



The Strategies of Catholic Religious Teachers in Enhancing the Learning Interest of Fifth Grade Students in Elementary School

Din Oloan Sihotang¹, Aldi Alfrianza Sinulingga², Riris Surbina Br Tarigan³

^{1,2,3}Catholic Religious Education, STP St. Bonaventura Delitua Medan, Indonesia.

oloansihotang08@gmail.com¹, sinulinggaaldi@gmail.com², ririssurbina@gmail.com³

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

learning interest; models; strategies; teaching.

Effective teaching strategies are crucial in enhancing students' understanding, increasing engagement, fostering creativity and problem-solving skills, addressing student diversity, and improving knowledge retention and transfer. The use of good strategies creates a positive and meaningful learning experience for students. Hence, this research aims to explore how Catholic religious teachers in Elementary School enhance the learning interest of fifth-grade students. The research methodology employed is qualitative. The study took place at Elementary School, involving 15 students selected through snowball sampling. Observations and interviews were conducted during the teaching and learning process. The findings indicate that the fifth-grade students at Elementary School display a positive learning interest in Catholic religious education. They actively engage with the teacher by asking questions and paying close attention. The teacher utilizes a Lesson Plan and addresses the variations in students' characteristics. Additionally, the teacher involves proficient students to assist their peers who may struggle. Social interaction is fostered through group discussions in the classroom. The teacher also demonstrates thorough instructional preparation. Overall, the students are physically and mentally prepared to participate in the learning process.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Interest is a psychological aspect that motivates individuals to pursue goals and develop a fascination, concentration, engagement, liking, appreciation, or heightened attention towards something. However, if the circumstances fail to generate interest in achieving those goals, the interest will be futile and not particularly strong or useful (Tuan et al, 2022). Interest represents one's desire to attentively engage in an activity, willingly and without coercion (Reski, 2021). Based on the above definitions, learning interest refers to an individual's capacity or inclination, focus, and enjoyment towards learning activities, demonstrated through active participation in the learning process.

The lack of students' learning interest is influenced by various factors such as teacher attention, availability of learning media, and learning methods that affect student interest (Ash & Hand, 2022). In Catholic religious education, the factors that influence student interest include the use of appropriate teaching strategies that significantly impact students' learning interest.

Students' interest in teaching and learning activities will increase through the implementation of various strategies that prevent boredom or disinterest during the learning process. The following characteristics indicate strong learning interest among students: (1) a desire to understand learning needs; (2) critical thinking and reflection during learning; (3) willingness to learn; (4) active participation in internal learning; and (5) enthusiasm for learning. Two types of factors contribute to increased student interest: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include an individual's health and ability to pay attention, while external factors encompass one's family, education, and community (Craig, 2021). Therefore, enhancing learning interest is essential to facilitate the teaching and learning process and achieve learning goals for students. However, based on observations conducted at Elementary School, Karo Regency, it is evident that students' learning interest in Catholic religious education is low due to several reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of school facilities and infrastructure. As a result, teachers face challenges in developing instructional materials and rely on available textbooks in the school. Secondly, Catholic religious teachers employ monotonous teaching strategies through conventional models, where students take notes from textbooks while the teacher predominantly delivers lectures. Consequently, many students feel sleepy and pay insufficient attention to the lessons, resulting in the failure to achieve learning goals. Thirdly, students' motivation to learn is low. Initial surveys indicate that students' attention during teacher-led lessons is minimal. Approximately 9 out of 15 students (60%) exhibit disinterest, as they engage in their own activities without paying attention to the teacher's explanations, despite receiving reprimands. Some students play with their peers, while others engage in conversations. Only 6 out of 15 students (40%) actively participate in the teaching and learning process.

To address these issues, teachers require tailored teaching strategies that are suitable for specific subjects and the school environment. Teachers need to be qualified and competent to fulfill their professional responsibilities. A teacher's ability to manage the classroom is a prerequisite for motivating students to participate in classroom learning (Koutrouba, 2020). In education, a teacher's primary duty is to educate the nation through formal education. This is affirmed by Egeberg et al. (2021), that every effort made is not exempt from limitations in achieving desired objectives. The learning process plays a vital role in educational success, and among its components is learning strategy, encompassing various techniques and methods. As Munna & Kalam (2021), stated that every learning activity involves the use of teaching strategies, and selecting the best strategy for the subject matter, situation, and students' abilities enhances the learning process. Thus, by utilizing appropriate teaching systems, learning objectives can be fully accomplished. Effective learning activities require effective teaching strategies.

Strategy originates from the Greek word "strategos," which means to strive for something or achieve what is needed (Haudi, 2021). According to Rokhimawan & Leli (2019), strategy can also be understood as what we have planned and decided to do during the implementation of activities. Strategy stems from the Greek word that means to strive for something or achieve what is needed (Haudi, 2021). Strategy can also be understood as what we have planned and decided to do during the implementation of activities (Rokhimawan & Leli, 2019). Learning strategy is a program that encompasses a series of tasks aimed at achieving specific educational objectives (Sally, 2022), (Ginting et al, 2023). The benefits of learning strategies include: Teachers can prepare teaching materials effectively and engage students, Teachers find it easier to manage the classroom, Teachers utilize more inventive classroom management techniques, Teachers utilize more inventive classroom management techniques and can modify some learning models.

Learning models are a series of teaching and learning processes that involve how teachers and students coordinate their activities from the beginning to the end of the learning process. The implementation of learning models is characterized by the presence of syntax, reaction principles, social systems, support systems, and instructional impact (Dewi et al, 2020). Based on the aforementioned details, the researcher has identified the following issues: (1) What is the learning interest of students at Elementary School?; (2) What are the strategies employed by Catholic religious teachers in implementing teaching models in Grade V at Elementary School? The researcher has set the research objectives as follows: (1) To determine the learning interest of students at Elementary School; (2) To investigate the strategies employed by Catholic religious teachers in implementing teaching models in Grade V at Elementary School. This study is crucial to identify the strategies used by Catholic religious teachers in enhancing students' learning interest. Consequently, it is expected that these strategies will stimulate the learning interest of Grade V students. Inspired by the aforementioned explanations, the researcher feels motivated to conduct the study entitled the strategies of Catholic Religious Teachers in Enhancing Students' Learning Interest in Grade V at Elementary School.

B. METHODS

The researcher conducted the study at Elementary School from February to April 2023. The research subjects were selected through snowball sampling. The informants identified in this study were 15 individuals, including religious teachers, peer teachers, and 11 students. The data sources used in the research consisted of primary data: (1) the interest in learning of students at Elementary School and (2) the strategies of Catholic religious teachers in implementing the learning model in the classroom. Secondary data sources included information and documentation related to the research and documentation of "Strategies of Catholic Religious Teachers in Enhancing the Interest in Learning of Grade V Students at Elementary School."

Data collection techniques included interviews, observations, and documentation. To facilitate the research process and maximize research objectives, the researcher provided research instruments in the form of an interview guide containing information about the strategies of Catholic religious teachers in enhancing the interest in learning of Grade V students at Elementary School. Through data reduction, data presentation, and research conclusions, data analysis was conducted. To draw conclusions from each research object, a step-by-step data analysis was performed, starting with data transcription, data identification, data classification, data interpretation, and data description.

Data checking techniques were performed using triangulation criteria, including (1) the researcher compared and verified the level of trustworthiness of information obtained from the collected data regarding the strategies of Catholic religious teachers in enhancing students' interest in learning to determine the validity of the data in Grade V at Elementary School; (2) the researcher evaluated the level of trust in data sources using predetermined methods; (3) Furthermore, the researcher carefully examined the data (facts) with various relevant theories; and (4) the researcher also conducted data audits to ensure accuracy and reliability, thus producing credible research results.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Student Interest in Learning at Elementary School Grade V

Student interest in learning at Elementary School Grade V is highly evident and positive in PAK (Religious and Moral Education) classes. They display a strong enthusiasm for participating in PAK lessons, as seen in their eagerness to complete and submit assignments. The students actively engage in PAK lessons by asking questions to the PAK teacher and providing answers. They also participate actively in group discussions, offering opinions and contributing to achieving outcomes that will be presented in front of the class. During the PAK learning process, the students demonstrate punctuality by arriving before the teacher enters the classroom. They appear focused and attentive, paying close attention to the material presented by the teacher. The students also take notes on key points related to the taught subject matter. In conclusion, Grade V students at Elementary School show a strong interest in learning in PAK classes. They exhibit enthusiasm, active involvement, punctuality, and concentration in their learning. This indicates a high level of interest and enjoyment in the PAK subject, as well as a desire to gain a good understanding of the material being taught. Interest in learning is the desire or willingness of students to engage in the learning process, which evokes curiosity, concentration, involvement, and a sense of enjoyment in school. The forms of students' interest in learning in this study are observed through feelings of liking, interest, concentration, and involvement.

a. Feeling of enjoyment

The form of the feeling of enjoyment in learning among students at Elementary School in this study is demonstrated through several aspects. Firstly, they show a liking for PAK (Pendidikan Agama Katolik - Catholic Religious Education) learning through cheerful facial expressions and enthusiasm while in the classroom. Secondly, the feeling of enjoyment in participating in PAK learning can also be seen from their consistent attendance during lessons. Students consistently attend classes and are not frequently absent or skip the PAK subject. The results of interviews with all Catholic students in grade V about their feelings of liking as a manifestation of their interest in learning show a willingness to attend and always be present during the learning process. For example, student 1 expressed in the following interview excerpt:

"I feel very happy learning PAK because our teacher invites us to sing, play games, and have quizzes/question-and-answer sessions."

Similarly, student 2 said:

"I feel happy to participate in PAK learning, so I always attend to listen to the teacher giving lessons in front of the class."

Student 3 and Student 4 also emphasized the opinions of the previous students, stating:
"When I attend PAK learning, I feel happy because the teacher doesn't just lecture in front of the class; instead, the teacher engages us in learning in the classroom, playing, singing, and having question-and-answer sessions, so the learning doesn't feel like it's already finished. That's why I am always present and engaged in learning".

Based on the interview results, it can be concluded that students at Elementary School feel very happy to participate in PAK learning. This is because the teacher uses a learning model that actively involves them through activities such as singing, playing games, and having quizzes/question-and-answer sessions.

b. Interest

The form of learning interest among students at Elementary School in this study is demonstrated through their enthusiasm and interest while working on tasks assigned by the teacher. Additionally, students are seen to complete tasks on time, following the instructions given by their teachers. Their engagement in learning was observed through observations and interview results. The interview results from 11 students regarding their forms of interest in learning show that they diligently work on and submit the tasks given by their teachers. For instance, student 1 expressed in the following interview excerpt: "In the process of learning, I work on tasks by following the instructions given by our teacher. I am always enthusiastic about submitting the tasks given by the teacher because the teacher assesses them and punishes students who do not do the tasks, such as making them stand in front of the class or writing the tasks ten times."

Student 2 also shared a similar sentiment, stating:

"When working on tasks, I first read the book and understand the questions, and then I work on them well and enthusiastically submit the tasks given by the teacher because I want to get good grades in school".

Student 3 and Student 4 also confirmed the opinions of the previous students, saying:

"When working on tasks given by the teacher, I first read the questions and understand them, and then I work on them by searching for answers in the book related to the material taught by our teacher. I am also enthusiastic about submitting the tasks because I feel happy to be evaluated by our teacher".

Based on the interview results, it can be concluded that in the process of learning PAK, students show an interest in learning by diligently and correctly working on the tasks given by the teacher. They first understand the questions or instructions provided before answering them correctly. Additionally, students submit the tasks on time as specified by the teacher. This demonstrates their enthusiasm for PAK learning and their efforts to achieve a good understanding of the subject.

c. Concentration

The form of learning concentration among students at Elementary School in this study is demonstrated through their focus on paying attention to the teacher while delivering the material in front of the class. Students show good concentration throughout the learning process, from the beginning to the end. For example, student Student 1, expressed in the following interview excerpt:

"During the learning process, I stay silent and focused in my seat, listening to the teacher delivering the material in front of the class. I pay close attention to the teacher from the beginning to the end of the lesson".

Similarly, Student 2 stated:

"I pay attention to the teacher while delivering the material in front of the class and remain focused during the learning process without playing with my classmates, although sometimes there are distractions from outside the classroom that cause my concentration to waver. However, I refocus my mind to stay concentrated on the learning".

Based on the students' opinions expressed in the interview results, it can be concluded that students demonstrate good concentration during the learning process. They attentively listen to the teacher while delivering the material and maintain focus throughout the lesson.

d. Engagement

The interview results from 11 students about their engagement as a manifestation of their learning interest show that they actively participate by asking the teacher about the taught material and providing opinions during group discussions in class. For example, student 1 expressed in the following interview excerpt:

"During the learning process, I am active by raising my hand to ask the teacher when I don't understand certain topics, and I answer the teacher's questions. During group discussions, I actively participate by giving opinions to my groupmates and presenting our findings in front of the class."

Student 2 also shared a similar sentiment, stating:

"While learning PAK, I listen to the teacher when delivering the material in front of the class, and after the explanation, I ask questions about the topics I haven't grasped yet. During group discussions, I participate by giving opinions to my peers to provide answers."

Based on the interview results, it can be concluded that students show enthusiasm and engagement in the learning process. They not only listen to the teacher but also confidently ask questions and actively participate in group discussions, demonstrating their eagerness to understand the material and engage in the learning process. The findings of this research are consistent with Reski's findings, which state that interest in learning is an individual's ability or feeling of pleasure, attention, and attraction to the learning activities they participate in, demonstrated through active participation in the learning process (Reski, 2021). The research findings also reinforce the findings of Trismayanti, who states that interest is a psychological aspect that motivates individuals to achieve goals, creating interest to have attraction, concentration, involvement, liking, appreciation, or paying more attention to something. However, if the circumstances do not generate interest in achieving those goals, then the interest will be in vain, as it is not strong or useful (Friantini & Winata, 2019).

Based on the research findings in the field, student interest in learning arises from feelings of liking, attraction, concentration, and involvement in the learning process. The feeling of liking is evident in students' consistent and punctual attendance before the teacher enters the classroom and the start of the lesson. Student attraction is seen in their enthusiasm to complete and submit assignments on time (Rahmi et al, 2020). Student concentration is observed as they focus on listening to the teacher during the lesson delivery. Student involvement is demonstrated through their active participation in learning, such as asking questions to the teacher, providing answers, and participating in group discussions throughout the learning process (Silke & Netta, 2023).

2. Strategies of Catholic Religious Teachers in Implementing Learning Models in the Classroom

Strategies of Catholic religious teachers in implementing learning models have been carried out in accordance with the components of the learning model. The teachers demonstrate Syntax in the learning process through the preparation of Lesson Plans (RPP) before entering the classroom. The teachers emphasize the importance of complete and systematic RPP as a guideline for teaching. RPP helps create interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, challenging, and motivating learning experiences for students, as well as providing ample space for creativity and independence. The teachers face individual differences in the nature and character of the students during the learning process. The interview results from teachers about the implementation of syntax as a strategy for Catholic Religious Education teachers in applying the learning model show that they create Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP) before conducting the lessons. For example, Teacher 1 stated in the following interview excerpt:

"Every teacher is required to develop a complete and systematic RPP to ensure that learning takes place interactively, inspiringly, pleasantly, challenging, motivating students to actively participate, and providing sufficient room for creativity and independence."

Similarly, Teacher 2 said:

"As a teacher, having an RPP is essential to help prepare and plan the material that will be taught to students."

Teacher 3 also agreed, saying:

"As a teacher, having an RPP is crucial because it serves as the main material or guide for a teacher in teaching."

Teacher 4 also expressed a similar opinion:

"In the teaching and learning process, a teacher must have an RPP as a guide in conducting the learning."

Based on the interviews above, it can be concluded that as a teacher, it is essential to create a comprehensive and systematic Lesson Implementation Plan (RPP) to ensure that learning takes place effectively and enjoyably. The RPP serves as a crucial guide for teachers in delivering their lessons. The reaction principle applied by the teachers involves engaging students who understand the material to assist their peers who are facing difficulties (Hui, 2023). The teachers review the material, use instructional aids, provide special attention, and allocate additional learning time for students who struggle to understand the material. The social system is demonstrated through the teachers' role in facilitating group discussions in the classroom. The teachers guide and facilitate the discussions to ensure they run smoothly. Questions related to the material are given to the students in groups, and they are asked to discuss and present the results of their discussions in front of the class. The teachers monitor the students during the discussions to ensure their active participation and engagement. The teachers' support system includes thorough preparation of teaching materials, which has a significant instructional impact on students' learning interest. The teachers in the school provide teaching materials such as textbooks, modules, and other resources to support the learning process in the classroom. Hamu, (2021), with good preparation, the teachers can easily deliver the material and help students understand it. Furthermore, the instructional impact is also seen in the physical and mental readiness of students to participate in the learning process. This instructional impact is also

evident in the use of varied learning models by the teachers, which helps stimulate the learning interest of students with different characteristics and traits. The teachers' ability to effectively manage the class also contributes to a positive instructional impact.

The findings of this research are consistent with the findings of Joyce in (Gülten, 2022), who stated that the learning models implemented, such as the mentioned components (Syntax, Social System, Reaction Principle, Support System, and Instructional Impact), are procedures that demonstrate the application of a model. The rules and norms that govern interactions between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves, constitute the social system. How a teacher treats students during the learning activities represents the reaction principle. All the resources needed to support the implementation of learning activities using the chosen model form the support system. When learning activities are conducted using a learning model, the outcome known as the impact or consequence of that learning model is obtained, as described in Joyce's theory (Gülten, 2022).

Based on the research findings in the field, it can be concluded that the strategies of Catholic religious teachers in implementing learning models align with the components of the learning model. The teachers have demonstrated the application of Syntax through the complete and systematic Lesson Plans (RPP) as a guideline for teaching. RPP assists in creating interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, challenging, and motivating learning experiences for students, as well as providing ample space for creativity and independence. The teachers also address the individual differences in the nature and character of the students during the learning process. In this regard, the teachers employ the reaction principle by involving students who understand the material in assisting their peers who are facing difficulties. The teachers provide suitable approaches, such as reviewing the material, using instructional aids, giving special attention, and allocating additional learning time for students who struggle to understand the material. The teachers' role in directing and facilitating group discussions in the classroom exemplifies the social system. Questions related to the material are presented to the students in several groups, and they are given the opportunity to discuss and present their answers in front of the class. The teachers monitor the students to ensure their active participation during the discussions. The teachers establish rules for this social system of learning. The students are encouraged to collaborate to achieve the outcomes of the group discussions and to treat each other with respect. Sally & Franco (2022), when the teachers ask the students to present the results of their discussions in front of the class, the students actively participate in those discussions. The teachers then ask questions to assess the students' understanding and ensure their accountability for the outcomes.

Furthermore, the teachers' support system, which includes thorough preparation of teaching materials, has a significant instructional impact on students' learning interest. The teachers in the school provide teaching materials such as textbooks, modules, and other resources to support the learning process in the classroom (Hui, 2023). With good preparation, the teachers can easily deliver the material and assist students in understanding it. The instructional impact is also evident in the teachers' use of various learning models, which help stimulate the learning interest of students with different characteristics and traits. The teachers' ability to effectively manage the class also contributes to a positive instructional impact.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The students' interest in the subject of Catholic Religious Education (PAK) is considered good, as seen from their liking for Catholic Religious Education learning. This is evident in their willingness to learn, as shown by their timely presence before the teacher enters the classroom. The students' interest is also evident in their enthusiasm in completing and submitting assignments on time. Their concentration is noticeable as they focus on listening to the teacher when delivering the material in front of the class. Their engagement is demonstrated through their active participation in learning, such as asking questions to the teacher, answering the teacher's questions, and participating in group discussions throughout the learning process.

The strategies employed by Catholic Religious Education teachers in implementing the instructional model are in line with the components of the instructional model. The teachers have demonstrated the application of syntax through a comprehensive Lesson Plan (RPP). They apply the principle of response by involving students who understand the material to assist their peers who are struggling. The social system is evident through the teacher's role in guiding and facilitating group discussions in the classroom. The supportive system implemented by the teachers involves thorough preparation of teaching materials, which has a significant instructional impact on students' learning interests. The instructional impact is also observed in the teachers' use of varied instructional models, which help stimulate the learning interests of students with different characters and traits. To enhance Catholic Religious Education, integrate technology for interactive learning, differentiate instruction, foster collaboration, relate lessons to real-life examples, assess student progress, encourage reflective thinking, and prioritize professional development. This creates an engaging and impactful learning environment.

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