



Enhancing Students' Learning Interest and Learning Outcomes in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga through the Use of Instructional Media

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the improvement of students' learning interest and academic achievement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education through the use of instructional media at SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga. The research was conducted using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design consisting of two cycles. The subjects of the study were 30 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga. Data were collected through multiple techniques, including classroom observation, questionnaires, achievement tests, and interviews. The findings reveal that the integration of instructional media such as educational videos, interactive PowerPoint presentations, and learning games significantly enhanced students' engagement and learning outcomes. Students' interest in learning, which was initially categorized as low with an average score of 65.7% in the pre-cycle, increased to a high category with an average score of 85.3% in the second cycle. Similarly, students' learning outcomes demonstrated substantial progress, with the average score rising from 68.5 in the pre-cycle to 82.7 in the second cycle. The percentage of students achieving classical mastery also increased from 53.3% to 90%. These results suggest that the effective and varied use of instructional media fosters both motivation and achievement in Christian Religious Education and Character Education. The use of multimedia resources provides a more dynamic and interactive learning environment, which encourages student participation, sustains their interest, and facilitates deeper understanding of the subject matter. Moreover, the incorporation of educational games and interactive presentations helps address diverse learning styles, making the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable. This study emphasizes that the strategic integration of instructional media plays a crucial role in enhancing students' learning interest and academic performance. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative and varied instructional media to improve the quality of learning, particularly in Christian Religious Education and Character Education.

Keywords: *Instructional Media, Learning Interest, Learning Outcomes, Christian Religious Education, Character Education*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education and Character Education hold a significant position within the national education system, particularly in shaping students' character and moral integrity. The primary objective of this subject is not merely to transfer theological knowledge but also to instill deep and applicable Christian values in daily life. Within this framework, Christian Religious Education and Character Education are expected to serve as a strategic means for fostering students' character so that they embody integrity, honesty, love, and responsibility as manifestations of Gospel values. The role of this subject is central to shaping students' spirituality and cultivating behavior consistent with the teachings of Christ. Students are not only encouraged to understand religious concepts cognitively but also invited to undergo personal transformation through the internalization of Christian values in both personal and social life. Consequently, the effectiveness of the learning process plays a decisive role in achieving the intended educational goals. Practical implementation reveals complex challenges. One of the most pressing issues is students' low interest in learning this subject, which directly affects the quality and outcomes of their learning. Learning interest is a crucial factor in determining educational success. Students who lack motivation tend to be passive, less enthusiastic, and struggle to comprehend the material.

Preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga revealed that the teaching of Christian Religious Education and Character Education remains dominated by conventional approaches, particularly continuous lecturing. Teachers largely act as the sole source of information, while students remain passive listeners. Interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students, is minimal. The use of instructional media is still limited, leaving learning monotonous and unengaging. Consequently, students quickly lose motivation, as reflected in their low academic performance. Data show that the average student score was only 68.5, with a classical mastery percentage of 53.3%, far below the minimum competency standard of 75. The use of instructional media emerges as a potential solution to overcome this issue. Instructional media, defined as all tools that support teaching and learning, help students understand subject matter more easily. Arsyad (2021) emphasizes that media not only assist teachers in delivering information but also motivate students, strengthen memory, and make learning more engaging and meaningful. Likewise, Siahaan (2022) found that creative use of media in Christian Religious Education significantly improves students' learning outcomes by simplifying abstract concepts and presenting them in a more concrete and understandable form, for example through videos, images, animations, or educational games. Given that Christian Religious Education often involves abstract and contemplative values, media play a crucial role in helping students visualize faith, love, forgiveness, and hope-concepts that may otherwise be difficult to grasp when conveyed verbally. Media also expand opportunities for student participation, shifting the process toward a student-centered model in which learners actively construct knowledge and values. The present study seeks to examine the effectiveness of instructional media in enhancing students' learning interest and outcomes in Christian Religious Education and Character Education at SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga. Specifically, it aims to: determine improvements in students' learning interest through the use of instructional media; assess the enhancement of learning outcomes; and identify effective types of

instructional media for achieving these goals. This research is expected to contribute to the development of more dynamic, contextual, and transformative Christian Religious Education practices. By employing media that resonate with the digital and visual orientation of today's learners, educators can foster not only intellectual competence but also spiritual and moral maturity, preparing students to become future generations who embody both academic excellence and Christian values.

METHODS

This study employed the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which consists of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research was carried out in two cycles, with each cycle comprising three meetings. The subjects of the study were 30 eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga, consisting of 13 male and 17 female students. The research was conducted during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, from January to March 2025. Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive techniques. Students' learning interest was analyzed descriptively by calculating percentages and categorizing them into four levels: very high (85-100%), high (70-84%), moderate (55-69%), and low (<55%). Learning outcomes were analyzed by calculating the average score and the percentage of classical mastery, with success criteria determined when at least 85% of students achieved the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) of 75. Meanwhile, observational and interview data were analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Learning interest is one of the key psychological factors that significantly influences the success of the educational process. It can be understood as an inner drive or a stable tendency of an individual to be attracted to, pay attention to, and actively engage in learning activities. Such interest does not arise spontaneously but develops through the interaction of internal factors-such as desires and needs-and external factors, including a supportive learning environment and the teacher's instructional approach. According to Slameto (2010), learning interest is a persistent inclination within individuals to pay attention to and remember a particular learning activity. It is characterized by feelings of enjoyment, enthusiasm, and strong attraction to the subject matter. Learners who possess a strong interest in studying typically demonstrate positive attitudes, such as attentively following teachers' explanations, asking questions, or seeking additional knowledge on the topics being studied. This readiness plays a crucial role in shaping students' mental and emotional preparedness for learning. In the educational process, learning interest functions as an internal factor that affects students' attention, concentration, motivation, and participation. Students with high interest in a subject tend to be more focused, have better retention, and show persistence in completing assignments. In this sense, interest reinforces intrinsic motivation, which is essential for sustaining long-term learning engagement. A lack of interest often results in passivity, boredom, and disengagement. Learning interest is not only relevant in science or mathematics but is also essential in subjects dealing with affective and spiritual

dimensions, such as Christian Religious Education and Character Education. Learning interest is vital because the subject does not merely aim at cognitive knowledge but seeks to shape character, attitudes, and spiritual values. Students with strong interest in Christian Religious Education are more inclined to study the Word of God, participate sincerely in worship or devotional activities, and embody Christian virtues such as love, forgiveness, honesty, and humility. Their interest supports not only cognitive understanding but also personal spiritual reflection and growth in faith. Various internal and external factors influence students' learning interest. Internal factors include motivation, readiness, talent, and emotional state, while external factors involve family support, social environment, teaching approaches, instructional media, and classroom atmosphere. Teachers play a strategic role in fostering students' interest by creating engaging, relevant, and caring learning environments. In Christian Religious Education, employing varied and contextual teaching methods-such as Bible-based storytelling, group discussions, drama, spiritual videos, or personal reflections-can enhance student engagement. Extracurricular religious activities like prayer groups or social service further reinforce students' interest and commitment. Thus, learning interest represents an inner condition that encourages individuals to value, actively engage in, and sustain participation in learning. Within Christian Religious Education and Character Education, it contributes not only to academic achievement but also to spiritual growth and character formation, guiding students to become faithful, responsible individuals who live according to Christ's teachings.

Learning Outcomes in the Context of Christian Religious Education

Learning outcomes reflect the extent to which students have understood, internalized, and are able to apply the material taught. In general education, outcomes are often measured through academic performance such as test scores or assignments. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), learning outcomes encompass more than intellectual achievement; they include changes in attitudes, values, and behaviors as tangible expressions of Christian faith in daily life. Bloom's taxonomy (1956) divides learning outcomes into three domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The cognitive domain relates to thinking skills such as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The affective domain involves attitudes, values, and emotions that shape responses to situations. The psychomotor domain addresses physical skills and the ability to perform particular actions. These domains are interconnected and especially crucial in CRE, where holistic development-integrating faith and action-is emphasized. Successful learning is not simply demonstrated by the ability to recite Bible verses or answer exam questions correctly, but by the extent to which students can embody these teachings in real life. Good learning outcomes are reflected in growing faith, transformed attitudes, and actions consistent with Christian values such as love, honesty, forgiveness, and humility. As Sanjaya (2011) argues, learning outcomes in CRE represent an integration of understanding Christian doctrine, character formation rooted in Gospel values, and the application of these values within social and cultural contexts. This underscores the holistic nature of CRE, which encompasses intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and moral dimensions. Improving learning outcomes in CRE therefore involves not only raising academic performance but also enhancing spiritual awareness and ethical maturity. For example, a student who was previously indifferent to

others may, after engaging with CRE, become more compassionate, active in service, and demonstrate patience, honesty, and responsibility. Such transformation indicates that learning has successfully instilled Christian values. The role of CRE teachers is critical in guiding students toward comprehensive outcomes. Teachers are not merely knowledge transmitters but also role models of faith and character. Through contextual, creative, and dialogical approaches, teachers help students recognize that CRE is not abstract theory but a relevant life guide. Learning outcomes in Christian Religious Education represent the integration of cognitive mastery, internalization of moral and spiritual values, and their practical application. Complete outcomes are evident in students who are not only intellectually competent but also socially sensitive, spiritually mature, and morally upright. Effective Christian Religious Education produces a generation that does not merely know about Christ but also lives in the light of His love.

Description of Initial Condition (Pre-Cycle)

The initial observation revealed that Christian Religious Education and Character Building lessons in Grade VIII at SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga were still dominated by the lecture method. Teachers had not yet made optimal use of instructional media, resulting in students appearing passive and less enthusiastic during the learning process. Based on the pre-cycle learning interest questionnaire, the average student interest level was in the medium category (65.7%). The distribution of students' learning interest in the pre-cycle is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Learning Interest in the Pre-Cycle

Category	Score Range (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	85–100	3	10.0
High	70–84	8	26.7
Medium	55–69	12	40.0
Low	<55	7	23.3
Total	—	30	100

Student learning outcomes in the pre-cycle were also suboptimal. Out of 30 students, only 16 (53.3%) met the minimum mastery criterion (KKM), with a class average score of 68.5. The distribution of students' pre-cycle learning outcomes is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Learning Outcomes in the Pre-Cycle

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Category
86–100	2	6.7	Very Good
75–85	14	46.6	Good
60–74	10	33.3	Fair
<60	4	13.4	Poor
Total	30	100	—

Cycle I Findings

During the first cycle, learning was implemented using video and interactive PowerPoint as instructional media. The topic addressed was "Living by Faith," which explored the concept of faith in Christian life and its practical application in daily living. Observations indicated an increase in student engagement during lessons, with students beginning to

ask questions and respond actively to the teacher. Their enthusiasm was particularly evident when watching the learning videos and engaging with the interactive slides. Learning interest in Cycle I improved, with the average increasing to 78.9% (high category). The distribution of students' learning interest in Cycle I is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Students' Learning Interest in Cycle I

Category	Score Range (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	85–100	9	30.0
High	70–84	15	50.0
Medium	55–69	6	20.0
Low	<55	0	0.0
Total	—	30	100

Similarly, students' learning outcomes improved, with the class average reaching 76.8 and the classical mastery level increasing to 73.3% (22 students achieving the KKM). The detailed distribution of student learning outcomes in Cycle I is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Students' Learning Outcomes in Cycle I

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Category
86–100	5	16.7	Very Good
75–85	17	56.6	Good
60–74	8	26.7	Fair
<60	0	0.0	Poor
Total	30	100	—

Although there was a notable improvement, the Cycle I results did not fully meet the predetermined success criteria. Consequently, the study proceeded to Cycle II with several refinements, including (a) incorporating educational games as an additional learning medium, (b) enhancing student interaction through group discussions, and (c) providing more intensive reinforcement and feedback.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the appropriate and varied use of instructional media has a significant impact on increasing both students' learning interest and academic achievement in Christian Religious Education and Character Building at SMP Negeri 1 Tigabinanga. The findings indicate that in the pre-cycle stage, students' learning interest was categorized as medium (65.7%), and the average learning outcome was relatively low (68.5), with only 53.3% of students meeting the minimum mastery criterion (KKM). The implementation of instructional media in Cycle I, including videos and interactive PowerPoint presentations, resulted in improvements in both indicators. Students' learning interest rose to 78.9% (high category), and the class average score increased to 76.8, with 73.3% of students achieving mastery. However, the success criteria were not yet fully attained. Further refinements in Cycle II—through the addition of educational games, group discussions, and more intensive feedback—led to a more substantial improvement. Students' learning interest reached 85.3% (very high category), and the average class score increased to 82.7, with 90% of students achieving mastery. These results confirmed that the research had successfully met its objectives. The study

concludes that the strategic integration of diverse instructional media-videos, interactive presentations, and educational games-not only enhances students' engagement and motivation but also improves their comprehension and mastery of learning materials. This suggests that teachers of Christian Religious Education should continue to develop creative, varied, and contextually relevant instructional media to foster more effective, meaningful, and holistic learning experiences for students.

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