

The Application of the Group Discussion Method in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the importance of student engagement in the learning process of Christian Religious Education and Character Education, which can be enhanced through the implementation of the group discussion method. The purpose of this study was to describe the implementation of the group discussion method, student engagement in learning, and the relationship between the implementation of the group discussion method and student engagement at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving the Christian Religious Education teacher and students of Class X-06 at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya. Data were analyzed using the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the group discussion method has been implemented in the teaching and learning process of Christian Religious Education and Character Education, although several challenges were encountered during its implementation. Student engagement was reflected in their participation in group discussions and collaborative activities; however, the level of engagement varied among students. The study also revealed a relationship between the implementation of the group discussion method and student engagement in the learning process. With proper management, the group discussion method can support the creation of a more active learning environment and encourage greater student participation.

Keywords

Group Discussion Method, Student Engagement, Christian Religious Education And Character Education, Learning



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INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education and Character Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen dan Budi Pekerti) plays a strategic role in developing students' character, moral values, and Christian faith. Its purpose is not limited to enabling students to understand religious concepts and learning materials but also involves facilitating the internalization of Christian values in students' daily lives. Sapparan et al. (2026) emphasize that Christian Religious Education

should encourage students to integrate Christian faith into their attitudes, behavior, and everyday interactions. Therefore, the learning process requires instructional approaches and methods that go beyond the transmission of knowledge and provide opportunities for students to participate actively, reflect on their experiences, communicate their ideas, and develop meaningful connections between learning materials and their lives. An active learning environment is particularly important because religious education involves not only cognitive understanding but also the development of attitudes, values, and social responsibility.

In practice, however, learning in Christian Religious Education and Character Education may still be dominated by teacher-centered instructional patterns. In such situations, teachers tend to occupy the central role in explaining learning materials, while students primarily listen, take notes, and complete assigned tasks. Simbolon et al. (2025) explain that teacher-dominated learning can position students as relatively passive recipients of information, thereby limiting opportunities for students to participate in discussions and express their opinions. When students have limited opportunities to communicate and interact during learning, their engagement may also become less visible. This condition is particularly relevant in religious education because students need opportunities not only to receive explanations but also to discuss values, interpret meanings, relate religious teachings to everyday situations, and develop their understanding through interaction with others.

One learning method that can provide greater opportunities for student participation is the group discussion method. Group discussion encourages students to exchange opinions, communicate ideas, cooperate with peers, and develop shared understanding through social interaction. In Christian Religious Education and Character Education, this method can create opportunities for students to connect learning materials with their personal experiences, social environments, and Christian values. Through discussion, students can learn to listen to different perspectives, articulate their own understanding, respond to the ideas of others, and develop responsibility for collective learning. Thus, group discussion has the potential to transform the learning process from a predominantly teacher-centered activity into a more participatory and collaborative learning experience.

Nevertheless, the implementation of group discussion does not automatically guarantee meaningful participation from all students. The effectiveness of the method depends substantially on how the teacher organizes groups, provides learning instructions, facilitates interaction, distributes responsibilities, and creates opportunities for every student to contribute. Sigalingging, Harefa, and Naibaho (2023) emphasize that group discussion requires appropriate management to ensure that students participate actively in the learning process. Without adequate facilitation, group discussions may be dominated by a small number of active students, while other students remain passive or simply follow the work of their peers. Consequently, there may be a gap between the theoretical principles of active and collaborative learning and the actual interaction that occurs in the classroom.

This issue provides an important basis for examining the implementation of the group discussion method in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMA Negeri 1

Palangka Raya. Rather than measuring learning outcomes or statistically testing the effectiveness of the method, this study seeks to understand the learning process as it occurs in its natural classroom context. Particular attention is given to how teachers implement group discussions, how students participate in the learning activities, and how the implementation of group discussions is related to student engagement. Student engagement is considered in terms of participation in group activities, willingness to express opinions, cooperation with peers, responsibility for assigned tasks, attention to learning activities, and interaction during the discussion process.

The study is guided by three research questions. First, how is the group discussion method implemented in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya? Second, how are students engaged in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at the school? Third, how is the implementation of the group discussion method related to student engagement in the learning process? These questions are intended to provide a comprehensive description of both the instructional process and the students' participation within that process.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to describe the implementation of the group discussion method in Christian Religious Education and Character Education, to describe student engagement during the learning process, and to describe the relationship between the implementation of the group discussion method and student engagement. The study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of group discussion as a collaborative learning approach in Christian Religious Education. Practically, the findings may provide teachers with insights into the importance of effective group management, teacher facilitation, equitable participation, and meaningful academic interaction. More broadly, the study may support efforts to develop Christian Religious Education and Character Education that is not only oriented toward understanding religious content but also encourages students to communicate, cooperate, reflect, and construct meaningful understanding through social interaction.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the group discussion method and student engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding the learning process, classroom interactions, group dynamics, teacher facilitation, and students' responses within their natural educational setting rather than measuring learning outcomes numerically. Through this approach, the researcher was able to explore the meaning underlying students' behavior, participation, communication, and interaction during the learning process.

The qualitative approach is consistent with the view that qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena comprehensively within their natural contexts by examining the social interactions that occur in the field (Sidiq, Choiri, & Mujahidin, 2019). In this study, the

approach enabled the researcher to examine how the group discussion method was implemented in Christian Religious Education and Character Education and how students participated in and responded to the learning activities.

The study used a descriptive qualitative research design. This design was selected because the purpose of the study was to describe systematically and comprehensively the actual conditions of the learning process without manipulating the research setting. The study specifically examined the stages of implementing the group discussion method, the teacher's role in facilitating group activities, and the forms and levels of student engagement during the learning process. The study did not aim to statistically test the effectiveness of the group discussion method or compare experimental and control groups. Instead, it sought to understand and describe the learning process as it naturally occurred in the classroom. Descriptive qualitative research emphasizes the description and interpretation of phenomena in their natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument and meaning being prioritized over statistical generalization (Susanto et al., 2025).

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya, located at Jl. AIS Nasution No. 2, Langkai, Pahandut District, Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. The research activities were conducted during 2026 and consisted of several stages, including proposal preparation, consultation, proposal submission, proposal seminar, research permission, field data collection, data analysis, thesis preparation, and the final thesis examination. Field research was primarily conducted in May and June 2026, involving direct observation of learning activities, interviews with the teacher and selected students, and collection of relevant documentation.

The data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained directly from the research participants, particularly the Christian Religious Education and Character Education teacher and students involved in the learning process. The primary data included information concerning the teacher's implementation of the group discussion method, students' experiences and responses, classroom interactions, group collaboration, and student engagement during learning activities. Directly obtained data enabled the researcher to understand the actual classroom situation and the participants' experiences in their natural context. Primary data are generally obtained directly from the first source through techniques such as observation and interviews (Sugiyono, 2018).

Secondary data were obtained from relevant written and visual documents that supported the research findings. These included learning plans, teaching materials, relevant curriculum documents, student group assignments, attendance records, photographs of learning activities, observation sheets, and other documentation related to the implementation of group discussions. Secondary data were used to complement and verify information obtained through observation and interviews, thereby strengthening the credibility and completeness of the research findings.

Three data collection techniques were employed: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted directly during Christian Religious Education and

Character Education lessons to examine the implementation of group discussions, student participation, interaction among group members, teacher facilitation, task distribution, and classroom dynamics. Interviews were conducted with the teacher and selected students to obtain deeper information regarding their experiences, perceptions, participation, and challenges during group discussion activities. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing the researcher to maintain the focus of the study while providing participants with opportunities to explain their experiences in their own words. Documentation was used as supporting evidence for the observation and interview findings. Relevant documents and photographs were collected to provide additional information concerning the learning activities and student participation. The combination of observation, interviews, and documentation enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon from different sources and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the learning process (Rukminingsih & Latief, 2020).

The data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative data analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process, beginning with data collection and continuing until the interpretation of the findings was completed. During data reduction, the researcher selected, organized, focused, and simplified information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. Data that were irrelevant to the research questions were excluded, while relevant information was categorized according to the main themes of the study. The reduced data were then displayed in an organized form to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, similarities, and differences among the findings. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions based on the patterns identified in the data. The conclusions were continuously reviewed against the available evidence to ensure that they accurately represented the conditions observed in the field. This interactive and continuous process enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive interpretation of the implementation of the group discussion method and its relationship with student engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education (Sari et al., 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Group Discussion Method in Christian Religious Education and Character Education

The findings indicate that the group discussion method in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya was implemented through several stages, including group formation, assignment of learning tasks, group discussion, teacher guidance, and completion or presentation of group work. The teacher used this method to encourage students to express their opinions, develop cooperation, and assist one another in understanding the learning material. During the learning process, the teacher acted primarily as a facilitator by moving between groups, providing explanations, answering questions, and assisting students who experienced difficulties. Students also demonstrated interaction and

cooperation by communicating with group members, determining task formats, and distributing responsibilities among themselves. These findings show that the implementation of group discussion had created opportunities for students to participate and collaborate rather than relying entirely on teacher-centered instruction.

However, the findings also reveal several limitations in the implementation of the method. The teacher did not provide a comprehensive introductory explanation of the learning material before the discussion, and the initial activity tended to proceed directly to the assigned questions. In addition, when students were allowed to form their own groups, they tended to select close friends, resulting in uneven distribution of academic ability and participation among groups. More importantly, student interaction during the discussion was predominantly focused on dividing responsibilities and completing assignments rather than engaging in deeper discussion of the Christian Religious Education and Character Education material. Thus, although the basic elements of collaborative learning had been implemented and teacher facilitation was evident, the discussion had not yet fully developed into a process of collective knowledge construction. The findings are consistent with the social constructivist perspective of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs through social interaction, dialogue, assistance, and collaborative construction of understanding.

Based on the research findings, the implementation of the group discussion method in Christian Religious Education and Character Education in Class X-06 at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya was carried out through several stages, including group formation, assignment of learning tasks, discussion activities, teacher facilitation, and presentation of the results. Throughout the learning process, the teacher attempted to encourage active student participation by providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively in completing the assigned tasks. The teacher primarily functioned as a facilitator by guiding and assisting groups when they encountered difficulties. This approach indicates a shift from teacher-centered instruction toward a learning process that provides greater opportunities for students to participate actively and interact with their peers.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that the implementation of the group discussion method was not yet fully optimal. One of the main limitations was that the teacher did not provide sufficient initial explanation of the learning material before the discussion began. As a result, students were immediately instructed to search for answers in their textbooks and discuss the assigned questions within their respective groups. Although this approach encouraged students to seek information independently, the absence of adequate preliminary explanation may have limited their initial understanding of the material and affected the depth of the subsequent discussion. In addition, the formation of groups was left largely to the students, resulting in an uneven distribution of academic abilities and participation among the groups. Consequently, some groups were more active and engaged than others. The discussions also tended to focus on completing the assigned tasks rather than developing a deeper understanding of the subject matter through the exchange and critical examination of ideas.

These findings are consistent with Mawikere (2022), who explains that the group discussion method provides students with opportunities to exchange ideas, cooperate with one another, and solve problems collectively. In the context of this study, opportunities for collaboration were indeed provided, as students were required to work together to complete the learning tasks. However, the collaboration observed during the learning process was still largely characterized by the distribution of tasks among group members. In other words, students tended to divide the work so that each member was responsible for a particular part of the assignment, rather than engaging in sustained dialogue to exchange perspectives and construct a shared understanding of the learning material. This condition suggests that although the basic characteristics of group discussion had been implemented, its potential as a medium for developing students' communication, critical thinking, and collaborative learning skills had not yet been fully realized.

From the perspective of Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, the implementation of the group discussion method reflects an important principle of learning, namely that knowledge is developed through social interaction (Konstruktivisme, 2024). The teacher provided opportunities for students to learn collectively, assist one another when facing difficulties, and receive guidance during the learning process (Rifqi, Handayani, & Ajie, 2022). Such practices demonstrate that learning was not entirely dependent on the teacher's explanation. Instead, students were given opportunities to interact with their peers and participate in constructing their understanding through collaborative activities. The teacher's role as a facilitator was also consistent with the social constructivist perspective, in which appropriate guidance and assistance can support students in accomplishing learning activities that may be difficult for them to complete independently.

However, the findings also reveal that the principles of social constructivism had not been implemented comprehensively. From Vygotsky's perspective, social interaction in learning should not be limited to completing assignments but should function as a means through which students develop and reconstruct knowledge through dialogue, negotiation of meaning, exchange of perspectives, and collaboration. In this study, interactions among students were still predominantly directed toward dividing responsibilities and completing the assigned tasks. Opportunities for students to question one another, explain their reasoning, challenge different viewpoints, and develop a deeper collective understanding of the material remained relatively limited. Therefore, although the implementation of the group discussion method had begun to reflect the principles of social constructivism, its effectiveness could be strengthened by providing clearer initial scaffolding, organizing groups more strategically, and encouraging students to engage in deeper academic dialogue. Such improvements would allow group discussions to function not merely as a mechanism for completing assignments, but as a meaningful learning process through which students actively construct knowledge through social interaction and collaboration.

Student Engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education through the Group Discussion Method

The findings indicate that student engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education through the group discussion method was demonstrated through participation in group assignments, willingness to express opinions, attentiveness to learning activities, and cooperation with peers. According to the teacher, group discussions encouraged students who were previously reluctant to speak in class to become more willing to express their ideas because responsibilities were distributed among group members. Student interviews similarly revealed that learning in small groups created a more comfortable environment for expressing opinions. Students reported feeling more confident because they had an opportunity to contribute ideas and believed that their contributions could support the achievement of group objectives. This finding was also supported by classroom observations showing that students were willing to ask questions and express opinions when they encountered difficulties during the learning process.

However, the findings also show that student engagement was not evenly distributed and remained largely oriented toward task completion. Classroom observations revealed that most students focused on completing their individual responsibilities within the group rather than engaging in substantive discussion of the learning material. Although students were physically and behaviorally involved in the group activities, interaction among them remained relatively limited and functional. The documentation further confirmed their participation through attendance records, photographs of group discussions, and completed group assignments. Thus, the group discussion method successfully encouraged students' behavioral participation, confidence, and willingness to communicate, particularly in small-group settings. Nevertheless, deeper cognitive engagement through exchanging ideas, discussing concepts, questioning different perspectives, and collaboratively constructing understanding had not yet developed optimally. The findings therefore suggest that group discussion can create favorable conditions for student participation, but its effectiveness in developing deeper engagement depends on how effectively the teacher facilitates meaningful academic interaction within each group.

Based on the research findings, the implementation of the group discussion method contributed to increased student engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education. This engagement was reflected in students' growing confidence in expressing their opinions, their sense of responsibility for completing group assignments, and the emergence of interaction among students throughout the learning process. These conditions indicate that the group discussion method can create a more active learning environment than instructional approaches that rely predominantly on teacher explanations. By involving students directly in group activities, the learning process provides them with opportunities to participate, communicate, and work collaboratively in achieving the expected learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that student engagement had not yet reached an optimal level. Most students participated primarily in completing the tasks assigned to them rather than engaging in discussions that explored the learning material in greater depth. In several cases, students appeared to focus on completing their respective portions of the

assignment, while opportunities to exchange ideas, question different perspectives, and construct a shared understanding remained limited. This finding suggests that student activity was more evident at the behavioral level, particularly in carrying out assigned responsibilities, than at the cognitive level, where students are expected to actively process, analyze, and discuss the learning material.

These findings are consistent with Simbolon et al. (2025), who found that the group discussion method can increase student activity by providing learners with opportunities to participate directly in the learning process. Similarly, Musakal, Rosdiana, and Rahman (2024) reported that group discussion can strengthen social interaction among students and create a more communicative learning environment. The findings of the present study correspond with these previous studies, particularly regarding the increased confidence of students in expressing their opinions and their willingness to cooperate with peers during learning activities. The group discussion method therefore provides a learning context in which students are not merely recipients of information but are given opportunities to contribute to classroom interaction and collaborative activities.

However, the findings also reveal that student engagement was not evenly distributed across all group members. Some students remained relatively passive, contributed minimally to the discussion, and tended to rely on more active group members to complete the assigned tasks. This condition demonstrates that the use of a group discussion method does not automatically ensure that all students will participate actively. The level and quality of student engagement continue to be influenced by individual responsibility, learning motivation, confidence, and willingness to contribute to group activities. Consequently, simply placing students into groups is insufficient to guarantee meaningful participation. Teachers need to establish clear expectations for individual contributions and create learning activities that encourage every student to become actively involved in the discussion.

Viewed from the perspective of Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, the student engagement observed in this study indicates that learning through social interaction had begun to develop. Vygotsky's perspective emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through communication, collaboration, and interaction with others. In the context of this study, students were provided with opportunities to discuss ideas, ask questions, exchange experiences, and assist peers who encountered difficulties. These interactions contributed to students' willingness and confidence to express their opinions. The group discussion setting therefore created a social learning environment in which students could develop their understanding not only through interaction with the teacher but also through communication and collaboration with their peers.

Nevertheless, the implementation of social constructivist principles had not yet been fully realized. The interactions that occurred within the groups were still largely oriented toward the division and completion of tasks rather than toward the collaborative construction of a deeper understanding of the learning material. As a result, student engagement was more visible in behavioral activities, such as attending the lesson, completing assignments, and

participating in group work, while cognitive engagement through in-depth discussion, reasoning, questioning, and critical responses remained relatively limited. From a social constructivist perspective, meaningful collaboration requires students to actively negotiate meaning and develop understanding through interaction rather than merely divide responsibilities.

Therefore, the effectiveness of the group discussion method in increasing student engagement depends not only on the formation of groups but also on how the teacher structures and facilitates the interaction within those groups. Teachers need to provide broader opportunities for students to engage in dialogue, articulate arguments, respond to their peers' ideas, and explain their reasoning. Clear discussion guidelines, individual responsibilities, stimulating questions, and teacher scaffolding can help ensure that every student has an opportunity to contribute. Through these strategies, group discussion can move beyond being a mechanism for completing assignments and become a genuinely collaborative learning process that supports behavioral, social, and cognitive engagement in accordance with the principles of social constructivist learning.

The Relationship between the Implementation of the Group Discussion Method and Student Engagement

The findings indicate that the implementation of the group discussion method was related to student engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya. The method provided opportunities for students to express their opinions, cooperate with group members, and take responsibility for completing group assignments. According to the teacher, group discussions could create an active learning atmosphere by encouraging students to defend their group opinions through presentations and question-and-answer activities. However, classroom observations revealed that presentations and intergroup question-and-answer sessions did not actually take place because of limited instructional time. Students mainly submitted or explained their group work to the teacher, which limited opportunities for broader interaction and peer feedback.

The findings further show that the relationship between group discussion and student engagement was influenced by the quality of group interaction and individual responsibility. Some students remained passive, contributed minimally, or relied on more active group members to complete the assignments. Students identified lack of cooperation, unequal task distribution, and miscommunication as common challenges during group activities. Consequently, although the group discussion method encouraged confidence, cooperation, and participation, it did not automatically ensure equal engagement among all students. Student involvement was also influenced by individual motivation, responsibility, willingness to cooperate, and participation. Overall, the findings suggest that group discussion can support student engagement, but its effectiveness depends on meaningful interaction, equitable participation, adequate teacher facilitation, and opportunities for students to present, respond to, and discuss one another's ideas rather than merely divide and complete assignments.

Based on the research findings, there was a relationship between the implementation of the group discussion method and student engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education among Class X-06 students at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya. This relationship was reflected in changes in the way students participated in the learning process. Students demonstrated greater confidence in expressing their opinions, showed a stronger sense of responsibility in completing group assignments, and became more actively involved in interactions with the teacher and their group members than when learning activities were conducted individually. These findings indicate that the group discussion method can contribute to the development of a more participatory learning environment in which students are provided with greater opportunities to become actively involved in the learning process.

However, the findings also indicate that the level of student engagement was closely related to the quality of the implementation of the group discussion method. When the teacher provided opportunities for students to work collaboratively, exchange ideas, and receive guidance during the discussion, students tended to demonstrate higher levels of engagement. In contrast, when the discussion was primarily focused on dividing tasks, was not followed by the presentation of group results, or did not provide sufficient opportunities for students to respond to and discuss one another's ideas, student engagement tended to be less optimal. Under these circumstances, only certain students actively participated, while others tended to rely on the work and ideas of more dominant group members. This finding demonstrates that group discussion as a learning method does not automatically ensure equal participation among students. Meaningful engagement depends largely on how the learning activities are designed, facilitated, and managed by the teacher.

The findings further demonstrate that the success of the group discussion method is determined not merely by the selection of the method itself but also by the teacher's ability to manage the entire learning process. Balanced group formation, clear instructions, opportunities for open discussion, and adequate space for every student to express ideas are important factors influencing student engagement. When these elements are appropriately managed, group discussion can provide a learning environment that encourages students to participate more actively and develop responsibility for their learning. This is consistent with Nursiniah and Utami (2025), who emphasize the importance of the quality of learning implementation in supporting student-centered learning. Thus, the effectiveness of a learning method cannot be separated from the teacher's capacity to organize learning activities in ways that encourage meaningful participation from all students.

The findings are also consistent with Sanjaya (2006), who explains that a learning method serves as a means of implementing a learning strategy so that instructional objectives can be achieved effectively. Similarly, Mawikere (2022) describes group discussion as a learning approach that encourages students to interact, exchange ideas, and collaborate in solving problems. In the present study, these characteristics were reflected in students' increased willingness to express their opinions and their emerging ability to cooperate with group members. Nevertheless, the collaboration that developed during the learning process

had not yet fully developed into in-depth academic discussion because some students remained primarily focused on completing their individual portions of the assignment. Consequently, the interaction among students was present, but its potential to facilitate deeper exploration and construction of knowledge had not yet been fully utilized.

When analyzed from the perspective of Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, the findings demonstrate that group discussion had begun to reflect the fundamental principles of social constructivism, particularly the idea that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, communication, and collaboration among learners. During the learning process, students were given opportunities to assist one another, ask questions, exchange opinions, and receive guidance from the teacher when they encountered difficulties. These interactions demonstrate that learning did not occur solely through communication between the teacher and students but also through interaction among students within their learning groups. Such conditions are consistent with the social constructivist view that interaction with others plays an important role in supporting the development of students' understanding (Hasanah & Himami, 2021).

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that the implementation of social constructivist principles had not yet reached its full potential. From Vygotsky's perspective, social interaction should encourage learners to construct understanding collectively through dialogue, argumentation, negotiation of meaning, and the exchange of ideas. In the present study, however, interactions among students were still largely directed toward dividing responsibilities and completing group assignments. As a result, the process of collectively constructing knowledge had not developed optimally. Student engagement was therefore more visible in task completion than in deeper cognitive involvement with the learning material. This distinction is important because active participation in group work does not necessarily mean that students are cognitively engaged in constructing knowledge.

The findings therefore suggest that the group discussion method is related to student engagement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education. More effectively organized group discussions provide greater opportunities for students to participate actively, communicate their ideas, collaborate with peers, and take responsibility for the learning process. Conversely, when group discussions are not adequately structured and facilitated, student engagement may remain limited, particularly among students who are less confident or less willing to contribute. The findings thus support the relevance of Vygotsky's social constructivist perspective, particularly the role of social interaction in the development of knowledge. At the same time, the study demonstrates that the realization of this principle depends substantially on the teacher's ability to design and facilitate discussion activities in which all students have meaningful opportunities to participate. Group discussion should therefore not be viewed merely as a technique for completing assignments, but as a structured collaborative learning process that enables students to exchange ideas, develop arguments, respond to different perspectives, and construct a deeper understanding of the learning material together.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and data analysis, it can be concluded that the implementation of the group discussion method in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMA Negeri 1 Palangka Raya has contributed to creating a more student-centered learning environment. The method was implemented through group formation, assignment of learning tasks, group discussions, teacher guidance, and the submission of group work. However, its implementation was not yet fully optimal because the teacher provided limited introductory explanations, group composition was not always balanced, and discussions tended to focus more on task distribution than on in-depth exchange of ideas and collaborative problem solving. The use of the group discussion method was also associated with increased student engagement. Students demonstrated greater confidence in expressing opinions, responsibility for completing group assignments, interaction with peers, and participation in learning activities. Nevertheless, student engagement was not evenly distributed. Some students remained relatively passive and relied on more active group members, while discussions were still largely oriented toward completing assignments rather than constructing a shared understanding of the learning material.

Overall, the findings indicate a positive relationship between the quality of group discussion implementation and student engagement. Effective teacher facilitation, balanced group formation, clear instructions, opportunities for dialogue, and individual responsibility were important factors supporting student participation. These findings are consistent with Lev Vygotsky's social constructivist perspective, which emphasizes social interaction, collaboration, and guidance in knowledge construction. However, the implementation of these principles requires further improvement so that group discussions become not merely a means of completing tasks, but a meaningful collaborative process that enables students to exchange ideas, develop arguments, and construct deeper understanding together.

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