



The Impact of Behaviorist Theory on Developing Learning Habits in Christian Religious Education: A Case Study at SD Negeri 095165 Banua Saribu

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of applying behaviorist theory on the development of students' learning habits in Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SD Negeri 095165 Banua Saribu. Learning habits are a crucial aspect in supporting the effectiveness of education, particularly in religious instruction, which focuses on character formation and students' spiritual growth. Behaviorist theory, emphasizing the stimulus–response relationship through reinforcement processes, is believed to instill consistent learning behaviors. The research employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method, involving fourth- and fifth-grade students. The experimental group received instruction based on behaviorist principles—including positive reinforcement, content repetition, and structured practice—while the control group participated in conventional learning. The results indicate a significant improvement in the learning habit indicators of the experimental group compared to the control group. The application of behaviorist strategies proved effective in enhancing intrinsic motivation and active student engagement in PAK learning. These findings affirm the relevance of behaviorist theory in elementary education, particularly in fostering structured, disciplined, and sustainable learning habits. The study's implications highlight the importance of teachers' roles in managing instruction through appropriate educational psychology approaches to create a conducive learning environment and continuously encourage positive learning behaviors.

Keywords: Behaviorism Theory, Learning Habits, Christian Religious Education, Positive Reinforcement, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in elementary schools plays a strategic role in shaping the character and spiritual foundation of students from an early age. This form of

education is not merely intended to transfer theological knowledge but also to instill moral values, ethics, and attitudes that reflect Christian teachings in everyday life. Therefore, the success of CRE learning is largely determined by the teacher's ability to design a learning process that is not only informative but also transformative. In this context, students' learning habits serve as an important indicator of instructional effectiveness, as these habits are closely related to students' consistency, discipline, and motivation in engaging with the learning process in a sustainable manner. However, in the practical reality of learning—particularly at SD Negeri 095165 Banua Saribu—several challenges remain concerning the low quality of students' learning habits in CRE. Initial observations reveal that many students lack initiative in completing assignments, fail to participate actively in class discussions, and tend to be passive and inconsistent in bringing necessary learning materials. This situation reflects the absence of well-formed and structured study patterns among most students. Such issues present a considerable challenge for teachers in fostering learning awareness and establishing positive study routines through appropriate pedagogical approaches.

One psychological approach that can be employed to address these challenges is behaviorism theory. This theory is grounded in the view that human behavior, including learning behavior, can be shaped through stimulus–response processes reinforced by either positive or negative reinforcement. Key figures in this theory, such as Ivan Pavlov with his classical conditioning experiments, Edward Thorndike with the law of effect, and B.F. Skinner with the concept of operant conditioning, emphasize that behaviors consistently reinforced are likely to be repeated and become part of an individual's habitual conduct. In an educational context, the principles of behaviorism can be applied through strategies such as the provision of rewards, the implementation of punishments, repetitive drills, and gradual learning (shaping), all aimed at fostering the desired learning behaviors. In CRE instruction, the application of behavioristic approaches can be realized through concrete practices such as rewarding active participation in discussions, providing immediate feedback on completed assignments, and establishing learning routines that encourage regular review of material. Through these strategies, teachers actively guide students' behavior toward positive directions while creating a conducive and motivating learning environment. Structured and consistent reinforcement enables students to develop learning habits that not only support academic achievement but also cultivate responsibility and independence in their learning process.

Grounded in this background, this study aims to identify and analyze the influence of behaviorism theory on the development of students' learning habits in the subject of Christian Religious Education at SD Negeri 095165 Banua Saribu. The study is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of educational psychology–based instructional strategies and to offer practical approaches for CRE teachers seeking to improve the quality of the teaching–learning process, particularly in fostering positive, sustainable learning habits aligned with Christian values.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach aimed at objectively examining the influence of behaviorism theory on the formation of students' learning habits in the subject of Christian Religious Education (CRE). The quantitative approach was selected for its ability to provide measurable insights into the phenomenon under investigation through the collection and analysis of numerical data. The research design adopted was quasi-experimental, specifically the non-equivalent control group design. This model involved two non-randomly assigned groups—an experimental group and a control group—while still allowing for intergroup comparisons to determine the effect of a given treatment. The participants were fourth- and fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 095165 Banua Saribu, with each class comprising 25 students. The fourth-grade class served as the experimental group and received CRE instruction based on behaviorist principles for a period of six weeks. The treatment included the use of positive reinforcement strategies, such as praise and rewards, repetition of material (drill), and structured, incremental practice designed to establish organized learning habits. The control group, consisting of fifth-grade students, followed the regular CRE curriculum without the application of behaviorist-based interventions.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, questionnaires, and documentation. Observation was employed to record students' learning behaviors during the instructional process, questionnaires were used to gather students' perceptions of their own learning habits, and documentation served to collect supporting data such as attendance records, assignment logs, and daily evaluation results. The observed variables encompassed four key aspects of learning habits: frequency of completing assignments, participation in classroom discussions, attendance rate, and consistency in bringing learning materials. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, content validity was established through expert judgment from specialists in education and psychology. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.87, indicating a high level of internal consistency and suitability for research purposes. The collected data were analyzed using an independent sample t-test to determine whether significant differences existed between the experimental and control groups after the treatment. The analysis was carried out with the assistance of appropriate statistical software to ensure accuracy and objectivity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study's findings demonstrate a significant change in students' learning habits following the implementation of behaviorism-based instructional strategies. These results were obtained from an analysis of quantitative data gathered through pre- and post-treatment observations and learning habit questionnaires. The research involved two groups of students: the experimental group (Grade IV), which received a six-week treatment using behaviorist instructional principles, and the control group (Grade V), which continued with regular instruction without targeted intervention. The mean scores of students' learning habits before and after treatment showed a marked contrast. In the

experimental group, the average score increased from 62.40 to 83.60, whereas the control group's average only rose from 60.80 to 68.10. Statistical testing using an independent sample t-test produced a significance value of 0.001, well below the α threshold of 0.05. These results indicate a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of improvements in learning habits, confirming that the application of behaviorism theory in Christian Religious Education (CRE) has a positive impact on the formation of students' learning habits.

More specifically, several observed indicators of learning habits showed substantial improvement in the experimental group. For example, the frequency of completing assignments increased from an average of 58% to 92%, participation in class discussions rose from 61% to 85%, attendance improved from 89% to 97%, and consistency in bringing learning materials increased from 66% to 90%. These gains were not incidental but resulted from the systematic application of behaviorist-based teaching strategies. One of the core principles of behaviorism is reinforcement—both positive and negative. In this study, positive reinforcement served as the primary strategy implemented by the teacher. This included verbal praise, reward stickers, motivational notes in students' books, and bonus points for demonstrating desirable learning behaviors. Such strategies proved effective in increasing students' motivation to participate actively in lessons. Students who were initially passive and undisciplined began to display greater enthusiasm, motivated by the expectation of receiving enjoyable reinforcement.

The principle of repetition (drill) also played a significant role. In CRE lessons, repetition was not only used for cognitive mastery but also to develop learning routines. Previously taught material was revisited through practice exercises, group discussions, and collective reflection. This approach enabled students to build automatic learning skills, fostering confidence and independence in approaching academic tasks. As noted by Skinner (1974), consistent repetition strengthens the stimulus–response relationship, ultimately forming desired habits or behaviors. In practice, the teacher played a central role in ensuring consistent application of behaviorist principles. Beyond functioning as a facilitator, the teacher acted as a reinforcement agent, closely monitoring students' behavior. Reinforcement was provided immediately after the expected behavior occurred, making the link between action and consequence clear and internalized by students. Regular feedback was also given to strengthen learning and correct mistakes through positive, constructive methods. This aligns with Skinner's concept of operant conditioning, which posits that consistently reinforced behaviors are more likely to be repeated, while those not reinforced—or given negative consequences—will diminish in frequency.

In contrast, the control group's results showed that a conventional teaching approach, without systematic reinforcement and repetition, was less effective in developing students' learning habits. Although the control group exhibited a slight increase in mean scores, the change was not statistically significant. This suggests that instruction focused solely on content delivery, without attention to psychological aspects of learning, is insufficient to foster meaningful behavioral change. Without habit-forming strategies, it is difficult to establish consistent and positive learning patterns. These findings align with prior studies emphasizing the effectiveness of behaviorist approaches in shaping

students' learning behaviors. Slavin (2009) reported that positive reinforcement can enhance student engagement and strengthen productive academic behaviors. Similarly, Woolfolk (2016) affirmed that behaviorist strategies at the elementary level can foster learning discipline through structured habit formation. Within the context of CRE, this becomes even more relevant, as the subject emphasizes not only cognitive outcomes but also affective and spiritual development. Thus, building strong learning habits in CRE impacts both academic achievement and the holistic formation of students' character.

The application of behaviorism also contributed to creating a more conducive and structured classroom environment. Students became more motivated to follow class rules, value the learning process, and build positive relationships with teachers and peers. The moral and disciplinary values embedded in the CRE curriculum were more effectively internalized through a habit- and reinforcement-oriented approach. This demonstrates that behaviorism influences not only cognitive outcomes but also the social and emotional dimensions of student development through enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. Nevertheless, implementing behaviorism in CRE also presents certain limitations. One potential issue is the risk of students developing dependency on external reinforcement. When accustomed to rewards, students may lose motivation once reinforcement is withdrawn. Teachers must therefore gradually shift from external reinforcement to internalization of values, a process known as fading. This involves reducing the frequency and intensity of external reinforcement while sustaining student engagement and motivation through reflective and dialogic approaches. In this way, students learn not only because of rewards but also due to an intrinsic awareness of their responsibilities and commitment to learning.

The implications of these findings are significant for the development of CRE instructional models in elementary schools. As the primary agents of instruction, teachers must have a solid understanding of educational psychology—particularly behaviorism theory—in order to design effective strategies tailored to learners' characteristics. While behaviorism should be adapted to the specific needs of students, it may also be combined with humanistic or constructivist approaches to create a holistic, student-centered learning experience. This study reinforces the argument that behaviorism theory remains relevant and applicable in CRE instruction at the elementary level. Although long established in educational discourse, its fundamental principles continue to offer high utility, particularly in fostering consistent and directed learning behaviors. Within the character-building focus of CRE, behaviorism provides a strategic foundation for instilling discipline, responsibility, and commitment to learning through positive and sustained habit formation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the application of behaviorist theory in Christian Religious Education (PAK) instruction has a significant influence on the development of students' study habits at SD Negeri 095165 Banua Saribu. The behaviorist approach, which emphasizes the principles of stimulus–response and reinforcement, has been shown to improve the quality of students' learning behavior—both in terms of

consistency in completing assignments, active participation in class discussions, discipline in attendance and preparedness, as well as motivation to engage fully in the learning process. These findings affirm that instruction designed on the basis of behaviorist principles is not only effective in promoting cognitive learning outcomes but is also highly relevant in shaping positive and structured learning habits. The use of positive reinforcement—such as verbal praise, symbolic rewards, and incentives in the form of additional points—proved effective in increasing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among students in participating in PAK lessons. Furthermore, the systematic repetition of learning materials contributed to the establishment of study routines, resulting in the long-term reinforcement of desired learning behaviors. Thus, students' study habits were not formed instantly, but rather through continuous and consistent habituation within a supportive learning environment.

In addition to reinforcing behaviorist theory as an effective pedagogical approach in primary education, this study offers practical contributions for teachers—particularly PAK teachers—in designing instructional strategies that more directly target the formation of students' learning habits and character. Teachers are encouraged to integrate behaviorist principles in a contextual and flexible manner, taking into account students' individual characteristics and needs. This is essential to ensure that reinforcement is not merely mechanistic but also facilitates the internalization of the spiritual and moral values that lie at the core of PAK. Moreover, the results of this research open opportunities for further studies to explore the integration of behaviorist theory with other learning theories—such as cognitivism or constructivism—in order to create more holistic instructional approaches. Future research could also expand the scope to other educational levels or examine in greater depth the impact of behaviorist approaches on the affective and spiritual dimensions of students in religious education contexts. Therefore, this study not only contributes conceptually to the body of knowledge on learning theory but also provides practical and strategic guidance for improving the quality of religious education in primary schools.

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