

Implementation of Active Learning Methods in Understanding Christian Religious Education (PAK) Material: A Case Study at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu

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ABSTRACT

Character education and cognitive understanding are essential objectives of Christian Religious Education (PAK) in Indonesian junior high schools. This study explores the implementation of active learning methods in enhancing students' comprehension and moral development at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student focus groups, providing a comprehensive view of pedagogical practices and student engagement. The study particularly emphasizes collaborative discussions, role-playing, reflective journaling, and culturally contextualized activities as central strategies for fostering active participation and ethical reasoning among students. Findings indicate that active learning significantly improves students' cognitive comprehension of biblical concepts, promotes reflective thinking, and encourages the internalization of moral values. Teachers' facilitation skills and personal competence-including integrity, patience, and ethical modeling-emerged as critical factors in translating active learning strategies into meaningful cognitive and moral outcomes. Challenges identified include time constraints, heterogeneous student abilities, limited resources, and initial difficulties in shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. Despite these challenges, culturally responsive practices and contextualization of biblical teachings enhanced students' engagement, moral reasoning, and practical application of ethical principles. This study underscores the transformative potential of active learning in PAK, highlighting the interplay between teacher competence, pedagogical strategy, and contextual relevance. The results suggest that integrating participatory methods, reflective practice, and cultural context not only enhances academic understanding but also cultivates ethical, socially responsible, and empathetic students. Implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and school policy are discussed, offering practical insights for strengthening the effectiveness and impact of character education in Indonesian junior high schools.

Keywords: Active Learning, Christian Religious Education, Methods

INTRODUCTION

Education serves not only as a conduit for intellectual knowledge but also as a transformative process for moral, social, and spiritual development. In the Indonesian context, Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen, PAK*) holds a unique position within the school curriculum, aiming to cultivate students' understanding of biblical teachings while simultaneously shaping character, ethics, and faith-oriented decision-making. At the junior high school level, students are transitioning from concrete operational thinking to more abstract reasoning, making them particularly receptive to pedagogical approaches that actively engage cognitive, emotional, and spiritual faculties (Piaget, 1969; Erikson, 1968). However, traditional teacher-centered methods, which prioritize rote memorization and passive reception of content, often fall short in fostering deep understanding, critical thinking, and moral reflection in students. Many teachers rely on lecture-based instruction, leaving limited room for student participation, dialogue, and experiential learning. Consequently, students may struggle not only to comprehend PAK material but also to internalize its moral and spiritual implications. Active learning has emerged as a pedagogical paradigm capable of addressing these challenges. Rooted in constructivist theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1966), active learning emphasizes students' engagement in the learning process through collaboration, discussion, problem-solving, and reflection. Rather than serving as passive recipients, students become co-creators of knowledge, negotiating meaning through social interaction, questioning, and practical application. In the context of PAK, active learning offers a means to bridge abstract theological concepts with students' lived experiences, allowing them to explore biblical principles, ethical dilemmas, and moral reasoning in a participatory environment. Research in religious education has consistently highlighted that active learning strategies—such as group discussions, role-playing, debates, and case-based problem-solving—enhance comprehension, retention, and the development of critical spiritual and ethical skills (Bandura, 1977; Johnson & Johnson, 2019).

At SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu, located in a semi-rural area with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, the implementation of PAK faces specific contextual challenges. Students exhibit varying degrees of prior knowledge, motivation, and engagement in religious studies, influenced by family practices, peer culture, and digital media exposure. Teachers have observed that traditional didactic instruction often fails to stimulate student interest or to foster reflective engagement with PAK material. This scenario underscores the need for pedagogical strategies that not only communicate knowledge but also cultivate critical thinking, personal reflection, and collaborative learning. Active learning methods present a promising solution by transforming the classroom into an interactive and dynamic learning environment where students actively participate, voice their ideas, and apply religious teachings to practical situations. Implementing active learning in PAK, however, requires careful adaptation. Teachers must possess not only subject-matter expertise but also skills in facilitating group activities, guiding reflective discussions, and managing classroom dynamics. They must balance the dual goals of knowledge acquisition and character formation, ensuring that students understand theological content while internalizing moral and ethical principles. Moreover, assessment strategies must align with the active learning approach, evaluating not only factual knowledge but also analytical thinking, ethical reasoning, and collaborative competence. This study seeks to

explore how active learning methods are applied in teaching PAK at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu and to evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing students' understanding of the material. The research focuses on identifying the strategies teachers use, observing classroom interactions, and analyzing students' responses to participatory learning methods. By examining the integration of active learning in PAK instruction, this study aims to provide insights into pedagogical practices that foster both cognitive mastery and moral development. The findings are expected to contribute to evidence-based pedagogical recommendations, highlighting the role of active learning in improving the quality of Christian Religious Education in Indonesian junior high schools.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the implementation of active learning methods in Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu. The qualitative design was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and students' engagement with PAK material. A case study approach is particularly suitable for examining complex educational phenomena in their real-life context, allowing the researcher to capture rich descriptive data on teacher strategies, student responses, and contextual factors influencing the learning process (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu, a junior high school located in a semi-rural area with students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The participants included two PAK teachers with more than five years of teaching experience and forty-eight students from grades VII and VIII. Teachers were selected based on their experience in implementing participatory teaching methods and their willingness to participate in the study. Students were selected through purposive sampling to include a representative mix of gender, academic achievement, and prior engagement in PAK classes. Data were collected through a combination of classroom observations, semi-structured teacher interviews, and student focus group discussions. Classroom observations were conducted over a period of six weeks, during which the researcher recorded instructional methods, student participation, collaborative activities, and interactions between teachers and students. Semi-structured interviews with the teachers explored their understanding of active learning principles, strategies employed in PAK instruction, perceived challenges, and reflections on student outcomes. Focus group discussions with students were conducted to capture their perspectives on learning experiences, engagement levels, and the perceived effectiveness of active learning activities. All qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and identifying recurring themes related to active learning implementation, student engagement, and learning outcomes. Observational data were triangulated with interview and focus group responses to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. Thematic synthesis focused on three primary dimensions: instructional strategies, student cognitive engagement, and affective or moral engagement with PAK content. Reflexive journaling by the researcher was employed to minimize bias and enhance interpretive rigor. This methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how active learning strategies are operationalized in the PAK classroom

and their impact on students' comprehension and engagement, forming the basis for evidence-based recommendations in Christian Religious Education pedagogy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of active learning methods in PAK at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu was observed to create a dynamic, interactive classroom environment that fostered both cognitive understanding and moral engagement among students. Data analysis from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student focus groups revealed that active learning strategies significantly influenced students' comprehension of religious concepts, participation in discussions, and reflective thinking about moral and ethical issues. The results are discussed under three primary themes: instructional strategies, student engagement, and contextual challenges in active learning implementation. The observed PAK lessons incorporated multiple active learning strategies that went beyond traditional lecture-based teaching. The most commonly implemented strategies included collaborative group discussions, case-based problem solving, role-playing, and interactive questioning. In one classroom, teachers divided students into small groups to analyze biblical passages, encouraging them to identify moral lessons and relate them to real-life scenarios. This approach allowed students to actively construct meaning from the text, moving from passive reception to critical engagement. As one teacher stated in an interview: *"I aim to guide students to think for themselves, to connect biblical teachings to their daily life. When they discuss in groups, they begin to see multiple perspectives and apply moral lessons practically."* Role-playing activities, another frequently used method, enabled students to embody characters from biblical narratives and simulate ethical dilemmas. For instance, when discussing the parable of the Good Samaritan, students enacted scenarios demonstrating compassion and moral choice. Observational data revealed that these activities stimulated lively debates and encouraged students to reflect on personal values, empathy, and decision-making. Similarly, teachers frequently posed open-ended questions to the entire class, prompting students to articulate reasoning, justify their perspectives, and engage in peer-to-peer discussion. These techniques align with constructivist principles, emphasizing knowledge co-construction and the importance of learner-centered pedagogy (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers integrated reflective journaling as part of the active learning process. Students were asked to record their insights, moral reflections, and practical applications of PAK material in daily life. Analysis of these journals indicated enhanced critical thinking and personal reflection, revealing that students were internalizing moral lessons rather than memorizing content mechanically. Students frequently linked biblical teachings to classroom behavior, interpersonal relationships, and community responsibilities, demonstrating that active learning methods promoted both cognitive and affective domains.

The implementation of active learning significantly enhanced students' comprehension of PAK material. Observational data and student focus groups indicated that learners were better able to explain theological concepts, recall biblical stories, and apply ethical principles. For example, during lessons on the Ten Commandments, students in group discussions could articulate not only the commandments themselves but also the rationale behind each and their relevance to modern life. Focus group responses revealed

that active learning encouraged deep processing of information. One student noted: *"When we discuss stories in groups or act them out, I understand better because I think about how I would act in that situation. It's easier to remember the lessons."* These findings corroborate existing literature emphasizing that active learning improves retention and comprehension by engaging multiple cognitive processes simultaneously (Freeman et al., 2014). Unlike passive lectures, which often result in superficial memorization, student-centered activities required synthesis, evaluation, and application of knowledge, fostering higher-order thinking skills. Teachers observed that students' ability to explain concepts in their own words and connect them to personal experiences improved significantly, indicating that active learning strategies supported meaningful learning in PAK. Group discussions facilitated peer scaffolding, a key component of Vygotsky's social constructivist framework (Vygotsky, 1978). Higher-performing students often assisted peers who struggled with comprehension, creating a collaborative environment where knowledge construction occurred socially rather than individually. This practice not only enhanced understanding but also fostered communication skills, confidence, and accountability within the classroom community.

Beyond cognitive understanding, active learning methods encouraged moral and affective engagement. Role-playing, storytelling, and ethical dilemmas enabled students to explore the practical implications of biblical teachings in their daily lives. Observations indicated that students were more likely to discuss personal experiences related to honesty, responsibility, and empathy when guided through interactive activities than during traditional lecture sessions. The relational nature of active learning helped students internalize values rather than treating moral lessons as abstract principles. Teachers noted that students demonstrated improved empathy, cooperation, and willingness to assist peers during collaborative tasks. One teacher reflected: *"I see students not just learning about kindness and responsibility, but practicing them. When they work in teams, they negotiate, listen, and apply biblical teachings to real situations."* Student reflections further emphasized the transformative potential of active learning in character formation. For example, after a role-play activity on conflict resolution, several students reported consciously choosing to mediate disagreements with classmates rather than reacting impulsively. This demonstrates that active learning can bridge theoretical knowledge and practical moral action, reinforcing PAK's dual objectives of knowledge acquisition and character development.

The effectiveness of active learning depended heavily on teachers' facilitation skills. Classroom management, task organization, and guidance in reflective discussions were critical for maintaining focus and ensuring that activities contributed to learning objectives. Teachers who effectively balanced freedom and structure created supportive environments where students felt comfortable expressing ideas and experimenting with moral reasoning. Conversely, classrooms where teachers struggled with time management or group coordination experienced reduced engagement and occasional off-task behavior. Teacher interviews highlighted that prior preparation, familiarity with active learning techniques, and personal commitment to moral education were essential for success. Teachers who consistently modeled ethical behavior, fairness, and patience were more effective in guiding students' moral reflection. This observation aligns with

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of modeling in moral and behavioral development. In essence, teachers' personal competence and facilitation skills were instrumental in translating active learning strategies into meaningful cognitive and moral outcomes. Several challenges emerged in implementing active learning in PAK. First, time constraints posed significant limitations. Active learning activities often required extended discussion, planning, and feedback, which conflicted with the structured timetable and curriculum coverage demands. Teachers reported that while students benefited from extended engagement, completing all required content sometimes became challenging. Second, student heterogeneity influenced participation and effectiveness. Differences in prior knowledge, confidence, and motivation occasionally led to unequal engagement within groups. Some students were hesitant to speak or struggled with collaborative problem-solving, necessitating additional teacher intervention. Third, classroom resources and physical space sometimes limited certain activities, such as role-playing or group discussions. In semi-rural settings like SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu, limited access to teaching aids and restricted classroom layouts posed practical challenges to active learning implementation. Some teachers initially struggled with shifting from a traditional lecture-based mindset to a student-centered approach. Observations and interviews revealed that professional development, mentorship, and peer collaboration were crucial in supporting teachers' adoption of active learning strategies. Once teachers gained confidence in facilitating discussions and managing group dynamics, the quality of student engagement improved markedly.

A notable finding was the integration of local cultural and religious contexts into active learning. Teachers frequently incorporated local traditions, stories, and community examples to make PAK material relevant and relatable. For instance, discussions about honesty or community service often referenced local practices or church activities, allowing students to contextualize moral principles in their daily environment. This approach enhanced engagement, reinforced cultural identity, and promoted practical application of biblical teachings, confirming findings from previous studies emphasizing culturally responsive pedagogy in religious education (Marzuki, 2020; Rachman, 2022). The combined effect of active learning strategies, teacher facilitation, and contextual integration led to observable improvements in students' comprehension, participation, and moral reasoning. Classroom observations indicated increased initiative in answering questions, collaborative problem-solving, and respectful dialogue among peers. Focus group discussions revealed that students felt more motivated, confident, and responsible for their learning. The synthesis of findings demonstrates that active learning not only enhances cognitive understanding but also fosters ethical reflection, empathy, and personal growth-key outcomes for PAK at the junior high school level. The case study at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu underscores the transformative potential of active learning in PAK instruction. Effective implementation depends on strategic facilitation, teacher competence, and contextual adaptation. While challenges exist-including time constraints, student diversity, and resource limitations-evidence indicates that active learning fosters meaningful engagement, enhances comprehension, and supports character formation. Teachers' ability to guide, model, and scaffold moral reasoning is critical, positioning them as central agents in creating a participatory, reflective, and morally conscious learning environment. The findings advocate for institutional support,

professional development, and curriculum flexibility to enable active learning strategies to thrive, ultimately enhancing both cognitive and moral outcomes in Christian Religious Education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of active learning methods in Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu significantly enhances both students' comprehension of religious concepts and their moral and affective development. Through collaborative discussions, role-playing, reflective journaling, and culturally contextualized activities, students actively construct knowledge while internalizing ethical values. These findings confirm that active learning transforms the PAK classroom from a passive, lecture-centered environment into a dynamic space where students engage cognitively, socially, and morally with the curriculum. The results indicate that teachers play a pivotal role in mediating the effectiveness of active learning. Their facilitation skills, pedagogical preparation, and personal competence—including moral integrity, patience, and reflective practice—directly influence student engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers who effectively balance structure and freedom, provide constructive guidance, and model ethical behavior create environments conducive to both intellectual growth and moral formation. In line with social learning theory, students internalize moral and ethical principles not merely through instruction but by observing and interacting with teachers who exemplify these values in practice. Time constraints, student heterogeneity, resource limitations, and initial difficulties in transitioning from traditional teaching methods occasionally hindered the optimal implementation of active learning. Addressing these challenges requires institutional support, curriculum flexibility, and continuous professional development for teachers. Mentorship programs, collaborative teacher communities, and targeted training on active learning strategies can help strengthen instructional quality and enhance student participation. Integrating local culture and contextual relevance emerged as a critical factor in making PAK lessons meaningful and engaging. By relating biblical teachings to students' daily experiences, local traditions, and community practices, teachers facilitated the practical application of moral principles, fostering a deeper sense of ethical responsibility and cultural identity. This culturally responsive approach aligns with contemporary educational theories advocating for context-aware, student-centered pedagogy. In conclusion, active learning represents a powerful pedagogical strategy for PAK, promoting both cognitive mastery and character development. The case of SMP Negeri 3 Sogaeadu illustrates that when teachers adopt participatory methods, demonstrate ethical leadership, and adapt lessons to students' social and cultural contexts, character education becomes a lived, experiential process rather than abstract instruction. Institutional support, teacher training, and reflective practice are essential to sustaining and expanding these outcomes. Ultimately, fostering student engagement, comprehension, and moral development through active learning in PAK contributes not only to academic success but also to the formation of responsible, ethical, and socially aware young citizens. This study underscores the transformative potential of active learning as a means to integrate knowledge acquisition with character

formation in the Indonesian junior high school context, offering practical implications for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers seeking to enhance the quality and impact of religious education.

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