

THE USE OF DISCUSSION METHODS IN EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE LEARNING ACTIVITY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the discussion method in enhancing student learning activeness in elementary school. The background of the research is based on the low level of student participation during learning activities, which is often caused by monotonous teaching approaches and limited classroom interaction. The discussion method was chosen for its potential to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and student confidence in expressing ideas. This research adopts a qualitative approach in the form of classroom action research, with data collected through observations and interviews with five teachers at SD Swasta Don Bosco Saribudolok. The findings indicate that the structured implementation of the discussion method gradually increases student enthusiasm, self-confidence, and social interaction during lessons. Despite challenges such as varying student characteristics and time management issues, strategies like forming heterogeneous groups, assigning clear roles, and providing structured instructions proved effective in optimizing the discussion process. The study concludes that the discussion method is a pedagogically effective strategy for creating active, collaborative, and meaningful learning experiences at the elementary level.

Keywords

discussion method, learning activeness, elementary students

Introduction

The dynamics of student engagement in elementary classrooms have become an increasingly pressing concern within the broader discourse on improving educational quality. Active participation is not merely a pedagogical ideal but a foundational element of meaningful learning, especially in early education where students are developing cognitive, emotional, and social habits that shape their lifelong learning trajectory. In the Indonesian context, where the Ministry of Education promotes student-centered learning through the Merdeka Belajar

(Freedom to Learn) policy, the demand for pedagogical models that cultivate student agency, interaction, and autonomy has grown considerably. However, the reality in many classrooms—particularly in elementary schools—is still marked by teacher-dominated instruction, routine tasks, and limited student interaction. These conditions result in students who are passive, disengaged, and unmotivated, which hinders their ability to think critically, express opinions, or collaborate meaningfully with peers.

Numerous studies have emphasized that the success of learning is closely tied to how actively students are involved in the classroom. According to constructivist theory, learning is most effective when students are actively constructing their own understanding through dialogue, exploration, and reflection on experiences. This theory supports the idea that student-centered pedagogies, including collaborative learning and group discussions, are essential in fostering deeper learning outcomes. Teachers, therefore, are encouraged to shift from monologic teaching models toward methods that stimulate student interaction and agency. The discussion method, in particular, has been widely recommended for its capacity to increase classroom participation, strengthen social communication skills, and promote critical thinking. Prior research by Sa'diyah et al. (2022) and Ngadha et al. (2023) underscores how structured group discussions can enhance students' confidence, encourage diverse perspectives, and lead to a more vibrant and inclusive learning atmosphere.

Yet, despite these promising theoretical and empirical insights, the implementation of discussion-based learning in elementary schools remains limited and often inconsistent. Many teachers report difficulties in facilitating discussions due to students' low confidence, underdeveloped communication skills, and behavioral challenges such as dominant or disruptive group members. Additionally, teachers themselves may lack the necessary methodological training or face structural constraints such as large class sizes, insufficient preparation time, or rigid curricular demands. These barriers are even more pronounced in rural or semi-urban schools where pedagogical innovation is often constrained by lack of support and infrastructure. While several studies have highlighted the theoretical value of discussion methods, very few have examined their practical application in specific classroom contexts, particularly at the lower primary level where cognitive and social development are still emergent.

In light of these challenges, this research seeks to explore the practical use of discussion methods in increasing student activeness in elementary school learning. By focusing on classroom experiences at SD Swasta Don Bosco Saribudolok, the study provides grounded insights into how the discussion method is perceived, implemented, and adapted by teachers

within a real-world educational setting. The study employs a qualitative classroom action research approach, utilizing interviews and observations to analyze both the outcomes and challenges of applying discussion techniques in early-grade teaching. Unlike previous research that tends to focus on outcomes alone, this study foregrounds the lived experiences of teachers—how they design discussion-based activities, respond to student behaviors, and manage the inherent complexity of group interactions.

The novelty of this research lies in its contextual specificity and its focus on practical classroom strategies that are adaptable to the realities of early-grade education in Indonesian schools. By documenting the nuanced efforts of teachers to foster student activeness through discussion, the study contributes a fresh, practice-oriented perspective to the discourse on active learning. It also offers a valuable reference for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to promote more inclusive and interactive pedagogical practices in elementary education. Through its findings, the study not only affirms the pedagogical potential of discussion methods but also presents actionable insights for enhancing their effectiveness in classrooms where student participation has traditionally been minimal.

Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach in the form of Classroom Action Research (CAR), which is specifically designed to address practical issues within the learning environment by implementing interventions aimed at improving teaching and learning outcomes. The primary objective of this study is to enhance student activeness in the classroom through the application of the discussion method. CAR was chosen as the appropriate framework because it allows for the continuous refinement of teaching practices based on direct observation and reflection within the real context of the classroom. The cyclic nature of this method planning, acting, observing, and reflecting—supports iterative improvements in pedagogical practice and learner engagement.

The study was conducted at SD Swasta Don Bosco Saribudolok, located in Kabupaten Simalungun, North Sumatra, which was selected purposively due to the observable issue of low student activeness during learning activities. The target population comprised classroom teachers who have implemented or are familiar with the discussion method as part of their instructional strategy. A sample of five teachers was involved in the data collection process, providing insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding student participation and the effectiveness of the discussion method in promoting engagement.

The research focuses on two main variables: the independent variable is the discussion method, while the dependent variable is the level of student activeness. Operationally, the discussion method is defined as an instructional approach that facilitates student involvement through the exchange of ideas, collaborative reasoning, and group-based problem-solving. Student activeness, in this context, refers to the observable behaviors of students that indicate engagement, such as posing and answering questions, expressing opinions, participating in group work, and interacting constructively with peers.

Data collection was conducted using two qualitative techniques: observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations were carried out during classroom activities to capture student behavior and participation levels in real-time when the discussion method was implemented. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with teachers to gather in-depth information about the planning, implementation, challenges, and outcomes associated with the use of the discussion method. Teachers were asked about their instructional choices, students' responses, as well as the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

Data analysis was performed using qualitative descriptive techniques, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Thematic coding was employed to categorize emerging patterns related to student activeness and teacher strategies. Observational notes and interview transcripts were examined to identify consistencies, contradictions, and contextual factors that influenced the success or limitation of discussion-based learning. The combination of data sources allowed for triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and validity of the findings.

By utilizing a grounded, context-sensitive methodology, this study not only investigates the outcomes of using the discussion method but also captures the underlying pedagogical dynamics and teacher decision-making processes that influence student engagement in the classroom. Through this approach, the research provides both empirical and reflective insights that can inform broader educational practice and theory development related to active learning strategies in elementary education.

Discussion

The implementation of the discussion method in this classroom action research was conducted in two observable cycles, each aimed at enhancing student activeness through incremental pedagogical refinement. In Cycle I, the focus was on introducing the discussion

method to the students in a structured yet exploratory manner. Teachers facilitated group discussions by organizing students into small heterogeneous teams and assigning them tasks that required collaborative problem-solving. For example, in a mathematics lesson about standard and non-standard units of measurement, students were asked to use everyday objects such as matchsticks, rulers, and books to conduct simple measurement experiments and then discuss their findings. Initially, students showed interest in the hands-on aspect of the task but demonstrated limited verbal engagement. Only a few students confidently expressed their opinions, while others remained passive, hesitant to speak or participate. Teachers noted that dominant students tended to overshadow quieter peers, and discussions often veered off-topic due to insufficient group control. Furthermore, it was observed that many students were unfamiliar with the norms of structured discussion, such as turn-taking, listening respectfully, or building on peer ideas.

Despite these challenges, Cycle I served as a critical diagnostic phase. It revealed that while students were cognitively stimulated by the discussion activities, their social and communication skills were not yet sufficiently developed to sustain productive group discourse. Teachers, therefore, recognized the need to strengthen group management strategies and scaffold student participation in the subsequent cycle. Reflection after Cycle I led to several improvements, including the development of clearer group roles, the provision of discussion sentence starters, and more precise time management to prevent discussions from losing focus. Teachers also introduced more frequent teacher-guided questioning to steer discussions constructively and ensure that all group members were engaged.

Table 1. Improvement in Each Cycle

Aspect	Cycle I	Cycle II
Objective	Introduce discussion method and observe initial student responses	Refine strategy and increase student participation and group dynamics
Teacher Strategy	- Formed small discussion groups- Gave open-ended tasks- Minimal role assignment	- Clearer group roles assigned- Sentence starters provided- Teacher guided questioning used
Student Behavior	- Low participation from most students- Dominant students overshadowed others- Off-topic discussions	- Increased verbal participation- More balanced contributions- Improved focus and collaboration
Challenges Observed	- Lack of discussion skills- Low confidence- Off-task behavior	- Hyperactive students needed guidance- Some students still required prompting

Student Engagement	- Majority hesitant to speak- Interest limited to hands-on activities	- Greater enthusiasm- Improved willingness to explain, ask, and respond
Teacher Reflection	- Need to scaffold participation- Need for clearer time and task structure	- Discussion norms established- Students began using academic vocabulary effectively
Result	Partial improvement in activeness; required refinement	Significant improvement in engagement and critical thinking

In Cycle II, these refinements produced notably better results. The discussion activities were now more guided, and students had begun to internalize the structure and purpose of collaborative learning. Teachers observed a marked increase in student activeness—more students volunteered to speak, exchanged perspectives, and offered peer feedback. In one notable example, during a group task involving data interpretation, students discussed the differences in measurement results obtained through standard versus non-standard tools and reflected on why such discrepancies occurred. Importantly, even students who had previously been passive began to engage in questioning and clarification, indicating a rise in confidence and critical thinking. Moreover, group dynamics improved as students became more respectful of others' turns and contributed constructively to the group goals.

The interview data supported these observations. Teachers reported that students showed more enthusiasm in attending classes, often anticipating the opportunity to work collaboratively. One teacher noted that the students' ability to explain their thoughts had improved significantly, and they began to use subject-related vocabulary with more accuracy and frequency. However, challenges remained. Some students still struggled with staying focused, particularly those with hyperactive tendencies, and a few required continuous prompting to participate fully. Nonetheless, the general trend showed that with clearer instructions, structured facilitation, and consistent encouragement, the discussion method succeeded in transforming a previously passive learning atmosphere into a more interactive, student-centered environment.

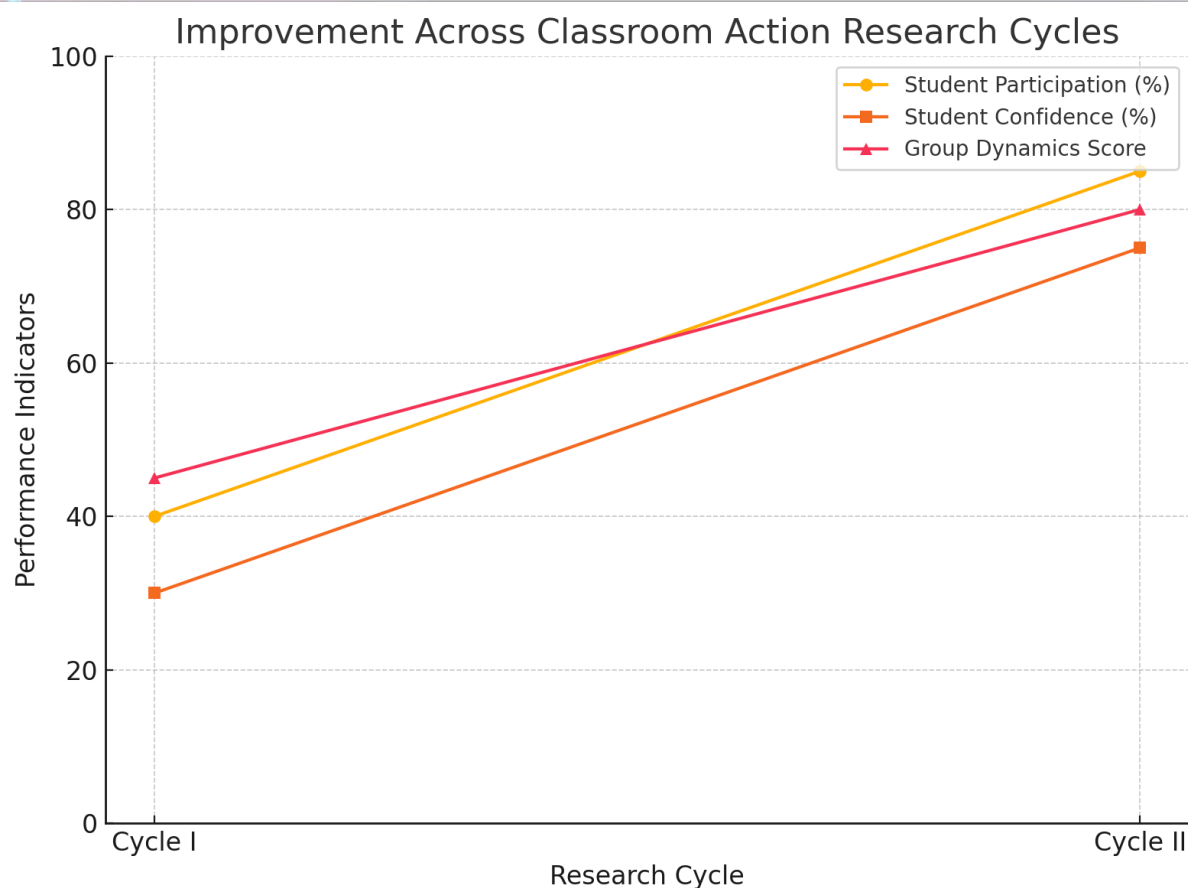


Chart 1. Improvement Across Classroom Action Research Cycles

Overall, the findings from both cycles confirm that while the discussion method may encounter initial resistance or uneven participation, it holds strong potential for promoting student activeness when implemented with thoughtful scaffolding and responsive teaching. The transition from a passive to an active classroom culture requires time, patience, and pedagogical adaptation, but as this study demonstrates, even early-grade students can meaningfully engage in collaborative learning when given the right support. Thus, the discussion method, when applied iteratively and reflectively, emerges not only as a tool for enhancing student participation but also as a platform for nurturing broader academic and social competencies among elementary learners.

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that the application of the discussion method is an effective pedagogical strategy for increasing student activeness in elementary school learning environments. Through the implementation of Classroom Action Research (CAR) across two cycles, it was evident that structured and well-facilitated discussion activities led to meaningful

improvements in student participation, confidence, and collaboration. In the initial cycle, while students showed interest in engaging with peers through hands-on tasks, they struggled with verbal expression, group coordination, and focused interaction. These challenges highlighted the necessity for scaffolding strategies that support students not only cognitively, but also socially and emotionally in navigating the collaborative learning process.

By the second cycle, significant progress was observed. Students demonstrated more confidence in voicing opinions, responded more willingly to peer input, and adhered more effectively to group norms and roles. Teachers played a crucial role in this transformation by refining group structures, providing explicit instructions, modeling communication protocols, and offering continuous encouragement. The development of clearer routines and supportive environments empowered students to engage more meaningfully, contributing to a classroom culture that values dialogue, respect for diverse perspectives, and active problem-solving.

The conclusion drawn from these observations is that the discussion method, when implemented with thoughtful planning and adaptive facilitation, can serve as a catalyst for transforming passive classroom dynamics into active and student-centered learning ecosystems. It does not merely enhance academic participation but also cultivates essential life skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, and effective communication. However, the success of this approach requires teachers to be responsive to the diversity of student needs, particularly in managing behavioral dynamics and fostering inclusive participation.

Therefore, it is recommended that schools and teacher education programs emphasize the development of facilitative teaching skills, especially those related to discussion-based instruction. Continuous professional development, peer collaboration, and reflective teaching practices are vital to ensuring that discussion methods are not only adopted but also sustained with fidelity and relevance. Future studies may expand on this work by integrating quantitative measures of learning outcomes and examining the long-term effects of discussion-based learning across different subjects and grade levels. Through such efforts, the goal of nurturing active, engaged, and empowered learners in elementary education can be more fully realized.

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