



Efforts to Increase the Learning Interest of Eighth-Grade Students in Christian Religious Education Through Problem-Based Learning Strategies at SMP Negeri 2 Ulususua

Hajarudi Halawa^{1*}, Ratna Saragih²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: hajarudihalawa12345@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to increase the learning interest of Grade 8C students in Christian Religious Education at SMP Negeri 2 Ulususua through the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy. The research employed a classroom action research (CAR) method consisting of several cycles, each including the stages of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The results of the study show that the effective implementation of PBL significantly enhances students' learning interest, as they become more actively engaged in the learning process, demonstrate improved critical thinking skills, and show greater enthusiasm in solving problems related to the subject matter. These improvements are reflected in better academic performance and more active student participation during lessons. Furthermore, several supporting factors contributed to this improvement, including teachers' guidance in facilitating discussions, the use of engaging learning media, and the creation of a conducive classroom atmosphere. This study concludes that Problem-Based Learning is an effective instructional strategy for increasing the learning interest of eighth-grade students in Christian Religious Education. It is recommended that future studies and teaching practices adopt the PBL approach in other subjects and further expand the use of interactive learning media to enhance student engagement and interest in learning.

Keywords: Learning interest, Christian Religious Education, PBL

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is an integral component of the curriculum at SMP Negeri 2 Ulususua. This subject not only aims to provide students with theological knowledge but also to shape their character and moral integrity in accordance with Christian teachings. However, one of the challenges faced by the school is the declining learning interest among eighth-grade students in Christian Religious Education. This phenomenon is evident through low student participation in class, lack of seriousness in completing assignments, and unsatisfactory examination results. One of the contributing

factors to this low level of interest is the lack of engaging and interactive teaching methods. Many teachers still rely on conventional approaches such as lectures and memorization, which tend to make students passive. This situation often leads to boredom and a lack of motivation to engage in the learning process. In fact, learning interest plays a vital role in influencing students' academic outcomes.

To address this issue, innovation in teaching strategies is necessary to enhance student engagement and motivation. The Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy has emerged as a potential solution. PBL emphasizes active student involvement in solving problems relevant to their real-life experiences. Through this approach, students are encouraged to think critically, collaborate with their peers, and apply the knowledge they have gained to find solutions to given problems. Learning interest refers to the intrinsic motivation that drives students to engage in learning activities. However, not all students possess the same enthusiasm for learning, and some exhibit low interest due to the teaching strategies employed by educators. In Christian Religious Education, teachers are required to continuously innovate by designing lessons that encourage students to think critically, creatively, and innovatively so that learning becomes more meaningful and goal-oriented. Christian Religious Education should serve as a means of cultivating students' learning interest and as a guide for addressing various problems in everyday life—whether in school, family, or society. Therefore, the teacher's role is crucial in transforming monotonous learning experiences into enjoyable and engaging classroom environments. Teachers are expected not only to transfer knowledge but also to create a pleasant and stimulating learning atmosphere. In this regard, Christian Religious Education teachers must be creative in implementing effective strategies, and one such approach is Problem-Based Learning. PBL refers to a series of learning activities that emphasize the scientific process of problem-solving. Previous studies have demonstrated that PBL can improve students' learning interest and conceptual understanding across various subjects. By implementing PBL in Christian Religious Education, students are expected to become more motivated and interested in the learning process. PBL not only makes learning more engaging but also helps students relate lesson content to their real-life experiences, thereby making the learning process more meaningful. Consequently, this research aims to investigate the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning strategy to enhance the learning interest of eighth-grade students in Christian Religious Education at *SMP Negeri 2 Uluusuua*. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective and innovative learning methods, as well as to the improvement of Christian Religious Education quality at the school.

METHOD

This study seeks to explore efforts to enhance students' learning interest in Christian Religious Education among eighth-grade students at *SMP Negeri 2 Uluusuua*. The researcher acted as a facilitator, motivator, and mentor throughout the process. The study subjects consisted of 25 eighth-grade students—13 male and 12 female. The first step in this classroom action research (CAR) was identifying existing problems in the classroom, which involved collecting initial data to understand students' current level of interest in Christian Religious Education. This was done through direct classroom observation to assess student participation and engagement, interviews with teachers

and students to gather insights, and an analysis of student grades to identify areas for improvement. The second step was action planning. Once the problems were identified, the next step involved designing an action plan to address them. This included developing a PBL-based lesson plan for Christian Religious Education, creating problem scenarios relevant to students' daily lives, and preparing research instruments such as observation sheets, learning interest questionnaires, and interview guides. The third step involved implementing the planned actions. Teachers introduced problem scenarios for students to solve collaboratively in small groups. The problems presented were engaging and relevant to Christian teachings and real-life situations. Students worked together to discuss and analyze possible solutions, while teachers facilitated and guided the process. The fourth step was observation and data collection. During implementation, data were collected to evaluate the process and outcomes of learning. Observations were made to assess how students engaged with PBL and how their learning interest evolved. Data from observation sheets, questionnaires, and interviews were analyzed to determine changes in student engagement and motivation. If necessary, subsequent cycles were conducted to ensure continuous improvement. The evaluation results were used to identify aspects that needed refinement, and action plans were revised accordingly to achieve optimal outcomes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of implementing the Problem-Based Learning strategy was to enhance students' ability to think critically, analytically, systematically, and logically in addressing problems through empirical exploration while fostering a scientific mindset. In the context of Christian Religious Education, this process also encouraged students to base their reasoning on Christian moral principles rather than mere logical comparison. During implementation, students were grouped and presented with real-life problems related to Christian values. Under the teacher's guidance, students engaged in group discussions, utilized textbooks and other resources, and collaboratively identified solutions. This group-based learning process cultivated peer appreciation, strengthened collaboration, and encouraged active participation, which contributed to the development of critical thinking skills.

Through the PBL model, students gained a clearer and deeper understanding of Christian Religious Education content. Learning became more meaningful as students connected their classroom experiences to real-life contexts. The problems presented mirrored everyday situations, enabling students to apply their knowledge practically in their communities. Furthermore, students presented their group discussion results before the class, while other groups provided feedback and alternative perspectives. This stage trained students to communicate confidently, defend their ideas, and respond constructively to criticism. Teachers acted as facilitators, guiding the learning process to ensure each student remained actively engaged. The findings revealed that implementing the Problem-Based Learning strategy significantly increased the learning interest of Grade 8C students in Christian Religious Education at *SMP Negeri 2 Uluusuua*. Students became more active in class discussions, frequently asked questions, expressed opinions, and collaborated effectively with peers. Their enthusiasm for solving presented problems translated into higher motivation and deeper engagement with the subject matter. Data

analysis also showed an improvement in students' academic performance, as reflected in higher test scores and better task completion after the implementation of PBL. These outcomes indicate a positive correlation between the use of Problem-Based Learning and both student interest and academic achievement. Moreover, PBL helped students develop critical and analytical thinking skills, which directly contributed to improved comprehension and academic quality.

Students' Learning Interest

In this study, SMP Negeri 2 Ulususua served as the research site for investigating efforts to improve students' learning interest through the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy. The Junior High School BOPKRI 3 Yogyakarta, which also emphasizes moral and creative education, envisions becoming a healthy, morally upright, creative, locally rooted, environmentally conscious, and love-driven institution. One of its missions is to cultivate graduates who are moral, creative, accomplished, and knowledgeable in science, technology, and culture. In line with this vision and mission, students are expected to study diligently so that the learning objectives and institutional goals can be effectively achieved. However, observations revealed that many students lacked enthusiasm during learning activities; they often appeared disengaged, complained, and seemed bored. According to the researcher's observations, the lack of learning interest was largely caused by monotonous and unengaging teaching methods. Therefore, teachers must identify and apply strategies to address this issue. This discussion explores the concept of learning interest, the importance of teachers' roles in fostering it, and the application of problem-based learning in Christian Religious Education (CRE).

According to Poerwadarminto (as cited in Riadi, 2020), interest can be defined etymologically as attention, fondness, or a tendency toward something desired. Interest refers to a feeling of liking and attraction toward a particular activity, arising spontaneously without external coercion. Interest greatly influences an individual's activity; with interest, one will willingly engage in certain actions, whereas without it, motivation to act diminishes. Teachers can cultivate students' learning interest through several means: (a) identifying students' needs so they willingly learn without compulsion, (b) connecting lesson content with students' life experiences, (c) creating a stimulating and conducive learning environment, and (d) employing diverse teaching methods that account for individual learning differences. Learning is a conscious and deliberate activity undertaken by individuals, involving mental processes that lead to changes in understanding or behavior. Effective learning occurs when both physical and mental engagement are high. Therefore, learning interest can be defined as the motivational state that drives students to engage in learning activities. Students with high learning interest tend to study enthusiastically and are more likely to achieve learning objectives. The teacher plays a crucial role in improving the learning quality of students, particularly in Christian Religious Education. CRE aims not only to impart theological knowledge but also to nurture students as children of God who live in Christian fellowship, follow Christ's calling in the world, and remain steadfast in hope. Thomas H. Groome describes Christian Religious Education as "an activity of believers in time, intentionally attending to God's activity in the present, within the story of the Christian faith community, and in light of God's Kingdom vision." CRE lessons guide students to deepen their faith actively and apply it in their daily lives. Teaching CRE involves developing spiritual insight, moral awareness,

and practical wisdom. Hence, teachers must pay close attention to students' engagement during lessons and identify those who display low learning interest. Through appropriate stimulation and encouragement, teachers can inspire students to participate actively, thereby increasing their motivation and engagement.

A CRE teacher must also relate classroom content to real-life experiences through contextual learning. This approach helps connect abstract biblical principles to students' lived realities, making faith-based learning relevant and transformative. Teachers should adjust their teaching styles to suit students' learning preferences and create meaningful links between knowledge and real-world application. In doing so, CRE not only fulfills curriculum requirements but also fosters students' spiritual growth and lifelong discipleship.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Strategy

In this study, the researcher applied the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy to enhance students' interest in Christian Religious Education. PBL utilizes multiple intelligences to confront real-world challenges, promoting higher-order thinking and adaptability. According to Rusman (2011), PBL is grounded in constructivist learning theory, characterized by: (1) knowledge acquisition through interaction with problem scenarios and learning environments; (2) cognitive dissonance that stimulates critical inquiry; and (3) the development of knowledge through social collaboration, discussion, and reflection. The PBL process typically involves three phases:

1. Group activities, such as analyzing cases, identifying key issues, formulating problems, generating hypotheses, identifying resources, discussing findings, and presenting results;
2. Individual activities, including independent research, reading multiple sources, and reporting discoveries;
3. Classroom activities, where students present and discuss their findings under the teacher's guidance.

Through these activities, students learn to think critically, collaborate effectively, and connect their classroom learning with real-life situations. In CRE, PBL encourages students to explore biblical truths analytically, fostering problem-solving and critical reasoning based on Christian values. This approach nurtures independent learning and self-confidence, as students construct their own understanding through guided inquiry.

CONCLUSION

Efforts to enhance the learning interest of Grade 8C students in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMP Negeri 2 Ulususua through the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) yielded positive and significant results. The application of PBL increased students' active participation during class activities; they became more engaged in discussions, asked questions, and collaborated to solve problems. Students also demonstrated higher enthusiasm and motivation, particularly when presented with relevant and challenging issues.

Their test scores and assignment performance improved notably after implementing PBL, reflecting a deeper understanding of CRE content. Moreover, PBL helped students develop critical and analytical thinking skills, which positively influenced their academic

performance. In addition to academic benefits, PBL strengthened students' collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills—essential competencies for future success. Through group-based learning, students learned to cooperate, express opinions, and find solutions collectively, creating a dynamic and supportive classroom atmosphere. Overall, the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning strategy in Christian Religious Education proved to be effective in enhancing students' learning interest. This success highlights the importance of adopting innovative and relevant teaching methods that not only improve academic outcomes but also promote holistic Christian education. Therefore, it is recommended that PBL be further developed and implemented across other subjects to achieve optimal and comprehensive educational outcomes.

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