

Applying Small Group Discussion as a Student-Centered Learning Strategy in Indonesian Language and Literature Education: A Case Study

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Abstract: Learning models in junior high schools remain predominantly teacher-centered, which may limit students' active participation in the learning process. This study aims to analyze the implementation of Small Group Discussion (SGD) as a Student-Centered Learning (SCL) strategy in Indonesian Language and Literature learning among Class VIII.4 students at SMP Negeri 17 Makassar. It also examines student interactions during group discussions and the teacher's role as a facilitator. This study employed a qualitative case study approach, with the Indonesian Language and Literature teacher and Class VIII.4 students serving as the primary data sources. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the implementation of SGD enhances students' active participation, collaboration, and learning outcomes in both linguistic and literary aspects. The teacher plays a facilitative role by guiding discussion dynamics, providing feedback, and encouraging equitable participation among group members. Overall, the implementation of SGD contributes to a more interactive, collaborative, and student-centered learning environment.

Keywords: Student Centered Learning, Small Group Discussion, Indonesian Language Learning, Student Interaction, Teacher's Role.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian Language and Literature learning at the junior high school level should help students develop language skills and critical thinking. However, the learning process is still mostly teacher-centered. Teachers tend to play the main role in explaining the materials, while students have limited opportunities to participate actively and develop their abilities.

Student-Centered Learning (SCL) provides an alternative approach that encourages students to learn actively through experience, discussion, and collaboration. One strategy that supports SCL is Small Group Discussion (SGD). Through SGD, students work in small groups to discuss problems, share ideas, and understand the learning materials more deeply.

At SMP Negeri 17 Makassar, preliminary observations showed that the average student score in Indonesian Language was 72, which was categorized as sufficient. Students also showed limited participation during learning activities. Therefore, SGD may help increase student participation, interaction, and understanding of language and literature materials.

Based on this situation, this study examines the implementation of SGD in Indonesian Language and Literature learning. It focuses on how teachers implement SGD, how students interact during group discussions, and how teachers act as facilitators in the learning process.

A. Student-Centered Learning and Small Group Learning

Student-Centered Learning (SCL) is a learning approach that positions students as the center of learning activities. This approach is rooted in constructivism, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively built by learners through experience, exploration, and interaction (Hamalik in Zulvia, 2003). In SCL, students are engaged both independently and collaboratively to understand material, while the teacher serves as a facilitator, motivator, and innovator who creates conditions that support creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills.

The main characteristics of SCL include: a) Learning tailored to students' needs and learning styles, b) Students actively involved in discovering knowledge, c) Teachers supporting learning through guidance and facilitation rather than being the main source of information, and d) Integration of other learning resources such as libraries, digital media, and the surrounding environment. This approach aligns with the 2013 curriculum, which requires active and collaborative learning and the holistic development of student competencies. Thus, SCL becomes an essential foundation in Indonesian Language and Literature learning at schools.

Beyond the basic characteristics explained above, the application of SCL at SMP Negeri 17 Makassar also proves relevant for linguistic and literary materials that demand analytical skills. Observations show that students studied two core topics: the syntactic analysis of sentences (Subject-Predicate-Object-Adverbial) and plot analysis of the novel *Laskar Pelangi*. Both topics require students' active engagement—not only understanding theory but constructing knowledge through discussion, exploration, and reflection, which are central to SCL.

For sentence analysis, SCL provides opportunities for students to independently explore sentence structure by identifying subjects, predicates, objects, and adverbials using example sentences from the teacher. Working independently and then discussing in groups, students discover that sentence structure cannot simply be memorized but must be analyzed based on syntactic functions. This aligns with constructivist principles where knowledge is built through direct experience and social interaction. Students analyze, test, and compare results with their peers, and when disagreements arise, they argue their findings—engaging in higher-order thinking skills.

Similarly, in literary materials, particularly the analysis of *Laskar Pelangi*, SCL encourages students to actively interpret the plot, understand character traits, and identify moral values in the story. Observations show that students were given freedom to explore important parts of the novel and discuss their relevance to personal experiences. This demonstrates that SCL promotes contextual learning, connecting classroom material with real-life contexts. Students not only understand the plot but also grasp moral messages such as perseverance, hard work, and solidarity—all of which support character education.

Thus, SCL not only enhances cognitive understanding but also strengthens students' critical, reflective, and collaborative skills. It becomes clear that SCL is not merely a modern teaching model but a comprehensive strategy suited to Indonesian Language and Literature learning.

Small Group Discussion (SGD) is an active learning method within the SCL framework, where students are organized into small groups to discuss a topic or problem (Slavin, 1995). This method encourages students to exchange ideas, express opinions, test arguments, and collaborate to solve problems. According to the Student-Based Learning Implementation Guide (2023), SGD is effective when it meets five key components: a) Positive interdependence, b) Individual accountability, c) Face-to-face interaction, d) Individual roles in the group, e) Evaluation of group processes.

In Indonesian Language and Literature learning, SGD has been proven to improve speaking skills, text analysis, literary appreciation, and structured writing. Small group discussions also give shy students a more comfortable platform to express their ideas compared to whole-class discussions, thereby improving their confidence and participation (Septiana & Sudarmaji, 2023; Azizah, 2022).

The teacher's role is crucial in ensuring the success of SGD and SCL. The teacher is no longer

the sole source of information but a facilitator who guides, motivates, and directs discussion dynamics. The teacher provides intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, assists students in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and ensures balanced participation among students. The teacher also evaluates group activities and results. In SGD, the teacher fosters a democratic, interactive, and conducive learning atmosphere so that students can optimally develop their collaboration and communication skills (Pratikno in Suharni, 2020).

In the context of Indonesian Language and Literature learning, SGD proves highly effective for analyzing linguistic and literary materials. Students work in small groups to discuss sentence analysis and *Laskar Pelangi*. The small-group format enables focus and confidence in expressing ideas. For sentence analysis, groups dissect examples by identifying syntactic elements. For the novel, each group discusses different aspects such as plot, conflict, theme, setting, and character development. Students relate the characters' struggles to their own experiences, strengthening critical and empathetic thinking. SGD also supports shy students by providing a safer, more intimate discussion space.

Thus, SGD not only helps students understand material better but also fosters 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. The findings of this study reinforce that small group discussions offer more meaningful, enjoyable, and effective learning experiences compared to conventional methods.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Student-Centered Learning and Indonesian Language and Literature Learning

Student-Centered Learning (SCL) is a learning approach that positions students as active participants in constructing knowledge through experience, exploration, interaction, and reflection. Rooted in constructivist principles, SCL shifts the teacher's role from the primary source of information to a facilitator, motivator, and learning guide (Hamalik in Zulvia, 2003). Its main characteristics include active student participation, learning based on students' needs and abilities, collaborative learning, and the use of various learning resources (Aswad et al., 2019; Yaumi et al., 2023; Mahdori et al., 2025). This approach is particularly relevant to Indonesian Language and Literature learning because students need to develop not only language competence but also critical thinking, communication, creativity, and interpretation skills.

In Indonesian Language and Literature classrooms, SCL enables students to actively analyze linguistic and literary materials rather than simply receive explanations from teachers. In linguistic learning, students can explore sentence structures by identifying subjects, predicates, objects, and adverbials, while literary learning can involve interpreting plot, characters, conflict, themes, and moral values in works such as *Laskar Pelangi*. Through these activities, students construct understanding through discussion, comparison, and reflection. Therefore, SCL provides an appropriate pedagogical foundation for creating active, collaborative, and meaningful Indonesian Language and Literature learning.

B. Small Group Discussion as a Student-Centered Learning Strategy

Small Group Discussion (SGD) is an active learning strategy within the SCL framework in which students work in small groups to discuss problems, exchange ideas, express opinions, and construct understanding collaboratively (Slavin, 1995). Effective SGD involves positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, clear individual roles, and evaluation of group processes (Student-Based Learning Implementation Guide, 2023). In Indonesian Language and Literature learning, SGD provides students with opportunities to practice communication, analyze texts, develop arguments, and compare different interpretations. It can also encourage quieter students to participate more actively because small-group settings tend to provide a more comfortable environment for expressing ideas (Azizah, 2022; Septiana & Sudarmaji, 2023; Prihandoko et al., 2021; Andini et al., 2026).

The effectiveness of SGD also depends on the teacher's role as a facilitator. Rather than dominating classroom interaction, the teacher organizes groups, provides instructions, monitors discussions, encourages balanced participation, and provides feedback when necessary. In linguistic learning, students can collaboratively analyze sentence structures, while in literary learning they can discuss plot, characterization, conflict, themes, and moral values. Thus, SGD operationalizes the principles of SCL by promoting active participation, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking while allowing teachers to facilitate rather than control the learning process (Pratikno in Suharni, 2020).

III. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to describe the implementation of Small Group Discussion (SGD) in a specific learning context. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 17 Makassar and involved one Indonesian Language and Literature teacher and all 35 students of Class VIII.4.

Data were collected through three techniques:

1. Direct observation of the learning activities during SGD.
2. In-depth interviews with the teacher and several students.
3. Documentation, including photos of the SGD learning activities.

The data were analyzed using the three steps proposed by Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

The findings observed by the researcher show that the teacher divided the class into 5–7 small groups consisting of 4–5 students each. Every group was assigned a different topic based on the material, namely language material (sentence analysis) and literature material (plot analysis of the novel *Laskar Pelangi*). The procedures implemented included:

1. Delivery of materials and discussion instructions
2. Group collaboration in understanding and completing tasks
3. Presentation of discussion results
4. Feedback from the teacher and other groups

This strategy enabled students to become more involved in understanding the material and constructing knowledge collaboratively. Student interactions also showed improvement in the following aspects: confidence in speaking, cooperation, exchange of ideas, argumentation skills, and collective problem-solving. Students who were previously passive began to show greater engagement when working in small groups.

Meanwhile, the teacher, as a facilitator, played roles in: designing discussion topics, facilitating the discussion process, monitoring group dynamics, providing reinforcement and concept clarification, and assessing both the process and the discussion outcomes. These roles helped make the learning process more structured without reducing students' independence.

Using this method, learning outcomes improved significantly: students' initial average score of 72 increased to 91 after the implementation of Small Group Discussion. The improvement occurred in both language and literature aspects. The research results indicate a significant increase in students'

academic performance prior to the implementation of Small Group Discussion. The average individual test score for language before SGD was 75.94. The following table presents the individual test scores:

Table 1. Individual Test Scores

Individual Score	Frequency (Number of Students)
85	1
79	2
78	5
75	27
Total	35

In the individual test on Indonesian language focusing on sentence analysis, one student scored 85; two students scored 79; five students scored 78; and the remaining twenty-seven students scored 75. The overall average score obtained by the students was 75.94.

For the literature test, students were assigned to individually analyze written texts of the folklore “The Origin of Bulukumba” and “Sawerigading.” The combined assessment results are presented in the following table:

Table 2. The Combined Assessment Results

Individual Score	Frequency (Number of Students)
80	2
78	3
75	5
70	25
Total	35

Two students obtained the highest score of 80; three students scored 78; five students scored 75; and the remaining twenty-five students scored 70. After applying Small Group Discussion, the average class score increased to **91.3**. This assessment was based on two aspects: the individual test after learning and students’ activeness during group discussions.

In the language aspect, the material discussed was sentence analysis, focusing on key elements of sentence structure: subject, predicate, object, and adverbial. This material was explored through small-group discussions where students actively analyzed example sentences. The results showed that this method positively influenced learning performance. The average group scores were as follows:

Language Discussion Scores (Sentence Analysis)

1. Group 1 Average: **88.57**
2. Group 2 Average: **93.29**
3. Group 3 Average: **89.14**
4. Group 4 Average: **90.29**
5. Group 5 Average: **90.71**

Below are the individual scores for each group:

Table 3. Individual Scores For Each Group

Group	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	Group Avg
1	95	87	95	79	94	80	90	88.57
2	95	95	85	94	93	95	96	93.29
3	95	75	95	80	90	94	95	89.14
4	80	94	95	94	95	80	94	90.29
5	95	95	81	94	84	92	94	90.71

Class average: $(88.57 + 93.29 + 89.14 + 90.29 + 90.71) \div 5 = 90.4$

In the literature aspect, students analyzed review texts of *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata. The discussions focused on four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking, to understand and respond to the novel. Students exchanged opinions, listened to peers' interpretations, wrote conclusions, and added group insights.

The group averages were:

1. Group 1 Average: **89.7**
2. Group 2 Average: **90.4**
3. Group 3 Average: **91.0**
4. Group 4 Average: **90.8**
5. Group 5 Average: **88.9**

Table 4. Individual Literature Scores

Group	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	Group Avg
1	92	92	90	90	90	85	85	89.7
2	92	92	92	90	90	88	88	90.4
3	92	92	92	89	89	89	89	91.0
4	92	92	92	90	90	90	88	90.8
5	90	90	89	89	88	88	88	88.9

Class average: $(89.7 + 90.4 + 91.0 + 90.8 + 88.9) \div 5 = 90.1$

Overall, the combined language and literature average score after applying SGD reached **91.3**, showing an increase of **14.7 points** compared to the pre-SGD average score of **76.6**. This increase indicates that the SGD method effectively enhanced students' learning performance and academic achievement.

Table 5. Comparison Table

Aspect	Before SGD (Individual)	After SGD
Language Score	75.94	90.4
Literature Score	71.90	90.1
Combined Language & Literature	76.6	91.3

The following table illustrates the improvement in students' learning outcomes before and after the implementation of Small Group Discussion in Indonesian Language and Literature learning. The baseline data were obtained from individual tests, while the post-SGD data came from group

discussion results.

B. Discussion

The assessment results indicate that SGD is effective in improving the quality of learning in Indonesian Language and Literature. This aligns with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and learning experiences. Small Group Discussion (SGD) allows students to develop communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities—four essential skills of 21st-century learning. The teacher, acting as a facilitator, provides space for students to take initiative and participate actively, thereby creating a more democratic and collaborative learning environment. The improvement in learning outcomes proves that the SCL approach, particularly SGD, can significantly enhance students' understanding of the material because they are directly involved in the construction of knowledge.

In addition to the findings previously described, the implementation of Small Group Discussion in Indonesian Language and Literature learning in class VIII.4 of SMP Negeri 17 Makassar also shows a significant change in overall classroom dynamics. The application of student-centered learning not only impacts academic achievement but also fosters the development of social, emotional, and communication skills among students. Through small-group discussions, students learn to listen to others' opinions, appreciate differing arguments, and negotiate perspectives in a healthy manner. This aligns with the goals of cooperative learning, which stress the importance of social interaction as the foundation for knowledge formation.

Changes in learning behavior are seen in the increased confidence students display when expressing ideas, whether in small groups or during class presentations. Students who were previously passive began to take more active roles once they felt they were in a safe and supportive environment. Small groups offer a comfortable space for students to express themselves, enabling them to overcome psychological barriers such as shyness and fear of making mistakes. This model builds an inclusive learning environment because every student has an equal opportunity to contribute.

The implementation of SGD is also influenced by careful teacher planning. Teachers not only provide discussion topics but also design worksheets, assessment indicators, and clear guidelines to ensure that the discussion remains focused and well-directed. The success of SGD in this study aligns with Slavin's (1995) view that group work becomes effective when there is individual accountability and positive interdependence among group members. The teacher ensured that each student had a clear role in the group to avoid dominance or excessive dependence on one student.

The use of SGD also demonstrates how SCL can be integrated into the 2013 curriculum, which demands active, collaborative learning and the development of 21st-century skills. Through group work, students show progress in collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and creativity. This provides an important foundation for improving the quality of Indonesian Language and Literature learning, which has often been perceived as a subject focused primarily on theory.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce earlier research stating that group-based learning or Small Group Discussion can improve learning outcomes while also building students' character. SGD is proven not only as a strategy to improve material understanding but also as an approach that shapes students into active, critical, and collaborative learners. Thus, this method is highly recommended for consistent implementation by Indonesian Language teachers and those teaching other subjects requiring critical thinking and collaboration.

Furthermore, the application of Small Group Discussion in Indonesian Language and Literature learning also shows an increase in students' metacognitive abilities. Observations indicate that students begin to demonstrate the ability to plan their learning strategies, evaluate their group's understanding, and reflect on the discussion process. This metacognition emerges because students are engaged in activities that require them to summarize, compare, connect concepts, and

independently correct their group's misunderstandings. This aligns with Trinova's (2003) view that SCL encourages learners to develop awareness of their own thinking processes, making them self-regulated learners.

Moreover, the findings indicate that group dynamics formed through SGD benefit not only academic aspects but also character development. Discussion activities train students to take responsibility, show concern for group progress, and develop honesty and openness in understanding concepts. The journal shows that students not only express opinions but also begin to give constructive criticism, respond to peers' arguments, and reach decisions based on logical reasoning. This is in line with Putri (2020), who emphasizes that Indonesian Language learning contributes significantly to building students' character, particularly communicative, collaborative, and empathetic traits.

Another finding reveals that integrating Student-Centered Learning with language and literary materials provides a more meaningful learning experience. The journal states that in sentence analysis lessons, students were able to identify Subject-Predicate-Object-Adverb elements more accurately after group discussions compared to before SGD implementation. This indicates that student interaction reinforces understanding of syntactic concepts that were previously difficult to grasp through lecture-based teaching. Meanwhile, in literary lessons—specifically analyzing the novel *Laskar Pelangi*—group discussions help students interpret plot, theme, and moral values more comprehensively because they gain diverse perspectives from their peers. This interaction supports the idea that literature helps develop students' reflective, imaginative, and socio-emotional abilities.

Additionally, the teacher's role as a facilitator is crucial in maintaining discussion quality. As explained in the journal, the teacher not only provides feedback but also monitors each group's dynamics, ensures equal participation, and reinforces concepts when misconceptions arise. This practice reflects Slavin's (1995) principles of individual accountability and positive interdependence, where group success relies on each member's contribution and the teacher ensures no student is left behind. Thus, the success of group discussions is not solely due to the grouping format but also to the teacher's ability to design clear instructions, manage time, and stimulate effective interaction.

The learning process using SGD also shows significant changes in classroom atmosphere. As noted in the journal, a classroom that was initially passive and teacher-centered transformed into a dynamic space full of interaction and collaborative activities. Students enjoy the learning process because they feel directly involved rather than merely listening to explanations. This increased learning energy positively influences students' intrinsic motivation. They begin to take control of their learning process, so their drive to understand the material comes from internal awareness and personal interest rather than external pressure.

Moreover, students' academic achievement shows significant improvement, as indicated in the journal, with students' scores increasing from approximately 72 to 91 after the implementation of SGD. This increase strengthens the argument that small group discussion is an effective strategy for enhancing understanding while fostering collaborative skills. In Indonesian Language and Literature learning, this method also successfully integrates the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in a balanced manner, as each student must read materials, listen to peers, present arguments, and write discussion results.

Thus, the implementation of Small Group Discussion not only positively impacts academic achievement and socio-emotional development but also supports the realization of learning relevant to 21st-century demands, such as creativity, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. This model aligns with the direction of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, which require active, student-centered learning and competency-based skills aligned with real-life needs. Therefore, SGD can be adopted as a primary learning strategy suitable for continuous application in Indonesian Language and Literature learning as well as other subjects.

V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Small Group Discussion is highly effective in creating a more interactive, collaborative, and student-centered learning environment. Student interaction increased significantly, particularly in terms of confidence in expressing opinions, cooperation, and problem-solving skills. In addition, the teacher's role as a facilitator is crucial in maintaining the dynamics of the discussion and ensuring the active involvement of all students. Students' learning outcomes also showed a substantial improvement, rising from an average score of 72 to 91 after the application of SGD. Therefore, the Small Group Discussion strategy can be recommended as an effective learning method for Indonesian Language and Literature courses.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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