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Improving the Quality of Elementary Teacher Education Learning through Student Activity-Oriented Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the application of student activity-oriented learning strategies in improving the quality of learning in the Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD) program. The method used is classroom action research (CAR) which is implemented in two cycles, each consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The subjects of the study were PGSD students who took courses related to learning strategies. Data collection instruments included observation, interviews, motivational questionnaires, learning outcome tests, and documentation. The results showed a significant increase in student engagement, learning outcomes, and motivation. In the first cycle, active student participation in group discussions reached 62%, projects 58%, and presentations 58%, with an average score of 72 and classical completion of 70%. In the second cycle, there was an increase to 85% in discussions, 88% in projects, and 82% in presentations, with an average score of 82 and classical completion of 90%. Student motivation also increased, as indicated by the proportion of highly motivated students, which rose from 45% in cycle I to 78% in cycle II. Interviews and documentation showed that learning became more enjoyable, interactive, and collaborative. These findings align with constructivist and sociocultural theories, which emphasize the importance of active engagement in learning, and support previous studies on the effectiveness of active learning. Therefore, a student-oriented learning strategy can be an effective approach to improving the quality of learning in higher education, particularly in preparing PGSD students as independent, creative, and prepared elementary school teacher candidates to face the challenges of 21st-century education.

Abstract: Student-Centered Learning, Learning Quality, Elementary School Teacher Education

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a crucial aspect in producing professional and qualified educators (Puspitarini & Hanif, 2019) . Lecturers in elementary school teacher education programs are not only required to master the subject matter but also to possess strong pedagogical, social, and personality skills. Mastery of the subject matter is crucial for lecturers to be able to convey concepts accurately, simplify information appropriate to the students' developmental stage, and relate it to the context of everyday life. (Nursikin, 2019). However, this ability must be supported by pedagogical skills, namely the ability to design, implement,

and evaluate learning with appropriate methods, strategies, and media so that the learning process is interesting, active, and meaningful for students (Ellis, Reupert, & Hammer, 2022) . In addition, lecturers also need good social skills to establish communication, build collaboration, and foster harmonious relationships with students and colleagues (Adilah & Suryana, 2021) . This is important to create a conducive learning environment while strengthening academic support (Nurul Fadhilah & Mukhlis, 2021) . Furthermore, strong personality traits such as integrity, discipline, patience, and responsibility are fundamental aspects because lecturers are role models whose behavior will be imitated by students (Seftiani, Sesrita, & Suherman, 2020). Thus, the combination of material mastery, pedagogical skills, social competence, and strong personality make lecturers holistic educators who shape the character, knowledge, and skills of prospective elementary school teachers. Therefore, the quality of the learning process in elementary school teacher education needs to be continuously improved so that graduates are able to meet the ever-evolving needs of the educational world (Puspitarini & Hanif, 2019).

One of the main challenges in teacher education is how to develop learning strategies that not only emphasize mastery of theory but also provide space for students to be active in the learning process. Currently, learning practices in many universities are still dominated by a lecturer-centered approach (Stavropoulou, Stamovlasis, & Gonida, 2023). In this pattern, the lecturer acts as the center of information, while students are more passive recipients. The learning process is one-way, where the lecturer delivers the material and students simply listen and take notes without much opportunity to ask questions, discuss, or explore knowledge independently (Kristianto, Susetyo, Utama, Fitriono, & Jannah, 2023). As a result, students lack meaningful learning experiences because they are not actively involved in the process of discovering, understanding, and applying knowledge (Santoso, 2023) . This condition has serious implications. Students tend to lose motivation, creativity, and curiosity, which are crucial for developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Mulyaningsih, Asbari, & Rahmawati, 2024). If this learning pattern persists, the quality of teacher education graduates will decline because they only master cognitive aspects superficially without the necessary social, emotional, and practical skills (Alisalman & Berau, 2022) . Graduates accustomed to passive learning are likely to continue the same pattern when they become elementary school teachers, thus perpetuating the lecturer-oriented learning cycle (Mariatul Hikmah, 2022).

In line with the modern educational paradigm, learning in higher education is required to transform from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model (Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Togo Ambarsari, 2024). In the teacher-centered approach, the lecturer becomes the center of information and determines the course of the learning process, while students only play a role as recipients of material (Sumardi, Rohman, & Wahyudiati, 2020) . This pattern is considered less effective in equipping students with critical thinking skills, creativity, and independent learning that are much needed in today's era (Stavropoulou et al., 2023). Therefore, the new educational paradigm places students as the main subjects in learning, where they are given the opportunity to actively explore, discover, and construct their own understanding through meaningful learning experiences. One approach that aligns with this paradigm is a student-oriented learning strategy (SLE). This strategy emphasizes active student involvement in every stage of learning, whether through discussions, group work, experiments, problem-solving, or project-based activities. Thus, learning is no longer just transferring knowledge from lecturers to students, but rather becomes an interactive process that develops students' potential cognitively, affectively, and psychomotorically. (Wahyuningtyas, Indarti, & Nurhayti, 2024) .

The implementation of a learning strategy oriented towards student activities has several advantages. First, this strategy can increase learning motivation because students feel directly involved in the learning process. Second, diverse activities can accommodate different learning styles, making the learning process more inclusive. Third, students are

encouraged to develop collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills, which are crucial in supporting their development as prospective elementary school teachers (Putra, Al, Pane, Husna, & Pane, 2024) . Furthermore, a learning strategy that emphasizes student activities is also relevant to the demands of the Independent Curriculum, which prioritizes experiential learning, projects, and the development of 21st-century competencies (Faizal Arvianto, Winda Dwi Hudhana, Rosita Rahma, Nurnaningsih Nurnaningsih, 2023). Therefore, elementary school teacher education students need to be provided with learning experiences aligned with the curriculum, so they can grow into independent, creative, and critical educators from an early age.

Various previous studies have shown that implementing student activity-oriented learning strategies can improve learning outcomes, critical thinking skills, and positive attitudes toward learning. However, implementing this strategy in higher education still faces several challenges, such as limited understanding of appropriate learning design by lecturers, limited supporting resources, and students' readiness to actively engage in the learning process.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine and develop the application of student-oriented learning strategies in elementary school teacher education as an effort to improve the quality of learning. The results are expected to contribute to learning innovation in higher education and strengthen the role of lecturers in preparing students as independent, creative, and prepared future elementary school teachers to face future educational challenges.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the implementation of student activity-oriented learning strategies in the Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD) study program. This approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth description of the processes, experiences, and dynamics that occur in learning, as well as provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the learning strategies used. The research design used was classroom action research (CAR) at the university level. CAR was chosen because this study seeks to improve the learning process through the implementation of student activity-oriented learning strategies. The research process was carried out in several cycles consisting of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. The subjects were 30 students in the Elementary School Teacher Education study program at a university in Indonesia, taking a basic learning strategies course. The research location was chosen based on the need to improve the quality of learning, which is still dominated by teacher-centered patterns. Research data were collected through several techniques: observation to observe student activities during the learning process, interviews with students and lecturers to obtain data on experiences, obstacles, and perceptions of the applied learning strategies, documentation in the form of lecture notes, learning tools, and student work, and learning outcome tests to measure improvements in material understanding before and after the implementation of activity-oriented learning strategies. (Subliyanto, nd) .

The data was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model which includes three stages, namely data reduction to select, focus, and simplify data relevant to the research focus, data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or graphs to facilitate understanding, as well as drawing conclusions and verification to find patterns, relationships, and meanings from the data that has been analyzed (Miles, MB, Huberman, AM, & Saldana, 2018)

. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques of sources and methods by comparing data from observations, interviews, documentation, and tests to obtain a more valid and reliable picture. The research procedure is carried out through several interrelated stages, namely planning by compiling learning tools based on student

activities, implementing actions by implementing student activity-oriented learning strategies in lectures, observation by recording student involvement in learning activities, and reflection to evaluate the results of actions and formulate improvements in the next cycle. With this research method, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture will be obtained regarding the effectiveness of student activity-oriented learning strategies in improving the quality of learning in the Elementary School Teacher Education study program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research result

This research was conducted in two cycles with planning, implementation, observation, and reflection stages. In cycle I, the implementation of student activity-oriented learning strategies showed an increase in student engagement compared to the previous teacher-centered pattern, although there were still obstacles. From the observation results, active student participation in group discussions reached 62%, while in project activities and presentations was still around 58%. The average score of student learning outcomes in cycle I was 72 with a classical completion level of 70%. The motivation questionnaire showed that 45% of students were in the high motivation category, 40% in the medium category, and 15% were still low. As shown in the graph below:

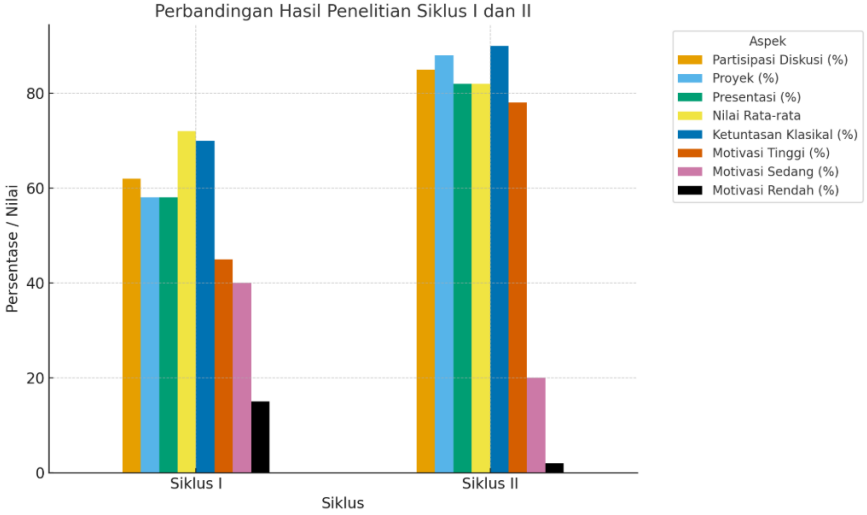

Figure 1. Comparison Results of Cycles I and II

In the reflection on cycle I, obstacles were identified, including some students not yet accustomed to active learning, the continued dominance of certain groups in discussions, and the lecturer's inability to optimally facilitate a variety of activities. Therefore, in cycle II, improvements were made in the form of more heterogeneous group arrangements, clearer instructions, and the use of more diverse media and learning resources.

The results of cycle II showed significant improvements. Active student participation in discussions increased to 85%, in project activities to 88%, and in presentations to 82%. The average learning outcome score increased to 82 with a classical completion rate of 90%. The motivation questionnaire also showed positive developments, with 78% of students in the high motivation category, 20% in the medium category, and only 2% in the low category. From the interview results, students stated that learning was more enjoyable, challenging, and provided opportunities for collaboration. Documentation in the form of field notes showed a more lively and interactive classroom atmosphere.

Discussion

The increased engagement, learning outcomes, and motivation of students in this study demonstrate the effectiveness of activity-oriented learning strategies. These results align with Piaget's (1970) constructivism theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is built through active experience. By engaging in discussions, projects, and problem-solving, students not only receive information but also construct their own understanding. This reinforces the finding that meaningful learning occurs when students experience the thinking process themselves, rather than simply hearing.

Furthermore, these findings support Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which states that students can achieve higher levels of understanding through social interaction and collaboration. In cycle II, the heterogeneous group work strategy was shown to facilitate more capable students helping less capable students, creating a natural scaffolding process. This demonstrates how activity-based learning develops not only cognitive aspects but also social skills.

Bonwell & Eison's (1991) concept of active learning is also relevant to the findings of this study. They stated that active learning requires students to engage in activities that require analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Increased student participation in group discussions and projects demonstrates that activity-based learning encourages critical thinking, argumentation, and creative solution-finding.

The results of this study are also consistent with Prince's (2004) findings, which confirm that active learning has a positive impact on student learning outcomes and attitudes. Similarly, Serdyukov (2017) emphasized that 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking can be developed through activity-based learning strategies. Kember's (2009) research also showed that a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning increases student independence and motivation in higher education.

In the context of teacher education, Astuti & Mustadi (2020) demonstrated that implementing activity-based learning strategies in elementary school teacher education (PGSD) students improved their pedagogical skills and self-confidence. Nugraha (2021) added that students accustomed to active learning were better prepared to implement the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. A meta-analysis by Freeman et al. (2014) also showed that active learning reduced students' academic failure rates and improved cognitive achievement compared to traditional learning.

From a learning motivation perspective, the results of this study align with Deci & Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which explains that active engagement in learning provides students with experiences of autonomy, competence, and social connectedness, thereby increasing their intrinsic motivation. This is evident in the shift in the proportion of highly motivated students from 45% in cycle I to 78% in cycle II.

This study confirms that student-oriented learning strategies are an effective approach to improving the quality of learning in elementary school teacher education programs. This strategy not only strengthens cognitive mastery but also equips students with 21st-century skills, learning motivation, and collaborative experiences essential for future teachers. Practically, these findings provide a strong basis for lecturers to shift the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered to better prepare elementary school teacher education graduates to face future educational challenges.

This two-cycle classroom action research study demonstrated that the implementation of student activity-oriented learning strategies improved the quality of learning in the elementary school teacher education program. The results showed significant improvements in several key aspects, namely student active participation, learning outcomes, and motivation. Participation in discussions, projects, and presentations, which was relatively low in cycle I, increased consistently in cycle II. The average student learning outcome increased from 72 to 82, with the classical completion

rate increasing from 70% to 90%. Student motivation also experienced positive developments, as indicated by an increase in the number of highly motivated students from 45% to 78%.

Theoretically, these findings support Piaget's constructivist view that active learning provides students with opportunities to construct knowledge independently, as well as Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration and scaffolding. The results of this study also align with Bonwell & Eison's concept of active learning and Prince's findings, which state that active student engagement improves academic achievement and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, in line with Deci & Ryan's self-determination motivation theory, activity-oriented learning strategies have been shown to foster intrinsic motivation through experiences of autonomy, competence, and social connectedness.

Thus, a student-oriented learning strategy can be an effective approach to improving the quality of elementary school teacher education. Implementing this strategy not only improves students' cognitive achievement but also equips them with 21st-century skills, collaborative abilities, and high learning motivation. The results of this study provide practical implications: lecturers need to shift their paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered so that PGSD graduates are better prepared to become professional teachers who are independent, creative, critical, and responsive to future educational challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of classroom action research conducted in two cycles regarding the application of student activity-oriented learning strategies in an effort to improve the quality of learning in elementary school teacher education programs, it can be concluded that this strategy has proven effective in increasing student engagement, learning outcomes, motivation, as well as affective and social aspects. Student involvement in discussions, projects, and presentations increased significantly from cycle I to cycle II, so that the classroom atmosphere became more active, interactive, and collaborative. Learning outcomes also improved, with the average score from 72 in cycle I to 82 in cycle II, and classical completion increased from 70% to 90%. Student learning motivation showed positive developments, marked by an increase in students with high motivation from 45% to 78%, while those with low motivation decreased drastically. In addition to cognitive aspects, this strategy also developed students' affective and social aspects, including self-confidence, communication skills, teamwork skills, and responsibility in groups. These findings align with the demands of 21st-century competencies and are relevant to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, it can be emphasized that student activity-oriented learning strategies are worthy of wider application in elementary school teacher education programs as an effort to equip prospective teachers with pedagogical and professional skills appropriate to the needs of the times. Based on these results, several recommendations can be put forward. First, PGSD lecturers are advised to consistently apply student activity-oriented learning strategies by considering a variety of methods, media, and activity designs to make learning more engaging and meaningful. Second, PGSD students are expected to play an active role in every lecture activity by developing critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity skills as provisions for becoming professional elementary school teachers. Third, for future researchers, this research can be expanded by examining the effect of activity-oriented learning strategies on other variables, such as higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), digital literacy, or student readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools.

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