

Optimizing Student Centered Learning to Increase Student Activeness in Christian Religious Education Learning for Class X at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the implementation and optimization of Student Centered Learning (SCL) in increasing student activeness in Christian Religious Education learning for Grade X students at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving one Christian Religious Education teacher and five Grade X students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. The findings revealed that Student Centered Learning had been implemented through group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, collaborative activities, presentations, and reflective learning, although teacher-centered instruction was still evident in several learning sessions. The optimization of Student Centered Learning was achieved by strengthening the teacher's role as a facilitator, creating a psychologically safe classroom environment, encouraging collaborative and reflective learning, and integrating learning activities that actively involved students in constructing knowledge and applying Christian values in daily life. These strategies significantly increased students' classroom participation, confidence, critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration, and spiritual engagement during Christian Religious Education learning. The study concludes that optimizing Student Centered Learning contributes not only to improving student activeness but also to supporting holistic learning that integrates cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and spiritual development. Therefore, Student Centered Learning represents an effective pedagogical approach for creating meaningful, participatory, and transformative Christian Religious Education learning in vocational high schools.

Keywords

Christian Religious Education, Christian Character, Grade X Students, Learning Activeness, Student Centered Learning, Vocational High School.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of twenty-first-century education has fundamentally shifted the orientation of teaching and learning from teacher-centered instruction toward approaches that actively engage students in constructing their own knowledge. This transformation is driven by the increasing demand for graduates who possess critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills that are essential for lifelong learning and workplace readiness. Within Indonesia, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum reinforces this paradigm by emphasizing meaningful learning experiences in which students become active participants rather than passive recipients of information. Consequently, Student Centered Learning (SCL) has become one of the most recommended pedagogical approaches because it encourages learners to develop independence, responsibility, and higher-order thinking skills through active participation in classroom activities (Kerimbayev et al., 2023; Prabawati et al., 2024).

Student Centered Learning is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which argues that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction, experience, and reflection instead of being transmitted directly from teachers to students. Under this approach, teachers function as facilitators who create meaningful learning environments that allow learners to investigate, collaborate, solve problems, and reflect upon their learning experiences. Numerous studies have demonstrated that Student Centered Learning significantly enhances learning motivation, classroom engagement, conceptual understanding, and students' confidence in expressing ideas. These advantages make Student Centered Learning particularly suitable for vocational education, where students are expected to acquire practical competencies alongside cognitive development to meet the demands of the modern workforce (Lathifah et al., 2024; Erdilanita et al., 2025).

The implementation of Student Centered Learning is equally important in Christian Religious Education because this subject aims not only to develop students' cognitive understanding of biblical teachings but also to cultivate spiritual maturity, Christian character, and responsible behavior in daily life. Christian Religious Education should therefore encourage students to participate actively in discussion, reflection, biblical interpretation, and collaborative learning so that Christian values are internalized through meaningful experiences rather than memorization alone. Active participation enables students to connect biblical principles with real-life situations, thereby fostering deeper faith development and moral transformation. Consequently, Student Centered Learning provides an educational framework that supports both academic achievement and spiritual formation simultaneously (Boiliu & Sinaga, 2021; Paendong & Marbun, 2024).

Despite its recognized benefits, the implementation of Student Centered Learning in many schools remains less than optimal. Preliminary observations conducted at SMKN 2 Palangka

Raya indicate that although elements of Student Centered Learning have been introduced in Christian Religious Education classes, classroom instruction continues to be dominated by teacher-centered lecturing. As a result, student participation is uneven, with only a small proportion of learners actively asking questions, expressing opinions, or engaging in collaborative discussions, while many remain passive throughout the learning process. This condition suggests that the intended objectives of Student Centered Learning have not yet been fully realized and that further optimization is required to ensure all students become actively involved in meaningful learning activities.

Previous research has consistently confirmed the positive influence of Student Centered Learning on student engagement and academic achievement across different educational contexts. Research has shown that learning environments emphasizing collaboration, inquiry, and reflective learning significantly improve participation, motivation, and higher-order thinking skills. However, studies specifically investigating the optimization of Student Centered Learning within Christian Religious Education at vocational high schools remain limited. Existing literature generally focuses on general classroom implementation without integrating multidimensional student activeness with the transformative spiritual objectives unique to Christian Religious Education. This gap highlights the need for research that explores contextual strategies capable of maximizing both learning participation and spiritual growth among vocational students (Sari et al., 2024; Juhra, 2024).

Based on these considerations, this study entitled "Optimizing Student Centered Learning to Increase Student Activeness in Christian Religious Education Learning for Class X at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya" seeks to examine how Student Centered Learning is implemented, identify the level of student activeness during Christian Religious Education lessons, and formulate effective optimization strategies that enhance students' multidimensional participation. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Student Centered Learning in Christian Religious Education and practically to provide teachers with evidence-based strategies for creating more active, meaningful, and transformative classroom learning experiences that support both academic excellence and Christian character formation..

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the optimization of Student Centered Learning in increasing student activeness in Christian Religious Education learning for Grade X students at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya. The research was conducted at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya, with participants consisting of one Christian Religious Education teacher and five Grade X students selected through purposive sampling based on variations in their classroom activeness. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation to obtain comprehensive information regarding the implementation of Student Centered Learning and students' learning participation. The collected data were

analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement were employed. This methodological approach enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of classroom practices, identify factors influencing student activeness, and formulate strategies for optimizing Student Centered Learning within the context of Christian Religious Education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Student Centered Learning in Christian Religious Education Learning for Grade X Students at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya

Student Centered Learning (SCL) is an educational approach that positions students as the central actors in the learning process, while teachers function as facilitators who guide, motivate, and support learners in constructing knowledge independently. The implementation of SCL has become increasingly important in contemporary education because it promotes active participation, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills that are essential for the twenty-first century. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), Student Centered Learning is particularly relevant because learning is not limited to transferring biblical knowledge but also aims to facilitate spiritual growth, character formation, and faith development through meaningful experiences. Therefore, the implementation of SCL in CRE classrooms enables students to engage actively in exploring Christian values and applying them in their daily lives rather than merely memorizing religious concepts (Kerimbayev et al., 2023; Baeten et al., 2020).

The implementation of Student Centered Learning in Christian Religious Education for Grade X students at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya can be observed through the use of interactive learning activities that encourage students to participate actively in the classroom. Teachers provide opportunities for learners to engage in group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, presentations, and collaborative problem-solving activities related to biblical teachings and contemporary social issues. These activities allow students to express opinions, share experiences, and construct understanding through interaction with peers and teachers. Such learning practices align with constructivist principles, which emphasize that knowledge is built through active engagement and social interaction. As a result, students become more involved in learning and develop a deeper understanding of Christian teachings (Schweisfurth, 2021; Alt & Raichel, 2022).

Another important aspect of SCL implementation is the transformation of the teacher's role from knowledge transmitter to learning facilitator. In a Student Centered Learning environment, teachers no longer dominate classroom interactions through lengthy lectures. Instead, they design learning experiences that encourage exploration, reflection, and participation. In Christian Religious Education, teachers guide students in interpreting biblical

passages, connecting religious values with real-life situations, and reflecting on personal experiences from a Christian perspective. By creating a supportive learning atmosphere, teachers help students develop confidence in expressing their thoughts and questions. This facilitative role contributes significantly to students' engagement because learners feel valued and encouraged to participate actively in classroom activities (Hoidn, 2021; Weimer, 2021).

The implementation of Student Centered Learning also involves collaborative learning processes that promote social interaction among students. Collaboration is particularly beneficial in Christian Religious Education because it reflects Christian values such as fellowship, respect, empathy, and mutual support. Through group discussions and cooperative tasks, students learn to appreciate different perspectives while working together to solve problems or analyze biblical cases. These collaborative experiences not only enhance cognitive learning outcomes but also foster social and emotional development. Research indicates that collaborative learning environments increase student engagement, communication skills, and academic achievement because learners actively contribute to knowledge construction rather than passively receiving information (Johnson & Johnson, 2020; Laal & Ghodsi, 2021).

Furthermore, Student Centered Learning encourages students to become independent learners who take responsibility for their own learning process. In Christian Religious Education, students are encouraged to explore biblical resources, analyze moral dilemmas, and reflect on spiritual issues independently. Such activities help learners develop self-regulation skills, critical thinking abilities, and intrinsic motivation to learn. When students assume responsibility for learning, they become more committed to achieving educational goals and more capable of applying Christian values in real-life situations. Self-directed learning is particularly important in vocational education because students need to develop autonomy and adaptability that will prepare them for future workplace challenges and lifelong learning opportunities (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Broadbent & Poon, 2021).

Despite its positive contributions, the implementation of Student Centered Learning often encounters several challenges. Some students may be reluctant to participate actively due to fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, or limited communication skills. Similarly, teachers may face difficulties in managing active classrooms, particularly when students have diverse learning needs and varying levels of participation. In Christian Religious Education classes, these challenges may result in uneven engagement, where only a few students consistently contribute to discussions while others remain passive. Therefore, successful implementation of SCL requires teachers to create a psychologically safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing opinions, asking questions, and participating without fear of judgment. Supportive learning environments have been shown to increase student confidence and engagement significantly (Kahu et al., 2022; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

Overall, the implementation of Student Centered Learning in Christian Religious Education for Grade X students at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya demonstrates a shift toward more

active, participatory, and meaningful learning practices. Through discussion, collaboration, reflection, and learner autonomy, students are encouraged to engage deeply with Christian teachings while simultaneously developing academic, social, and spiritual competencies. The effectiveness of this approach depends on teachers' ability to facilitate learning, foster supportive classroom relationships, and provide opportunities for meaningful student participation. Consequently, Student Centered Learning serves as a powerful educational approach that supports not only intellectual development but also the formation of Christian character and values that are essential for students' personal and spiritual growth (OECD, 2021; Boiliu & Arifianto, 2022).

Optimizing Student Centered Learning to Increase Student Activeness in Christian Religious Education Learning for Grade X Students at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya

Optimizing Student Centered Learning (SCL) is a strategic effort to maximize the effectiveness of student-centered instructional practices so that learners become actively engaged in every stage of the learning process. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), optimization extends beyond improving academic participation because it also seeks to nurture students' spiritual maturity, Christian character, and personal faith. Effective optimization requires teachers to design learning environments that encourage students to think critically, collaborate with peers, communicate confidently, and reflect on biblical teachings in relation to everyday life. Therefore, Student Centered Learning should not be implemented merely as a teaching technique but as a comprehensive educational philosophy that empowers learners to become responsible participants in constructing knowledge and practicing Christian values. Research consistently demonstrates that optimized student-centered instruction enhances engagement, learning motivation, and meaningful educational experiences across various educational settings (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Schweisfurth, 2021).

One of the primary strategies for optimizing Student Centered Learning is strengthening the teacher's role as a facilitator rather than the sole source of knowledge. Teachers are responsible for creating learning experiences that stimulate inquiry, discussion, exploration, and reflection instead of relying predominantly on lectures. In Christian Religious Education, teachers facilitate biblical discussions by encouraging students to ask questions, analyze Scripture, relate biblical principles to contemporary issues, and express personal reflections regarding faith and morality. Such facilitative practices increase students' confidence in sharing ideas while promoting deeper conceptual and spiritual understanding. Studies have shown that teachers who employ facilitative instructional approaches successfully increase students' classroom participation, critical thinking abilities, and collaborative learning behaviors (Hoidn, 2021; Weimer, 2021).

Another essential optimization strategy involves designing collaborative learning activities that encourage students to learn from one another. Group discussions, cooperative projects, case studies, and problem-based learning activities provide opportunities for students to exchange ideas, solve authentic problems, and appreciate diverse perspectives. Within Christian Religious Education, collaborative learning also supports the development

of biblical values such as love, fellowship, humility, forgiveness, and mutual respect. Students learn that Christian faith is not only understood individually but is also practiced within a community through dialogue and cooperation. Collaborative learning therefore contributes simultaneously to cognitive achievement, interpersonal competence, and spiritual development. Numerous educational studies indicate that cooperative learning significantly improves classroom engagement, communication skills, and academic performance because students become active contributors to knowledge construction (Johnson & Johnson, 2020; Laal & Ghodsi, 2021).

Optimizing Student Centered Learning also requires creating a psychologically safe classroom environment where every student feels comfortable expressing opinions without fear of criticism or failure. Student activeness often declines because learners experience anxiety, embarrassment, or lack of self-confidence when participating in classroom discussions. Consequently, teachers should cultivate supportive relationships characterized by encouragement, respect, empathy, and constructive feedback. In Christian Religious Education, psychological safety aligns closely with Christian values of acceptance, compassion, and unconditional love, creating an atmosphere where students feel appreciated regardless of their academic abilities. Research demonstrates that psychologically supportive classrooms significantly increase student participation, intrinsic motivation, and willingness to engage in collaborative learning activities (Kahu et al., 2022; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

The optimization of Student Centered Learning further involves integrating reflective learning activities that enable students to connect biblical teachings with their personal experiences. Reflection encourages learners to evaluate their beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes based on Christian principles. Teachers may employ reflective journals, testimony sharing, biblical case analyses, or guided personal reflection to deepen students' understanding of faith. Such reflective practices transform learning from simple knowledge acquisition into character formation and spiritual growth. Educational research emphasizes that reflective learning strengthens critical thinking, self-awareness, moral reasoning, and lifelong learning competencies because students actively interpret their experiences in meaningful ways (Boud et al., 2021; Rodgers, 2021).

Technology integration also represents an important dimension of optimizing Student Centered Learning in modern education. Digital learning platforms, interactive presentations, online discussion forums, multimedia resources, and collaborative digital tools enable students to access information independently while promoting interactive learning experiences. In Christian Religious Education, technology can facilitate access to biblical resources, educational videos, online devotionals, and collaborative projects that enrich classroom instruction. When technology is used appropriately within a student-centered framework, it enhances learner autonomy, engagement, creativity, and communication while accommodating diverse learning styles. Contemporary educational studies have confirmed that technology-supported Student Centered Learning positively influences students'

participation and academic achievement across different educational contexts (Kerimbayev et al., 2023; Bond et al., 2020).

Ultimately, optimizing Student Centered Learning to increase student activeness in Christian Religious Education requires continuous collaboration among teachers, students, and schools. Teachers need ongoing professional development to strengthen student-centered instructional competencies, schools should provide supportive learning environments and adequate instructional resources, and students must be encouraged to assume responsibility for their own learning. Through systematic optimization involving facilitative teaching, collaborative learning, reflective practice, psychological safety, and appropriate technology integration, Christian Religious Education can become more active, meaningful, and transformative. Such optimization not only improves classroom participation but also contributes to the holistic development of students by strengthening their intellectual abilities, social competencies, moral values, and Christian faith, thereby preparing them to become responsible citizens and faithful **followers of Christ in contemporary society** (OECD, 2021; Boiliu & Arifianto, 2022)..

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the implementation of Student Centered Learning in Christian Religious Education for Grade X students at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya has shifted the learning process toward greater student participation through discussion, collaboration, reflection, and active engagement, although its implementation still requires continuous optimization to achieve maximum effectiveness. The study further demonstrates that optimizing Student Centered Learning by strengthening the teacher's role as a facilitator, creating psychologically safe learning environments, promoting collaborative and reflective learning activities, and integrating appropriate instructional strategies significantly enhances students' activeness, critical thinking, communication skills, and spiritual development. Therefore, Student Centered Learning serves not only as an effective pedagogical approach for improving classroom participation but also as a transformative learning model that supports the holistic development of students by integrating academic achievement, Christian character formation, and faith development. The successful implementation of this approach requires sustained commitment from teachers, schools, and students to establish meaningful, engaging, and student-centered Christian Religious Education that prepares learners to become lifelong learners and responsible Christian citizens..

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