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Implementation of the Structured Debate Learning Model to Improve Learning Outcomes in Pancasila Education on the Topic of "the Territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia" at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding

Erfa Meiliyah[1], Mardi Widodo[2], Ismiati[3]
[1,2]Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe, Indonesia; [3]UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding, Indonesia
evamelia657@gmail.com

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Abstract

Low initial learning mastery highlighted the need for more active instruction in Pancasila Education at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding. This study examined changes in learning outcomes following the implementation of structured debate on the territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), with students divided into affirmative and opposing groups. A mixed-methods classroom action research design was conducted over two cycles involving 26 seventh-grade students in Class VII-C. Data were collected through observations, questionnaires/tests, and interviews and analyzed descriptively using quantitative and qualitative techniques. At baseline, two students (8%) met the minimum mastery criterion (KKM = 70), and the class mean score was 55. In Cycle I, mastery increased to 16 students (62%), with a mean score of 71. In Cycle II, mastery remained at 16 students (62%), while the mean score was 69. Qualitative findings indicated a progression from basic conceptual understanding toward analysis involving higher-order thinking skills, accompanied by greater self-confidence and stronger argumentation skills. These findings indicate that mastery gains relative to baseline were maintained across the two cycles, alongside qualitative improvements in students' thinking and participation. The study provides contextual evidence for constructivist, debate-based civic pedagogy and practical insights for teachers seeking to strengthen analytical thinking, confidence, and argumentation through structured classroom debate.

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Keywords: Structured Debate; Pancasila Education; Learning Outcomes; Higher-Order Thinking; Classroom Action Research

INTRODUCTION

Pancasila Education is a subject that plays a crucial role in shaping students' character, national insight, and civic awareness. Civic Education is an essential component of the national education system, as it helps students understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens while instilling moral, social, and cultural values that are fundamental to building a civilized and integrity-driven society (Murtiningsih et al., 2024) . Through this subject, students are expected not only to understand state-related concepts but also to apply them in daily life in line with national ideals and goals, while developing critical thinking and communication skills. One of the core topics in the junior secondary school curriculum concerns "the Territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI)," which covers territorial boundaries, sovereignty, and the potential and challenges facing Indonesia's territory.

Based on the author's observations while teaching at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding, Tuban, a fundamental problem was identified that hindered the achievement of learning objectives: students exhibited low self-confidence in speaking, expressing opinions, and constructing arguments in front of the class. Students tended to be passive, afraid of making mistakes, and reluctant to voice their ideas or respond to their peers' opinions. This condition was compounded by teaching methods that remained dominated by conventional lecturing and question-and-answer techniques, so that students were rarely trained to think critically or to construct logical arguments. This concern is in line with (Majidi et al., 2021) , who noted that weaknesses in students' argumentation are often linked to a lack of adequate and effective instruction rather than to students' inherent inability to acquire such skills. (Guo et al., 2023) similarly pointed out that conventional teaching characterized by top-down knowledge transmission can hinder students from developing critical thinking and argumentation skills. The impact of this lack of confidence and argumentation skill was evident in student learning outcomes: daily test scores on the NKRI Territory topic showed that most students had not reached the school's Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) of 70.

Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 1 Paragraph 6, stipulates that an educator is an education personnel qualified as a teacher, lecturer,

counselor, community learning facilitator, tutor, instructor, or other designation relevant to their specialization, who participates in organizing education. Based on this provision, teachers as educators are expected to design instruction and to act as guides, facilitators, motivators, and monitors of students' learning outcomes. Teachers therefore need to create instructional innovations that transform the classroom into a more active and interactive environment while training students' courage to speak. One alternative considered appropriate for this purpose is the debate learning model, which requires students to search for information, construct arguments, and present them publicly, thereby indirectly building self-confidence while deepening content understanding.

In response to the problem identified, the researcher proposed a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy, a student-centered model that uses real-world problems as the primary trigger for learning, aiming to construct new knowledge, train critical thinking, and develop collaboration skills through problem-solving. According to (Arends, 2012), PBL is defined as a learning model in which students are confronted with real-world problems, with the aim of enabling them to construct their own knowledge, foster higher-order skills, become more independent, and increase self-confidence (Novianti et al., 2020). Building on this argument, and combined with the debate model divided into Pro and Contra camps, the researcher conducted classroom action research entitled "Implementation of the Structured Debate Learning Model to Improve Learning Outcomes in Pancasila Education on the Topic of the Territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia at SMP Negeri 3 Semanding, Tuban."

Several previous studies provide relevant context for this research. (Nasihudin & Hariyadi, 2021) explain that student knowledge is largely formed through learning experiences, while (Cynthia et al., 2016) found that learning success does not occur spontaneously but is influenced by interrelated factors, including intelligence and aptitude, both of which affect students' capacity to understand material, solve problems, and achieve optimal learning outcomes. (Ikhwan & Nurjanah, 2025) demonstrated that active, participatory learning models such as Gallery Walk can improve student learning outcomes, indicating that a shift away from purely informative instruction toward more interactive strategies tends to strengthen learning achievement.

(Kurniawan, 2026) applied debate simulations in Pancasila Education for eleventh-grade students through a three-cycle classroom action research and found that students'

argumentation skills improved progressively, from adapting to the debate format to constructing data-based arguments accompanied by objective rebuttals. Similarly, (Hamidah et al., 2025) reported that debate-based civic education significantly influenced students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

However, most of these previous studies focus on general learning-outcome determinants or on alternative active-learning models other than structured debate, and few have specifically examined a Pro–Contra debate model applied to Pancasila Education, particularly on the topic of NKRI Territory, within a classroom action research framework that tracks the progression from lower-order to higher-order thinking across multiple cycles. This constitutes a research gap: limited empirical evidence exists on how a structured, two-sided debate format can be systematically used, cycle by cycle, to build both learning outcomes and the argumentation and critical-thinking skills that civic education is meant to cultivate. This gap provides the logical basis for the present study.

The novelty of this study lies in its combination of a structured debate design dividing students into Pro and Contra camps with a two-cycle classroom action research framework that deliberately increases cognitive complexity from Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) in Cycle I to Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Cycle II, applied specifically to the NKRI Territory topic in Pancasila Education. This approach has received limited attention in prior civic education research, which more commonly examines discussion- or lecture-based interventions rather than a systematically graded, opposition-based debate format.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on Problem-Based Learning theory (Arends, 2012) which positions real-world problems as the trigger for constructing new knowledge and higher-order skills, and on Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's theory asserts that intellectual development occurs when students face tasks slightly beyond their actual ability, requiring social interaction, discussion, collaboration, and guidance from teachers or peers (Tohari & Rahman, 2024) Structured debate is understood in this study as a form of scaffolding that helps students move from their actual competence toward their potential competence within the ZPD (Fitriani et al., 2026). In constructivist theory, scaffolding is a support system that structures learning activities, enables timely feedback, and helps students move from assisted to autonomous task completion, a concept that originates from Vygotsky's ZPD (Kaldaras et al., 2024).

Based on the issue, argument, research gap, and theoretical foundation outlined above, this study focuses on the implementation of the Structured Debate learning model, with Pro and Contra group divisions, in Pancasila Education on the topic of NKRI Territory. This study aims to determine the extent to which the implementation of the Structured Debate learning model improves student learning outcomes and critical thinking skills in Pancasila Education on the NKRI Territory topic among seventh-grade students at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding, across two classroom action research cycles.

METHODS

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative methods (numerical data, statistics, tests) and qualitative methods (interviews, observation, documentation, and in-depth understanding). The purpose of this mixed-methods approach was to obtain more complete, in-depth, and accurate results, as numerical data could be reinforced with direct explanations from real classroom conditions (Yam, 2022) The study was conducted according to principles of rationality (grounded in theory and intervention logic), empiricism (using data obtained directly from the subjects), and systematicity (following the sequential stages of classroom action research).

This study was designed in two cycles, following the classroom action research model described by (Arikunto, 2019) defined as research conducted by a teacher in collaboration with a researcher (or by a teacher acting simultaneously as researcher) in the classroom or school where the teacher works, with an emphasis on improving learning processes and practices. Each cycle consisted of four stages: Planning, Acting, Observing, and Reflecting.

In the Planning stage, the teacher developed a lesson plan (RPP) for each cycle, applying the Structured Debate model on topics related to NKRI Territory, prepared observation sheets for teacher and student activities, test instruments or student worksheets (LKM), instructional media, and evaluation tools. In the Acting stage, learning was carried out according to the steps set out in the RPP: students were divided into two camps of five to six members each (Pro and Contra), and actively engaged in discussion and debate under the teacher's role as moderator and facilitator. This Pro–Contra arrangement follows the logic of policy debate, in which teams engage in structured argumentation about public issues and alternate between affirming and negating a resolution (Schueler & Larned, 2025) . In the

Observing stage, two observersthe classroom teacher and a peer colleaguesimultaneously documented teacher performance and student engagement using structured observation sheets. In the Reflecting stage, the results of each cycle were evaluated to identify strengths and weaknesses, which then informed refinements to the lesson plan, assessment instruments, and instructional strategy for the following cycle.

The research was conducted at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding, Tuban Regency, during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, over a period of two months (April–May 2026) across six meetings. It was carried out by students of the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program at Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe (UNIROW) Tuban undergoing their Field Experience Practicum (PPL), together with a Field Supervising Lecturer, and involved the school principal, the classroom teacher, and students as research partners. The study was considered successful if the classical learning-mastery indicator reached at least 75% of students meeting the KKM of 70, with the following success indicators: (1) an increase in the average learning outcome score across cycles; (2) an increase in the number of students achieving the KKM; and (3) an increase in students' activity, self-confidence, and argumentation skills during learning (as reflected in cognitive outcomes).

The participants of this study were 26 seventh-grade students of class VII-C at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding studying Pancasila Education on the topic of NKRI Territory (including the outermost island boundaries). As this study was classroom action research conducted within an intact classroom, the entire class was involved as the research subject through total (saturation) sampling, meaning no sampling technique was applied to select a subset of the population; rather, all 26 students in the class participated in every stage of the research.

Data collection instruments consisted of: (1) observation sheets used to record teacher and student activity during the learning process; (2) questionnaires/tests, including a diagnostic questionnaire prior to the intervention, pre-tests, post-tests, and student worksheets (LKM) containing debate arguments, anticipated counter-arguments, and case-based questions; and (3) interview guidelines used to gather students' reflections and perceptions after participating in the Structured Debate activities. Prior to the implementation of each cycle, a diagnostic assessment was administered to determine students' readiness for Deep Learning, Problem-Based Learning, and the Pro–Contra Structured Debate approach. Data collection procedures followed a consistent sequence in

each cycle: diagnostic assessment, pre-test, implementation of the debate activity with concurrent observation, post-test, and interview.

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using the classical learning-mastery percentage formula (see Equation 1) to determine the proportion of students who achieved the KKM in each cycle, and scores were further categorized using a five-level interval scale (Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor, Very Poor). Qualitative data obtained from observation notes and interviews were analyzed descriptively through data reduction, categorization, and interpretation, focusing on changes in students' confidence, argumentation skills, and the progression of their thinking from Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) toward Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). The quantitative and qualitative findings were then integrated to provide a comprehensive picture of the effect of the Structured Debate model on both cognitive outcomes and non-cognitive skills.



Figure 1. Classroom Action Research Cycle

RESULTS

Prior to the implementation of the action (Pre-cycle), an assessment of Chapter IV, "Diversity of the Indonesian Nation within the Framework of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," showed that of the 26 students, only 2 (8%) achieved learning mastery, while 24 students (92%) had not yet reached the KKM of 70, with an average score of 55. Following the implementation of the Structured Debate model with Pro and Contra groups in Cycle I, on the topic of NKRI Territory, the number of students achieving mastery increased to 16 (62%), while 10 students (38%) remained below the KKM, with the average score rising to 71.

In Cycle II, which continued the NKRI Territory topic with questions designed at a higher level of complexity based on Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), the classical mastery percentage remained at 62% (16 students), with 10 students (38%) still below the KKM and an average score of 69. Although the percentage of students in the "Very Good" category did not increase relative to Cycle I, qualitative data from teacher observation notes and student interviews indicated a clear shift in the quality of students' thinkingfrom simply understanding concepts (LOTS) toward analyzing problems and applying knowledge in broader contexts (HOTS) along with increased self-confidence and reduced dependence on peers when constructing arguments.

Table 1 presents the interval criteria used to categorize students' learning outcomes throughout this study.

Table 1. Criteria for Categorizing Student Learning Outcomes

Score Interval	Category
81 – 100	Very Good
61 – 80	Good
41 – 60	Fair
21 – 40	Poor
0 – 20	Very Poor

As shown in Table 2, the frequency distribution of student learning outcomes in the Pre-cycle condition indicates that none of the 26 students reached the Very Good category (0%), 9 students (35%) were in the Good category, and the majority, 14 students (54%), fell into the Fair category, while 2 students (8%) were categorized as Poor and 1 student (4%) as Very Poor.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Student Learning Outcomes (Pre-cycle)

No.	Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	81 – 100	Very Good	0	0
2	61 – 80	Good	9	35
3	41 – 60	Fair	14	54
4	21 – 40	Poor	2	8
5	0 – 20	Very Poor	1	4
Total			26	100

Table 3 further shows that, based on the KKM of 70, only 2 students (8%) achieved mastery in the Pre-cycle condition, while 24 students (92%) had not yet reached mastery, confirming that the conventional teaching method used prior to the intervention had not been effective in helping students meet the required mastery standard.

Table 3. Learning Mastery of Students in the Pre-cycle Condition

No.	Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	70 – 100	Mastered	2	8
2	0 – 67	Not Mastered	24	92
Total			26	100

Cycle I Implementation

The following presents the results of the students' learning test in Cycle I:

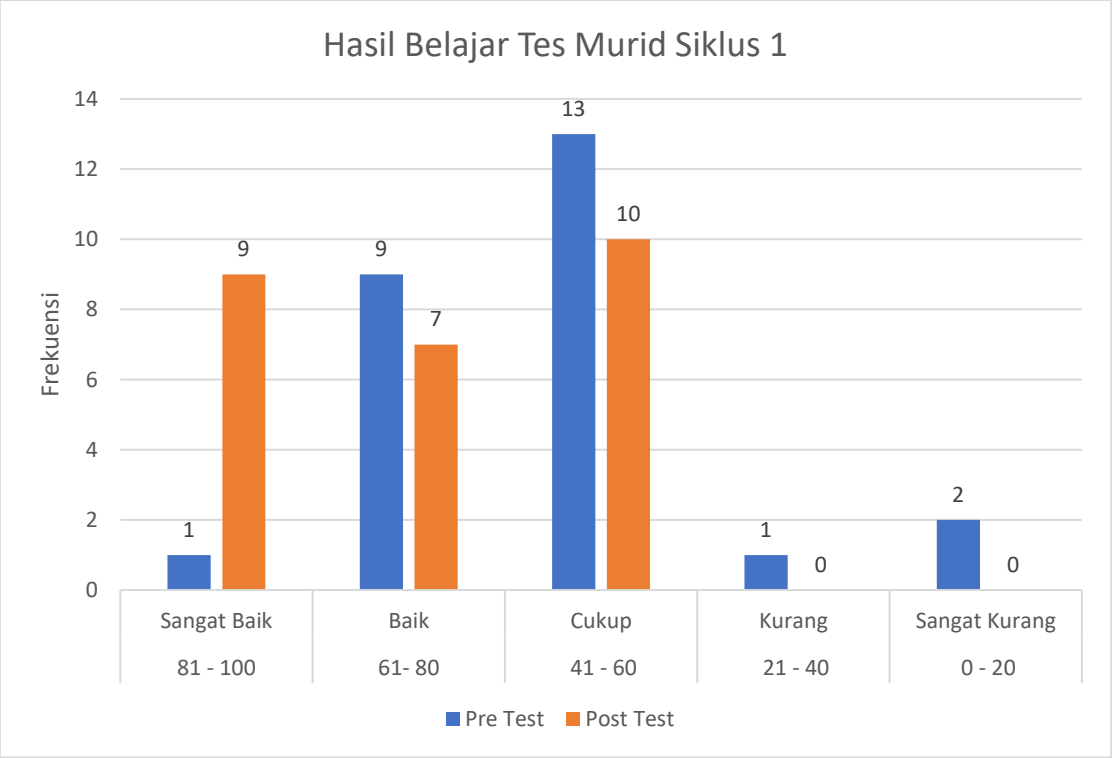


Figure 2. Student Learning Test Results in Cycle I

Based on the Pre-cycle results followed by 26 students, an initial picture was obtained regarding students' level of understanding of the NKRI Territory material before instruction was implemented.

The following presents the results of the students' learning test in Cycle II:

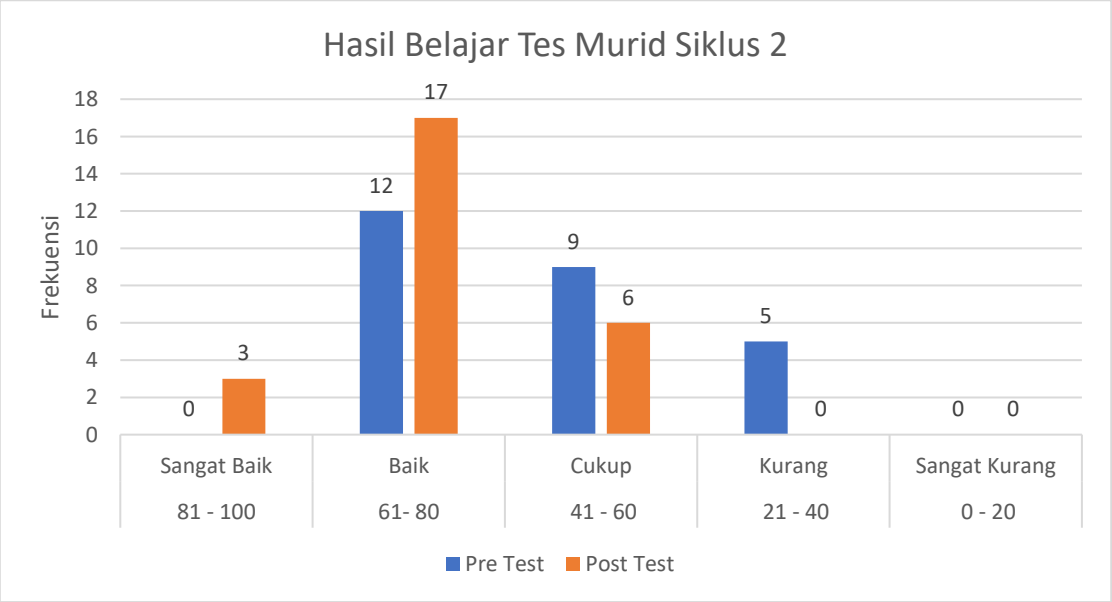


Figure 3. Student Learning Test Results in Cycle II

Based on the Cycle II pretest results, of the 26 students, none (0%) were in the Very Good category, 12 students (47%) were in the Good category, 9 students (35%) were in the Fair category, 5 students (20%) were in the Poor category, and none (0%) were in the Very Poor category. This data indicated that students' initial ability remained fairly diverse. The Cycle II post-test results, however, showed an improvement in learning outcomes: 3 students (12%) achieved the Very Good category, 17 students (65%) achieved the Good category, 6 students (23%) achieved the Fair category, and no students remained in the Poor or Very Poor categories (0%). This variation in outcomes may be attributed to the more complex, HOTS-oriented material presented in this cycle.

Table 4 summarizes and compares student learning outcomes across the Pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II conditions, referring to Figure 1 (the classroom action research cycle diagram) and Figure 2 (the results of the learning tests in Cycle II).

Table 4. Comparison of Student Learning Outcomes Before (Pre-cycle) and After the Implementation of the Structured Debate Model

Status	Pre-cycle (f)	Pre-cycle (%)	Cycle I (f)	Cycle I (%)	Cycle II (f)	Cycle II (%)
Mastered	2	8	16	62	16	62
Not Mastered	24	92	10	38	10	38
Total	26	100	26	100	26	100
Average Score	55	-	71	-	69	-

As shown in Table 4, the average score increased from 55 in the Pre-cycle condition to 71 in Cycle I, and remained relatively stable at 69 in Cycle II despite the higher complexity of the HOTS-based questions. The number of students achieving mastery increased from 2 (8%) in the Pre-cycle to 16 (62%) in both Cycle I and Cycle II, indicating that the Structured Debate model was able to help a substantially larger proportion of students meet the established mastery standard, as illustrated in Figure 1 (the two-cycle classroom action research procedure) and Figure 2 (Cycle II test results).

Table 5. Write the Table Description Here

Indicators	Mean	SD
Indicator 1	Data indicator 1	Data indicator 1
Indicator 2	Data indicator 2	Data indicator 2

One notable divergent finding was that the percentage of students in the Very Good category did not increase from Cycle I to Cycle II, and the overall average score slightly decreased from 71 to 69, despite the more complex, HOTS-based material used in Cycle II. This pattern deviates from the expected trend of continuous improvement across cycles and is reported here factually as an anomaly relevant to the research focus, without speculative interpretation, in accordance with the objectivity and transparency required in reporting classroom action research results.

A further divergent finding emerged from the interview data: while most students expressed increased enjoyment and confidence in the debate activities, one student explicitly stated a reluctance to participate in future debates, describing the activity as "tense" (menegangkan). This response diverges from the generally positive pattern reported by other students and is presented here as part of the factual results; its possible causes and implications are addressed in the Discussion section.

The classical learning-mastery percentage in each cycle was calculated using the following formula:

$$KM = (ST / N) \times 100\% \quad (1)$$

where KM denotes the classical mastery percentage, ST denotes the number of students who achieved mastery, and N denotes the total number of students in the class.

DISCUSSION

The finding that the implementation of the Structured Debate model substantially increased the proportion of students achieving the KKMfrom 8% in the Pre-cycle to 62% in Cycle Iindicates that active, argumentation-based learning plays an important role in helping students construct and retain understanding of the NKRI Territory topic. This finding is consistent with the objective of the study, which sought to determine the extent to which structured debate improves both cognitive learning outcomes and students' confidence and argumentation skills. The stability of the mastery percentage at 62% in Cycle II, combined with clear qualitative evidence of a shift from LOTS to HOTS-based thinking, suggests that the model's contribution extends beyond test scores alone, reflecting a deeper cognitive and affective transformation in how students engage with civic education content.

This finding is consistent with previous research showing that active, participatory learning strategies are positively associated with improved learning outcomes, such as the Gallery Walk model examined by (Ikhwan & Nurjanah, 2025) and the discussion-based factors identified by (Cynthia et al., 2016) as influencing student achievement. It also aligns with (Arends, 2012) conception of Problem-Based Learning, in which confronting students with real, contextually grounded problemssuch as the dilemma of prioritizing development among Indonesia's outermost islands used as the debate topic in this studybuilds independent knowledge construction and higher-order skills. This result is also in line with (Sanjaya et al., 2022) who reported that students who learned through an active, problem-oriented model (conflict resolution) outperformed those taught conventionally in civic education.

The increase in students' confidence and active participation is in line with (Baketa et al., 2023), who reviewed evidence that debate is associated with greater confidence and requires more active student involvement, thereby increasing students' responsibility for their own learning.

The progression from LOTS in Cycle I to HOTS in Cycle II is further explained through Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which holds that intellectual growth occurs when learners engage with tasks slightly beyond their current ability, supported by social interaction, discussion, and guidance from teachers or peers (Tohari & Rahman, 2024) The Structured Debate activity functioned as a scaffold within this framework, consistent with the view of (Fitriani et al., 2026) that teachers must first diagnose students' learning difficulties before providing the appropriate level of scaffolding.

However, the finding that the Very Good category did not increase in Cycle II diverges somewhat from a straightforward reading of scaffolding theory, which would predict continued gains; this suggests that the increased complexity of HOTS-based material in Cycle II may have temporarily raised the cognitive demand beyond what some students' current scaffolding could fully support, even as their qualitative reasoning skills continued to develop. (Xu et al., 2023) also noted that the effect of collaborative problem-solving on critical thinking varies with factors such as intervention duration, group size, and the presence of learning scaffolds, which may help explain why gains were not uniform across cycles in the present study.

The findings contribute to the development of constructivist, scaffolding-based pedagogy within Pancasila and civic education, demonstrating how a structured, two-sided debate format can be used to deliberately move students from foundational understanding toward higher-order analytical thinking across successive instructional cycles. Practically, the results may serve as a basis for Pancasila Education teachers and civic education practitioners in designing debate-based learning activities particularly on territorially and nationally significant topics such as NKRI Territory that are structured to build both academic mastery and students' confidence and argumentation skills in a graduated, cycle-based manner.

This study is limited by its small sample size (26 students from a single class), its implementation within only two cycles at a single school, and the absence of a comparison or control group, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other classes, schools, or topics within Pancasila Education. Future studies are encouraged to expand the sample across multiple classes or schools, apply a longer or comparative/quasi-experimental design, and examine the Structured Debate model on other civic education topics, in order to obtain a more comprehensive and generalizable understanding of its effectiveness in improving both learning outcomes and critical thinking skills. Similar limitations, namely a small sample and a single institution, were also acknowledged in debate research by (Spaska et al., 2021), who recommended that debate facilitators be well trained in moderating debates and that students be made aware of debate procedures beforehand.

CONCLUSION

Based on the classroom action research conducted in class VII-C at UPT SMP Negeri 3 Semanding, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Structured Debate learning

model, with students divided into Pro and Contra groups, improved learning outcomes in Pancasila Education on the topic of NKRI Territory. This is reflected in the increase in students' average scores from 55 in the initial condition (Pre-cycle) to 71 in Cycle I, remaining within a relatively good range at 69 in Cycle II as the complexity of the HOTS-based questions increased. The number of students achieving learning mastery (KKM 70) also increased significantly, from 2 students (8%) in the Pre-cycle to 16 students (62%) in Cycle I, a level that was sustained in Cycle II, indicating that this learning model was able to help a considerably larger number of students meet the established mastery standard.

Beyond cognitive outcomes, the Structured Debate model also succeeded in improving students' self-confidence, courage in argumentation, and critical thinking skills. In Cycle II, students demonstrated development in their thinking from simply understanding concepts (LOTS) toward analyzing more complex problems (HOTS), as reflected in teachers' observation notes and student interviews expressing greater comfort, confidence, and skill in constructing arguments. Accordingly, the Structured Debate learning model can be recommended as an effective alternative strategy for Pancasila Education, capable of simultaneously improving learning outcomes and students' critical thinking and communication skills, and providing a solid foundation for further development in subsequent instructional topics.

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