is recognized for its openness to educational innovation and its consistent encouragement of teachers to develop creative and effective teaching strategies. In practice, the PAK teacher at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo has begun designing lesson scenarios that integrate Discovery Learning principles, such as the use of biblical case studies, group discussions to interpret Christian values, and small-scale projects requiring students to apply biblical teachings in real-life contexts.

Nevertheless, to date, no academic study has specifically and systematically evaluated the effectiveness of this model's implementation in the context of PAK at the school. Such an evaluation is essential to understand the extent to which Discovery Learning contributes to improving the quality of PAK instruction and character formation in students. Furthermore, such research is necessary to identify challenges and supporting factors that arise during implementation, enabling teachers and education policymakers to take appropriate improvement measures.

Against this background, the present study aims to: (1) analyze the process of implementing the Discovery Learning model in PAK instruction at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo; (2) identify challenges and supporting factors encountered by teachers and students in applying this model; and (3) evaluate the impact of Discovery Learning on student learning outcomes, particularly in terms of active engagement, understanding of religious values, and reflective ability in connecting religious teachings with real-life situations. These objectives are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relevance and

effectiveness of Discovery Learning in teaching Christian Religious Education at the junior high school level.

This study holds significant theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, it will enrich the body of literature on innovative learning models in the context of religious education, particularly within primary and secondary education settings. The findings will provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of Discovery Learning in developing active, contextual, and reflective learning, which is an urgent need in today's Christian Religious Education.

Practically, the research findings are expected to serve as a reference for PAK teachers in designing lessons that are more engaging, meaningful, and relevant to students' spiritual needs and developmental stages. Teachers can adopt Discovery Learning as an alternative to conventional approaches that tend to be passive and less stimulating for student learning motivation. Furthermore, this study can inform school principals and education policymakers in formulating policies for teacher professional development, curriculum design, and the provision of resources and training to support the implementation of innovative teaching models such as Discovery Learning.

Overall, this study is expected to encourage pedagogical transformation in Christian Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo and in other schools facing similar challenges. By adopting more student-centered learning models, PAK instruction can become more effective in fostering faith, moral values, and critical thinking skills that students need to navigate the complexities of modern life. Meaningful learning will enable students not only to understand Christian teachings theoretically but also to embrace them as guiding principles in their relationships with others and with God.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design as the primary strategy to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of implementing the Discovery Learning model in the context of Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore the meanings, experiences, and dynamics occurring during the learning process in a holistic manner. The choice of a case study design was based on the objective of examining, in a detailed and contextual manner, the instructional practices occurring in real-life situations, where the variables involved interact in a complex and inseparable way (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study was deemed most suitable for this research as it provided the opportunity for comprehensive observation of the implementation of the Discovery Learning model within a specific school environment, including attention to the social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence it.

The research site was SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo, a junior high school located in Ulunoyo District, Central Sulawesi Province. This school was selected because it is known to have adopted innovative teaching approaches, including the Discovery Learning model, particularly in Christian Religious Education. The research subjects comprised various stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of PAK using this model. The primary subjects were two Christian Religious Education teachers who actively applied Discovery Learning in their teaching practices. Additionally, 64 students from three Grade VIII classes were included as respondents, as they had participated in learning activities using this approach. The school principal was also involved as a key informant to provide

insights on policy and institutional support for the ongoing instructional innovation. The subjects were selected through purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their direct involvement and relevance to the focus of the research.

Data collection was conducted using multiple techniques to ensure depth and accuracy of the information gathered. First, classroom observations were conducted 12 times over one semester. These observations used structured instruments to record the stages of Discovery Learning implemented, the interactions between teachers and students, and the overall classroom dynamics. The aim was to obtain factual data on the actual implementation of the learning process in the field.

Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with PAK teachers, the school principal, and a selection of students chosen randomly from the three classes. These interviews sought to explore the perspectives and experiences of the participants regarding the implementation of Discovery Learning, including their perceptions of its effectiveness, challenges, and impacts. Interviews with the principal focused on policy and institutional support aspects, while student interviews concentrated on their personal responses and learning experiences.

Third, document analysis was conducted on various relevant written sources, including Lesson Plans (RPP), learning modules, student worksheets (LKS), and assessment results. The purpose of this analysis was to evaluate the extent to which the instructional plans aligned with the principles of Discovery Learning and how these principles were translated into classroom practice. Student assessment results were also analyzed to assess learning achievements as outcomes of the model's implementation.

Fourth, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with student groups to gain deeper insights into their learning experiences. The FGDs were designed to provide space for students to discuss how they understood PAK material, the extent to which they felt engaged in the learning process, and how the Discovery Learning model influenced their motivation and understanding of religious values in daily life. Through FGDs, richer and more collective qualitative data could be obtained.

For data analysis, this study adopted the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The process began with data condensation, involving filtering and reorganizing raw data from field notes, interview transcripts, observation results, and instructional documents to focus on aspects relevant to the research objectives. The data were then presented in descriptive narratives, tables, and diagrams to facilitate comprehension and categorization—this stage is known as data display, serving as a bridge between data collection and interpretation.

The final step was drawing conclusions and verification. At this stage, the researcher interpreted the meaning of the analyzed data, identifying recurring patterns, relationships, and categories. Verification was conducted through triangulation of data sources (teachers, students, principal), data collection techniques (observation, interviews, documents, FGDs), and data collection times. This strategy was applied to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, ensuring that the results are scientifically accountable.

By applying this qualitative case study approach, the researcher sought to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of Discovery Learning in Christian Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo and to make a tangible contribution to the

development of more active, participatory, and contextual instructional strategies for students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Discovery Learning Model in Christian Religious Education (PAK)

1. Stimulation (Providing Stimulus)

At this stage, the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher begins the lesson with a provocative question or a contextual case related to Christian values. Classroom observations revealed that 87% of students demonstrated high interest and enthusiasm when the teacher employed audiovisual media such as film clips or illustrated stories as stimuli. An effective example was the use of a video depicting bullying at school as an introduction to a lesson on love and respect for others.

As stated by PAK Teacher 1:

"I deliberately choose cases that are close to the lives of teenagers. When they see the relevance to their daily experiences, they are much more motivated to engage in the learning process."

2. Problem Statement (Identifying the Problem)

Following the stimulus, students are guided to identify issues and formulate critical questions. Observation data show that 62% of students were able to formulate questions relevant to the learning topic. The questions generated were not only factual but also conceptual and applicative. A noteworthy finding was students' tendency to connect religious values with contemporary issues, for example: "How can the principle of forgiveness in the Bible be applied to cases of bullying at school?"; "Why did Jesus teach us to love our enemies, even though it is difficult to do?"

3. Data Collection

During this stage, students were given opportunities to explore various learning resources, including Biblical texts, reference books, and digital sources. Analysis of student worksheets indicated that 78% of students successfully gathered relevant and diverse data. Teachers facilitated this process by providing exploration guides and resources suited to students' comprehension levels.

Collaborative strategies, such as thematic group discussions, proved effective in supporting the data collection process. As one student shared during a focus group discussion (FGD):

"Learning in groups allows us to share understanding. Some friends understand Bible stories better, others are good at connecting them to real life. This makes our knowledge more complete."

4. Data Processing

The data processing stage involved analyzing and interpreting the information gathered. Observations showed that 65% of students were able to process data with minimal teacher assistance. Effective strategies at this stage included the use of comparison charts, concept maps, and analytical tables to help students organize and interpret information.

One innovative example was the use of a "Biblical Character Analysis," in which students analyzed Biblical figures from multiple perspectives and related their qualities to values relevant to contemporary life.

5. Verification

At this stage, students presented their findings and verified them against authoritative sources, including the Bible and relevant theological literature. Observation data showed that 71% of student presentations demonstrated accurate understanding of the theological concepts studied.

The teacher played a crucial role in this stage by clarifying and correcting misconceptions. As explained by PAK Teacher 2:

“The verification stage is critical to ensure that students do not misinterpret Biblical texts. I provide additional explanations for complex concepts while respecting their discovery process.”

6. Generalization (Drawing Conclusions)

In the final stage, students were guided to formulate universal principles and values applicable to everyday life. Analysis of student reflections revealed that 83% were able to formulate meaningful and applicable conclusions. Most students were also able to identify the relevance of Christian values in the context of contemporary adolescent life.

Impacts of Implementing the Discovery Learning Model

Observation data indicated a significant increase in active student participation compared to conventional approaches. The average student participation rate in classroom discussions rose from 45% to 78% following the implementation of Discovery Learning. Analysis of observation notes also revealed a higher frequency of critical questions posed by students during the learning process.

Analysis of students' reflective assignments showed improved ability to interpret religious texts critically. A total of 73% of students demonstrated the ability to: 1) Analyze Biblical texts within their historical and cultural contexts. 2) Identify theological principles from Biblical narratives. 3) Evaluate the relevance of religious teachings in contemporary contexts.

Learning evaluation results indicated that 82% of students were able to articulate their conceptual understanding of Christian values, rather than merely memorizing doctrinal statements. This understanding was evident in their ability to: Explain theological concepts in their own words, relate Christian values to real-life situations, and identify practical applications of religious teachings. As one student expressed during an interview: “Before, I would just memorize Bible verses without truly understanding their meaning. With this learning model, I now better understand how Biblical values can be applied in my daily life.”

Data from interviews and FGDs with students showed a significant rise in learning motivation. A total of 85% of students stated that they were more enthusiastic about participating in PAK lessons using Discovery Learning compared to conventional models. Key factors contributing to this increased motivation included: Opportunities for self-exploration and discovery, relevance of the material to daily life, a more interactive and varied learning process.

Challenges in Implementing the Discovery Learning Model

PAK lessons at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo are allocated only three class hours per week. Teachers found it challenging to implement all stages of Discovery Learning comprehensively within this time frame. As PAK Teacher 1 explained:

“The stages of Discovery Learning require considerable time, especially during the data collection and processing stages. Sometimes I have to continue in the next session, which disrupts the flow of learning.”

Classroom observations revealed disparities in students’ ability to engage in the discovery process. Approximately 25% of students struggled particularly during the data processing and verification stages, especially when dealing with complex Biblical texts. Differentiated instruction thus became a particular challenge for teachers in accommodating diverse learning needs.

Document analysis and teacher interviews revealed a shortage of relevant and contextual learning resources to support the implementation of Discovery Learning in PAK. Teachers often had to develop their own materials suited to the discovery approach and the local context.

Implementing Discovery Learning in religious education presents the challenge of balancing open-ended exploration with the need to ensure doctrinal accuracy. As the school principal noted:

“Some parents worry that the discovery approach might lead to incorrect interpretations of religious teachings. We continually strive to ensure that exploration remains guided, ensuring doctrinal truth.”

The Effectiveness of the Discovery Learning Model in Christian Religious Education

The findings of this study indicate that the Discovery Learning model is effective in enhancing the quality of Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo. This effectiveness is evident in the increased active engagement of students, the development of critical thinking skills, and a deeper conceptual understanding of religious values. These results align with Westerhoff’s (2012) research, which emphasizes the importance of exploratory approaches in religious education to facilitate authentic spiritual transformation.

The successful implementation of Discovery Learning in PAK can be explained through the lens of constructivist learning theory. According to Piaget (as cited in McLeod, 2018), meaningful conceptual understanding occurs when students actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment. In the context of PAK, the discovery process enables students to construct their understanding of religious values based on personal experience and reflection.

A particularly noteworthy finding of this study is the model’s ability to bridge the gap between doctrinal knowledge and the practical application of religious values. As Groome (2011) emphasizes, effective religious education should facilitate dialogue between religious tradition and contemporary life experiences. Through its stimulation and generalization stages, the Discovery Learning model successfully creates opportunities for students to connect sacred texts with the realities of their daily lives.

Adaptations of the Discovery Learning Model in the Context of PAK

The implementation of the Discovery Learning model in PAK at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo reveals several notable adaptations. These reflect the distinctive nature of PAK as a field of study that simultaneously engages cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions.

First, the stimulation stage in PAK learning focuses not only on fostering intellectual curiosity but also on engaging emotional and spiritual dimensions. The use of personal narratives, testimonies, and experiential reflections as stimuli has proven effective in fostering personal connections between students and the learning material. This approach is consistent with Nouwen's (1979) "wounded healer" concept, which underscores the importance of personal engagement in spiritual education.

Second, the verification stage in PAK involves dialogue between personal discovery and the authority of tradition. PAK teachers at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo have successfully balanced respect for students' discovery processes with the need to ensure doctrinal accuracy. This approach reflects Groome's (2011) "shared praxis" model, which frames religious education as a dialectical dialogue between the faith tradition and contemporary experience.

Implementation Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

The challenges encountered in implementing Discovery Learning in PAK—particularly those related to time constraints and variations in student ability—highlight the importance of methodological adaptation in formal education contexts. Several adaptive strategies that may be considered include:

1. **Integration of Technology in the Discovery Process**

Utilizing digital platforms and online learning resources can streamline the processes of data collection and processing. The "flipped classroom" approach may also be adopted, where students engage in preliminary exploration outside of class and use class time for discussion and verification (Horn & Staker, 2015).

2. **Differentiated Scaffolding**

To accommodate diverse student abilities, teachers can develop differentiated scaffolding systems that provide varying levels of support based on individual needs. This strategy aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (as cited in McLeod, 2019), which emphasizes the importance of tailored support according to students' cognitive development levels.

3. **Development of a Community of Practice**

Establishing communities of practice among PAK teachers can facilitate the exchange of experiences and the collaborative development of learning resources. This approach can address the challenge of limited contextualized resources for supporting Discovery Learning in PAK.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this research extends understanding of how constructivist models can be applied in religious education, which is often associated with transmissive approaches. The results demonstrate that constructivist approaches, such as Discovery Learning, can be effectively integrated into the essence of religious education without compromising doctrinal integrity.

Practically, this study offers an implementation framework that can be adapted by PAK teachers in various educational contexts. The identified stages and adaptive strategies provide a reference for developing more student-centered and meaningful PAK instruction.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Discovery Learning model in PAK at SMP Negeri 3 Ulunoyo demonstrates significant effectiveness in improving learning quality. This model has successfully facilitated active engagement, the development of critical thinking skills, and a conceptual understanding of religious values. The success of the implementation is supported by methodological adaptations that account for the unique nature of PAK as a field of study involving cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions.

Despite challenges related to limited instructional time, variations in student ability, and the balance between exploration and doctrinal accuracy, PAK teachers have developed effective adaptive strategies. This research affirms that constructivist approaches, such as Discovery Learning, can be integrated into religious education to create transformative and meaningful learning experiences. The model enables students to construct a personal understanding of religious values while remaining connected to the authority of tradition.

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