



Implementation of the Talking Stick Learning Model in Enhancing Students' Learning Activeness in Christian Religious Education for Grade XII at SMK Negeri 1 Balige

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ABSTRACT

Education serves not only as a means of intellectual formation but also as a transformative process that nurtures moral, social, and spiritual growth. Within the framework of Christian Religious Education (CRE), learning should extend beyond cognitive understanding to the cultivation of faith, ethical values, and Christian virtues. This study examined the implementation of the Talking Stick learning model in Grade XII CRE classes at SMK Negeri 1 Balige to address the issue of low student participation. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the Talking Stick model effectively transformed a teacher-centered classroom into an interactive, student-centered learning environment. By providing each student with an opportunity to speak and listen respectfully, the method promoted active engagement, confidence, and mutual respect. Students who were initially passive became more involved in discussions, demonstrated improved communication skills, and developed a greater capacity for critical and reflective thinking. Supporting factors included teacher preparedness, administrative encouragement, and student enthusiasm, while initial challenges such as nervousness and low self-confidence were mitigated through consistent practice and motivation. The Talking Stick model also contributed to holistic development by integrating cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning in alignment with Christian educational values. Overall, the study concludes that the Talking Stick learning model is an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing student learning activeness and character formation in Christian Religious Education, fostering both academic and spiritual growth within a collaborative and respectful classroom community.

Keywords: Talking Stick, Learning Activeness, Christian Religious Education

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in shaping human character and improving the quality of human resources. It is not merely a process of transferring knowledge but also a transformative effort that fosters intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual growth. In the context of *Christian Religious Education* (CRE), learning is expected to go beyond cognitive understanding-it should cultivate faith, moral values, and Christian virtues that guide students in their daily lives. Teachers of Christian Religious Education therefore carry a dual responsibility: to deliver the content of faith-based knowledge and to model Christ-centered behavior that inspires students to be active, reflective, and responsible participants in the learning process. One of the major challenges in the classroom today, particularly in the teaching of Christian Religious Education, is the low level of student participation. Based on preliminary observations at *SMK Negeri 1 Balige*, many students tend to be passive during lessons. They listen to the teacher's explanations but rarely ask questions, express opinions, or engage in discussions. This passivity can limit students' understanding and reduce their motivation to learn, especially in subjects that require critical reflection and personal expression such as Christian Religious Education. A learning environment that remains teacher-centered can hinder the development of students' self-confidence and their ability to articulate ideas-skills that are crucial for holistic Christian formation. In addressing this issue, the Talking Stick learning model offers a meaningful pedagogical alternative. The Talking Stick, which has its origins in Native American cultural practices, was traditionally used as a tool for orderly communication in group discussions. Whoever holds the stick has the right to speak, while others listen respectfully. When adapted to the classroom setting, this model becomes an interactive strategy that promotes equality, respect, and active engagement among students. The teacher facilitates the discussion, guiding the stick from one student to another, thereby ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to contribute. In the context of Christian Religious Education, the Talking Stick model can be a powerful medium for developing students' communication skills, spiritual reflection, and social interaction. It aligns with Christian values such as respect, humility, and love for others. By providing a structured yet dynamic form of dialogue, this method encourages students to express their understanding of biblical teachings, share personal experiences of faith, and respond to moral dilemmas presented in the lesson. This approach not only improves learning outcomes but also nurtures a sense of fellowship and mutual appreciation among learners. The Talking Stick learning model also aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active participation and the co-construction of knowledge. Students are not passive recipients of information but active agents who build understanding through interaction and dialogue. The teacher acts as a facilitator who creates meaningful learning experiences that connect theory with practice and personal reflection. When students are given a voice in their own learning process, they become more motivated, responsible, and engaged.

At *SMK Negeri 1 Balige*, the application of the Talking Stick model was designed to address the observed problem of low learning activeness. The teacher began by introducing the concept and rules of the Talking Stick to ensure that all students understood its purpose. Each session began with an opening prayer and a brief review of the previous material. During the main activity, the teacher posed a question or presented a case study related

to the topic, then passed the stick randomly to one of the students. The student who received the stick was expected to answer or comment, after which the stick would be passed to another student. This process continued until all participants had the chance to speak. This activity transformed the classroom dynamic from a teacher-centered lecture into an interactive, student-centered learning experience. The use of the Talking Stick created an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement, as students knew they might be called upon at any time. Over time, their anxiety diminished, and their confidence increased. Students who were initially reluctant to speak began to participate more actively. They learned to listen attentively when others were speaking and to value different perspectives. This collaborative learning process fostered a sense of community and belonging, which is central to Christian education. Furthermore, the Talking Stick model promotes several essential aspects of student development. First, it strengthens students' communication competence, as they practice expressing ideas clearly and respectfully. Second, it enhances critical thinking, since students must process information and respond meaningfully to questions or issues discussed. Third, it cultivates social-emotional skills, such as empathy, patience, and cooperation-qualities that are integral to Christian character formation. Lastly, it supports spiritual reflection, allowing students to internalize biblical principles through verbal articulation and shared experiences. Qualitative observations at *SMK Negeri 1 Balige* revealed positive changes in students' attitudes and behaviors. The classroom atmosphere became more lively and inclusive. Students demonstrated higher levels of engagement and enthusiasm during lessons. They were more willing to volunteer answers, participate in group discussions, and reflect on how the learning material applied to their personal lives. Teachers also noted an improvement in students' interpersonal relationships, as mutual respect and cooperation grew stronger. The effectiveness of the Talking Stick learning model can be attributed to its ability to integrate affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains of learning. It does not merely transmit information but facilitates transformation-helping students to embody Christian values through interactive dialogue and cooperative participation. In this way, the model resonates deeply with the holistic purpose of Christian education: to develop individuals who are intellectually capable, spiritually mature, and socially responsible.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive research design, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Qualitative research is particularly suited for exploring complex educational processes because it allows for the collection of rich, detailed information that captures the experiences, perceptions, and interactions of participants. The descriptive nature of the study enabled the researcher to systematically describe and interpret the implementation of the Talking Stick learning model in the Christian Religious Education classroom, focusing on how it influenced students' learning activeness. Data collection in this study was carried out using multiple techniques, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations allowed the researcher to directly examine the dynamics of student participation, teacher facilitation, and overall classroom interactions. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including Christian Religious Education

teachers, the school principal, and students from Grade XII. These interviews provided insights into participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward the use of the Talking Stick model in fostering active learning. Documentation, such as lesson plans, student work, and school records, supplemented the primary data and helped to triangulate findings to ensure validity and reliability. The research subjects comprised Christian Religious Education teachers, the school principal, and Grade XII students at SMK Negeri 1 Balige. These participants were selected based on their direct involvement in the teaching and learning process, making them highly relevant sources of information for understanding the classroom practices and outcomes associated with the Talking Stick model. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data reduction, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the raw data to highlight essential patterns and themes. Data display involved organizing and presenting the information in a systematic way to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring patterns, relationships, and implications, allowing the researcher to provide a coherent and evidence-based account of the study's findings regarding the effectiveness of the Talking Stick learning model in enhancing student learning activeness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the most notable outcomes of applying the Talking Stick model was the emergence of an interactive classroom atmosphere. Prior to the intervention, the classroom was largely teacher-centered, with students exhibiting minimal engagement during lessons. Observations revealed that many students remained silent, reluctant to ask questions or contribute their opinions. The teacher, as the primary source of knowledge, dominated the discussion, which limited peer interaction and the collaborative construction of knowledge. The introduction of the Talking Stick changed this dynamic significantly. The teacher used a tangible stick as a medium to manage turns for speaking, ensuring that each student had an opportunity to participate. The presence of the stick acted as both a visual and procedural cue, signaling who was authorized to speak while others listened attentively. This structured approach reduced confusion during discussions and encouraged students to focus on the content being shared. By establishing clear speaking turns, the Talking Stick model effectively promoted equitable participation, allowing students who were previously hesitant to voice their ideas to engage in classroom dialogue.

Enhancement of Student Participation

The impact on student participation was immediately observable. Students who were initially passive began to show greater interest and involvement in the learning process. They became more willing to ask questions, express their opinions, and engage in discussions with peers. Teachers reported a marked increase in student interaction, where learners not only responded to questions posed by the teacher but also actively commented on the contributions of their classmates. This peer-to-peer engagement fostered a collaborative learning environment in which knowledge was co-constructed through dialogue. The model encouraged students to take intellectual risks. The structured opportunity to speak, facilitated by the stick, allowed students to experiment

with articulating their thoughts in a safe and supportive environment. Over time, their confidence grew, and they demonstrated a greater capacity for critical thinking and reflective reasoning. These developments are particularly valuable in Christian Religious Education, where students are encouraged to reflect on moral dilemmas, interpret biblical teachings, and relate spiritual concepts to their personal experiences.

Supporting Factors for Successful Implementation

Several factors contributed to the successful implementation of the Talking Stick model. First, teacher preparedness played a critical role. The teacher demonstrated mastery of the subject matter and possessed the skills necessary to facilitate discussions effectively. Preparation included designing meaningful questions, anticipating potential challenges, and establishing clear procedures for the use of the Talking Stick. The teacher's confidence and competence created an environment conducive to active participation. Second, support from the school administration was essential. The principal and other school authorities provided encouragement and logistical assistance, such as allocating sufficient time for interactive learning activities and ensuring that classroom resources were available. This institutional support reinforced the teacher's efforts and highlighted the school's commitment to innovative pedagogical practices. Third, student enthusiasm emerged as a significant factor. Many students were motivated by the novelty of the Talking Stick approach. The method offered a break from conventional lecture-style instruction and provided a sense of ownership over their learning. The anticipation of having a turn to speak increased attention and engagement, as students were eager to contribute meaningfully to discussions. Peer encouragement also played a role, as classmates listened respectfully and responded constructively to one another's contributions.

Challenges and Inhibiting Factors

Despite its effectiveness, the Talking Stick model was not without challenges. One of the main inhibiting factors was students' initial nervousness and lack of self-confidence. Some students hesitated to speak due to fear of making mistakes, embarrassment in front of peers, or uncertainty about the correctness of their responses. This hesitancy was particularly evident during the first few sessions of implementation, where only a small number of students dominated the discussion while others remained silent. Additionally, varying levels of prior knowledge among students occasionally limited the quality of contributions. Students with less familiarity with the subject matter struggled to formulate coherent responses, which could temporarily reduce their willingness to participate. The teacher addressed this challenge by providing supportive prompts, rephrasing questions, and offering encouragement to students who were less confident. Over time, the observed inhibiting factors diminished through consistent practice and strategic teacher interventions. Habitual use of the Talking Stick played a crucial role in normalizing the expectation of active participation. As students became accustomed to the procedure, anxiety levels decreased, and confidence increased. Regular practice reinforced the social norms of respectful listening and structured turn-taking, creating a safe environment for students to express themselves. Teacher motivation and encouragement were equally important. By providing positive reinforcement, praising thoughtful contributions, and acknowledging efforts, the teacher helped students build

self-efficacy. Students learned to perceive mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures, which further enhanced their willingness to participate. In addition, collaborative reflection sessions allowed students to discuss their experiences and share strategies for improvement, reinforcing both peer support and metacognitive awareness.

Overall Effectiveness of the Talking Stick Model

The implementation of the Talking Stick model produced several measurable and observable benefits. First, it increased active student participation, as evidenced by the growing number of students engaging in discussions and responding to questions. Second, it enhanced student confidence and communication skills, as learners became more comfortable expressing opinions and articulating ideas. Third, the model fostered a sense of inclusivity and respect, as students learned to listen attentively and value the perspectives of others. Finally, it created a positive and dynamic classroom atmosphere, characterized by enthusiasm, mutual support, and cooperative learning. These outcomes demonstrate that the Talking Stick model is not only effective in increasing learning activeness but also aligns with the broader objectives of Christian Religious Education. By promoting active engagement, moral reflection, and respectful dialogue, the method contributes to both cognitive and character development. Students learn to integrate knowledge with ethical and spiritual understanding, which is central to the holistic aims of CRE. The findings of this study suggest several implications for educational practice. Teachers of Christian Religious Education are encouraged to incorporate interactive learning strategies, such as the Talking Stick model, to enhance student engagement. Proper preparation, structured implementation, and ongoing support are essential for maximizing effectiveness. In addition, addressing initial student apprehension through encouragement and gradual exposure is critical for sustaining active participation. School administrators also play a pivotal role by fostering an environment that supports innovative teaching methods. Providing professional development opportunities, allocating resources for interactive learning, and promoting a culture of experimentation can facilitate broader adoption of strategies that enhance student learning activeness. Finally, continuous reflection and adaptation are necessary to ensure that the Talking Stick model meets the evolving needs of students. Incorporating student feedback, aligning discussion topics with curriculum objectives, and integrating complementary pedagogical techniques can further enhance the learning experience.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Talking Stick learning model in Grade XII Christian Religious Education at SMK Negeri 1 Balige effectively transformed the classroom into a more interactive and participatory learning environment. By providing a structured framework for students to take turns speaking, the Talking Stick encouraged equitable participation, ensuring that all learners had an opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions. This approach not only enhanced students' confidence in sharing ideas but also fostered an atmosphere of mutual respect, where diverse perspectives were acknowledged and valued. The success of the model was influenced by several key factors, including the teacher's preparedness in facilitating discussions, active support from the school

administration, and the students' enthusiasm and willingness to engage in learning activities. Despite initial challenges such as nervousness and low self-confidence among some students, these obstacles were gradually overcome through consistent practice, encouragement, and motivation provided by the teacher. Over time, students became more comfortable participating, demonstrating improved communication skills and active engagement in classroom discussions. Overall, the findings of this study highlight that the Talking Stick learning model is an effective pedagogical strategy in Christian Religious Education. It not only promotes active learning but also supports the holistic development of students by integrating cognitive, social, and moral growth in alignment with the objectives of faith-based education.

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