



The Utilization of Communication Skills in the Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers to Enhance Students' Learning Interest at SD Negeri 156487 Siramiramian

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the utilization of communication skills within the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and their impact on students' learning interest at SD Negeri 156487 Siramiramian. Effective communication constitutes a fundamental component of pedagogical competence that significantly influences student engagement and academic motivation. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this research involved two CRE teachers and 45 students from grades 4-6 through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The findings reveal that CRE teachers demonstrate varied proficiency in employing verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including questioning techniques, active listening, and empathetic responses. The study identifies three primary communication patterns: instructional communication, motivational communication, and affective communication, which collectively contribute to enhanced student participation and learning enthusiasm. Results indicate a positive correlation between teachers' communication skills and students' learning interest, with students reporting increased engagement when teachers utilize age-appropriate language, interactive methods, and responsive feedback. However, challenges persist in adapting communication styles to diverse learning needs and maintaining consistent student attention. This research contributes to understanding the critical role of communication competence in religious education pedagogy and provides practical implications for teacher professional development programs.

Keywords: Communication skills, pedagogical competence, Christian Religious Education, learning interest

INTRODUCTION

The quality of education fundamentally depends on the competence of teachers in delivering instruction and fostering meaningful learning experiences. Among the four essential competencies mandated for Indonesian teachers-pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies-pedagogical competence serves as the cornerstone

of effective teaching practice. Within this framework, communication skills emerge as a critical dimension that bridges teachers' knowledge and students' comprehension, particularly in value-oriented subjects such as Christian Religious Education (CRE). Christian Religious Education in Indonesian elementary schools plays a vital role in character development and moral formation alongside academic achievement. The subject requires teachers to convey abstract spiritual concepts, ethical principles, and religious values in ways that resonate with young learners' cognitive and emotional development. This pedagogical challenge necessitates sophisticated communication skills that extend beyond mere information transmission to encompass motivation, inspiration, and relational connection. Student learning interest represents a crucial psychological factor that determines educational outcomes. Learning interest manifests through students' attention, emotional engagement, and willingness to participate actively in learning activities. Research consistently demonstrates that student interest significantly influences academic achievement, retention of material, and long-term educational motivation. In religious education contexts, where content often addresses existential questions and moral reasoning, sustaining student interest becomes particularly challenging yet essential. Despite the recognized importance of teacher communication in educational effectiveness, limited empirical research has specifically examined how CRE teachers in Indonesian elementary schools utilize communication skills to enhance student learning interest. Previous studies have predominantly focused on general pedagogical practices or secondary education contexts, leaving a knowledge gap regarding communication strategies in primary-level religious education.

SD Negeri 156487 Siramiraman, located in North Sumatra, provides a relevant context for investigating this phenomenon. As a public elementary school serving a diverse student population, the institution faces typical challenges in maintaining student engagement in religious education classes. Preliminary observations suggested variations in student participation levels across different CRE learning sessions, indicating potential relationships between teacher communication approaches and student interest. This study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do CRE teachers at SD Negeri 156487 Siramiraman utilize communication skills in their pedagogical practice? (2) What communication patterns are most effective in enhancing students' learning interest? (3) What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing effective communication strategies? The research aims to provide empirical evidence regarding the relationship between teacher communication competence and student learning interest in CRE contexts, thereby contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical improvement of religious education pedagogy in Indonesian elementary schools.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore and describe the utilization of communication skills by CRE teachers and their impact on student learning interest. The qualitative approach was selected to capture the nuanced, context-specific nature of classroom communication and to understand participants' lived experiences and perspectives. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 156487 Siramiraman, North Sumatra, Indonesia, during the academic year 2024-2025. The school serves approximately 180 students across six grade levels. The study focused on upper

elementary grades (4-6) where students demonstrate greater capacity for reflective engagement with religious education content. Participants included two certified CRE teachers (Teacher A with 8 years of experience and Teacher B with 5 years of experience) and 45 students (15 from grade 4, 15 from grade 5, and 15 from grade 6) selected through purposive sampling. Both teachers held bachelor's degrees in Christian Religious Education and possessed the required professional certifications. Data analysis followed an iterative thematic analysis process. Observation notes and interview transcripts were coded using open coding to identify initial categories, followed by axial coding to establish relationships among categories. Themes emerged through constant comparative analysis, examining patterns and variations across different data sources. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively to provide quantitative support for qualitative findings. Member checking with teacher participants ensured credibility, while peer debriefing with educational researchers enhanced trustworthiness. Ethical approval was obtained from the school administration and the local education office. Written informed consent was secured from teachers, while parental consent and student assent were obtained for minor participants. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews revealed that CRE teachers at SD Negeri 156487 Siramiraman employed diverse communication strategies within their pedagogical practice, though with varying levels of proficiency and consistency. Both teachers demonstrated competence in using age-appropriate language and religious terminology. Teacher A frequently employed analogies and real-life examples to explain abstract biblical concepts, such as comparing faith to planting seeds when teaching the Parable of the Sower. Teacher B showed strength in storytelling techniques, using narrative structure and voice modulation to maintain attention during Bible story presentations. Questioning emerged as a critical verbal strategy, with both teachers utilizing a mix of closed-ended recall questions and open-ended reflective questions. However, wait-time after posing questions varied considerably, with Teacher A typically allowing 3-5 seconds for student thinking, while Teacher B often proceeded to provide answers after only 1-2 seconds. Feedback quality also differed, with Teacher A providing specific, elaborative feedback ("Your answer shows good understanding of compassion; can you think of how we practice that in school?"), whereas Teacher B more frequently used generic affirmations ("Good," "Correct"). Observational data indicated substantial use of non-verbal communication to support instruction. Teacher A demonstrated conscious use of gestures to emphasize key points, moved strategically around the classroom to maintain proximity with different student groups, and maintained consistent eye contact while addressing the class. Facial expressions conveyed warmth and approval, particularly when students shared personal reflections. Teacher B relied more heavily on frontal positioning but effectively used visual aids and body language to illustrate biblical narratives. Both teachers smiled frequently and nodded encouragingly during student contributions, creating an affirming classroom atmosphere. Both teachers incorporated interactive elements, though implementation varied. Teacher A regularly organized small-group discussions where students explored moral dilemmas from Christian perspectives,

circulating among groups to facilitate conversations. Teacher B preferred whole-class discussions and question-answer sequences. Role-play activities appeared in both classrooms but with different frequencies—Teacher A integrated them bi-weekly, while Teacher B used them monthly. Student presentations of personal reflections occurred in both settings, providing platforms for learner-initiated communication.

Identified Communication Patterns and Their Effects

Instructional Communication focused on knowledge transmission and concept clarification. This pattern characterized the beginning phases of lessons when teachers introduced new material. Clear explanations, structured presentation, and systematic vocabulary development defined this pattern. Students exhibited attentiveness during well-structured instructional communication, but sustained interest required transition to other patterns. The pattern proved most effective when teachers connected religious concepts to students' prior knowledge and daily experiences. Motivational Communication aimed to inspire interest and encourage participation. This pattern included enthusiastic delivery, inspirational language, personal testimony sharing, and explicit expressions of confidence in students' abilities. Teacher A frequently employed motivational communication when introducing challenging topics or encouraging reluctant participants: "I know this story might seem difficult, but you all have wonderful ideas to share about how Joseph showed forgiveness." Students responded with increased willingness to attempt answers and greater participation in discussions. Questionnaire results indicated that 78% of students felt more interested in CRE when teachers expressed enthusiasm and 82% appreciated when teachers shared personal faith experiences. Affective Communication emphasized emotional connection and empathetic understanding. This pattern emerged particularly when students shared personal struggles, questions about faith, or moral uncertainties. Teachers demonstrated active listening, validated student emotions, and responded with compassionate guidance. Teacher A's response to a student questioning why bad things happen to good people exemplified affective communication: "That's a really important and honest question, and many people wonder about this throughout their lives. Let's think about it together." Students exhibited deeper engagement and more authentic participation when teachers utilized affective communication, with 87% of questionnaire respondents indicating they felt comfortable sharing thoughts and questions in such environments.

Student Learning Interest Indicators

Multiple data sources confirmed variations in student learning interest levels correlated with teachers' communication approaches. Observational data recorded attention indicators every five minutes during lessons. Lessons featuring varied communication strategies maintained average attention rates of 81-89%, whereas lessons dominated by single communication patterns (particularly prolonged instructional communication) showed declining attention, dropping to 58-65% by the lesson's final segment. Students reported that teachers' use of stories, questions directed to them personally, and opportunities to share opinions most effectively sustained their attention. Student interviews revealed that emotional connection to CRE content intensified when teachers communicated authentically and vulnerably. One grade 5 student stated, "When Teacher shares her own stories about believing in God, it makes me think about my own faith

more." Questionnaire data indicated 73% of students felt emotionally engaged with CRE content, with higher engagement reported in Teacher A's classes (81%) compared to Teacher B's classes (65%), correlating with observed differences in affective communication utilization. Participation rates varied significantly across different activity types and communication contexts. Small-group discussions facilitated by dialogic communication generated 92% participation rates, while whole-class questioning without adequate wait-time or encouraging feedback resulted in 34-48% participation, with the same 8-12 students dominating responses. Students expressed greater willingness to participate when they perceived the communication environment as non-judgmental and supportive. One grade 6 student explained, "I like to answer in CRE class because even if my answer isn't exactly right, Teacher listens and helps me understand better, not just says I'm wrong."

Relationship Between Communication Skills and Learning Interest

Triangulation of observational, interview, and questionnaire data revealed strong patterns suggesting positive relationships between teacher communication skills and student learning interest. Students taught by teachers demonstrating comprehensive communication competencies—integrating verbal and non-verbal strategies, employing varied communication patterns, and adapting approaches to context—exhibited consistently higher learning interest indicators across attention, emotional engagement, and participation dimensions. Conversely, lessons characterized by limited communication strategies, minimal interaction, or inadequate responsiveness to student contributions correlated with diminished interest indicators. Notably, no single communication skill operated in isolation. Rather, effective communication emerged as a synergistic combination of multiple competencies applied flexibly according to pedagogical objectives, content characteristics, and student needs. The most engaged learning moments occurred when teachers seamlessly integrated clear instruction with motivational encouragement and genuine emotional connection, creating what students described as "feeling like Teacher really cares about us understanding and growing."

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted role of communication skills in Christian Religious Education pedagogy and their significant influence on elementary students' learning interest. The results demonstrate that communication competence extends far beyond linguistic proficiency to encompass strategic, interpersonal, and affective dimensions essential for effective religious education. The identification of three distinct communication patterns—instructional, motivational, and affective—provides a useful framework for understanding how CRE teachers can intentionally structure communication to achieve diverse pedagogical objectives. This framework aligns with educational communication theory, which posits that effective teaching requires flexible adaptation of communication styles to match learning objectives and student characteristics. The patterns observed in this study particularly resonate with the transactional model of communication, where meaning is co-constructed through reciprocal exchange rather than unidirectionally transmitted. In the context of religious education, where the goal encompasses not merely knowledge acquisition but also value formation and spiritual development, transactional communication becomes especially critical.

The study's findings regarding student learning interest substantiate considerable existing research linking teacher communication quality to student motivation and engagement. The particularly strong impact of affective communication on student engagement merits attention, as it suggests that religious education's effectiveness depends substantially on the relational dimensions of teaching. This finding supports pedagogical approaches emphasizing care, empathy, and authentic teacher-student relationships as foundations for meaningful learning. In religious education specifically, where content addresses existential questions, moral formation, and personal faith development, students' willingness to engage vulnerably with material appears contingent on perceiving the teacher as a trustworthy, empathetic guide rather than merely an information source. The variations observed between the two teachers in this study highlight the personalized nature of communication competence development. While both teachers demonstrated foundational communication abilities, differences in specific strategies-particularly regarding wait-time, feedback specificity, and affective responsiveness-correlated with observable differences in student engagement. This finding underscores the importance of targeted professional development that moves beyond generic communication training to address specific skill refinement through observation, feedback, and reflective practice. The challenges identified by teachers, particularly regarding adaptation to diverse learning needs and time constraints, reflect systemic issues in Indonesian elementary education. The tension between comprehensive curriculum coverage and deep, dialogic exploration of meaningful questions represents a persistent pedagogical dilemma. In religious education, this tension becomes particularly acute, as authentic engagement with faith and values arguably requires the very time and space for reflection that standardized curricula may constrain. The study's findings also raise important questions about teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. The fact that both teachers reported minimal training specifically addressing communication skills in religious education contexts suggests a potential gap in teacher education programs. While general pedagogical training typically addresses classroom communication, the specialized communication demands of religious education-including discussing sensitive spiritual matters, navigating diverse beliefs within classrooms, and addressing existential questions-may require dedicated preparation. Limitations of this study include its small sample size and single-site focus, which restrict generalizability. The relatively short observation period may not capture seasonal variations in teaching approaches or student interest levels. The presence of researchers during observations may have influenced both teacher and student behavior, potentially affecting the authenticity of observed interactions. Future research could address these limitations through longitudinal, multi-site investigations employing diverse methodological approaches. The study contributes valuable empirical evidence regarding communication competence in religious education pedagogy. It demonstrates that effective communication constitutes not a single skill but rather an integrated repertoire of verbal, non-verbal, and interpersonal competencies strategically deployed to foster student learning interest. For elementary CRE teachers, developing this communication repertoire represents an ongoing professional commitment essential to pedagogical effectiveness. The research also contributes to broader understanding of pedagogical competence by highlighting communication as a dynamic, context-responsive practice rather than a static set of techniques. This conceptualization suggests that teacher professional development

should prioritize reflective practice and adaptive expertise over prescriptive skill acquisition. Teachers benefit not from communication scripts to follow uniformly but from developing sophisticated situational awareness that enables them to select and implement appropriate communication strategies based on moment-to-moment assessment of student needs and learning dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the utilization of communication skills within the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers and their impact on student learning interest at SD Negeri 156487 Siramiraman. The research revealed that CRE teachers employ diverse communication strategies encompassing verbal and non-verbal dimensions, organized into three primary patterns: instructional, motivational, and affective communication. Each pattern serves distinct pedagogical purposes and differentially influences student engagement. The findings demonstrate a positive relationship between teacher communication competence and student learning interest, as manifested through attention levels, emotional engagement, and participation willingness. Students exhibited heightened interest when teachers utilized varied communication approaches, provided specific feedback, demonstrated empathy, and created interactive learning environments. Conversely, limited communication repertoires and insufficient responsiveness to student contributions correlated with diminished learning interest. Challenges identified include adapting communication to diverse learning needs, managing time constraints, addressing linguistic and cultural diversity, and assessing communication effectiveness. These challenges reflect both individual teacher development needs and systemic educational constraints requiring institutional attention. The study's practical implications suggest that enhancing CRE teaching quality requires focused investment in developing teachers' communication competence through targeted professional development, reflective practice opportunities, and peer collaboration. Teacher education programs should incorporate specific training addressing communication skills in religious education contexts, including techniques for facilitating sensitive discussions, responding to existential questions, and creating emotionally safe learning environments. For school administrators, the findings indicate that supporting teachers' communication skill development—through mentoring, observation and feedback systems, and dedicated professional learning time—represents a valuable investment in educational quality. Additionally, curriculum design should balance content coverage with sufficient time for dialogic teaching approaches that foster deep engagement with religious education material. Future research should expand investigation to multiple schools and regions to establish broader patterns, employ longitudinal designs to track communication skill development and long-term impacts on student outcomes, and examine specific professional development interventions for enhancing communication competence. Additionally, exploring student voice more extensively through participatory research approaches could provide richer understanding of how learners experience and respond to different communication strategies. Ultimately, this research affirms that communication skills constitute an essential, though often underemphasized, dimension of pedagogical competence in religious education. By recognizing and intentionally developing these skills, CRE teachers

can significantly enhance their effectiveness in fostering not only student learning interest but also deeper engagement with the transformative potential of religious education.

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