



## The Influence of Visual Learning Media on Learning Interest in Christian Religious Education and Character Development

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the influence of visual learning media on students' learning interest within the context of Christian Religious Education and Character Development. Recognizing the increasing dominance of visual culture in contemporary learning environments, this research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize empirical and theoretical findings published between 2014 and 2024 across major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar. A total of 32 studies met the inclusion criteria after rigorous screening for relevance, methodological quality, and alignment with the themes of visual media, learning motivation, and character formation. The results reveal that visual learning media, such as images, videos, animations, and infographics, significantly enhance cognitive engagement by simplifying abstract biblical concepts and supporting dual-channel information processing. Visual media also stimulate affective engagement by evoking emotional responses that foster curiosity, attention, and intrinsic motivation. Importantly, the review highlights the role of visual representations in Christian character formation, as they vividly model virtues, moral dilemmas, and real-life applications of biblical teachings. These visual encounters strengthen students' moral imagination, empathy, and reflective awareness, contributing to their willingness to internalize and practice Christian values. The study further identifies pedagogical and contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of visual media, including teacher competence, instructional design, cultural relevance, and technological accessibility. Overall, the findings underscore that visually enriched instruction provides a meaningful and spiritually grounded pathway to enhance learning interest and character development in Christian education. Recommendations for future research and pedagogical practice are provided to advance effective visual-based learning in faith-based contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Visual Learning Media, Christian Religious Education, Learning Interest*

### INTRODUCTION

Learning interest is one of the most crucial determinants of students' academic success, particularly in subjects that require deep reflection, value internalization, and continuous

engagement such as Christian Religious Education and Character Development. In the digital era, students are increasingly exposed to visual stimuli through multimedia platforms, interactive digital content, and visually rich communication modes. These shifts have transformed the way students perceive, process, and retain information. As a result, educational practices must adapt by integrating visual learning media as a strategic instructional approach to enhance interest, motivation, and comprehension. Visual learning media, including images, charts, infographics, videos, animations, and digital presentations, play a significant role in making abstract concepts more concrete, complex ideas more understandable, and moral teachings more relatable to students' everyday experiences. Within Christian Religious Education, where many lessons revolve around biblical narratives, ethical principles, and spiritual formation, visual media offer meaningful pathways to strengthen both cognitive engagement and character development. Christian Religious Education emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge about biblical texts and Christian doctrines but also the cultivation of virtues such as love, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and respect. Traditional verbal or textual methods of instruction often face limitations, particularly when addressing diverse learning styles or capturing the attention of students who are habituated to visually oriented digital environments. Visual learning media present a valuable alternative by stimulating multiple senses, encouraging active participation, and fostering deeper emotional and spiritual connections with the learning material. For example, animated biblical stories can help students imaginatively enter into a narrative; visual metaphors can clarify abstract theological concepts; and character-based videos can model moral decision-making that aligns with Christian values. Through these visual elements, students are more likely to develop interest in learning, maintain focus, and engage in reflective moral reasoning. The relevance of visual learning media becomes even more pronounced in character development. Character formation requires more than theoretical explanations; it involves internalizing values and applying them in daily life. Visual media can offer scenarios, case studies, and moral dilemmas that encourage students to think critically, evaluate alternatives, and reflect on their own behavior. Research in educational psychology also emphasizes that visual stimuli enhance memory retention, emotional response, and cognitive processing. When combined with spiritual and moral content, the use of visual media can stimulate students' imagination and empathy, leading to stronger identification with biblical characters, greater appreciation for Christian virtues, and higher readiness to practice moral behaviors. Their role in Christian Religious Education and Character Development has not been sufficiently explored in the literature. Many educators in faith-based contexts still rely heavily on lecture-based approaches or written materials, which may limit students' engagement and reduce the effectiveness of character formation efforts. As Christian education aims to nurture holistic individuals, spiritually grounded, morally upright, and intellectually competent, it becomes essential to examine pedagogical strategies that align with contemporary learning preferences while remaining faithful to theological and ethical foundations. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the influence of visual learning media on learning interest in Christian Religious Education and Character Development. Through a systematic review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, this research aims to identify how visual media contribute to students' motivation, attentiveness, comprehension, and value internalization. By analyzing both cognitive and affective

dimensions of learning, the study provides insights into how educational practitioners can design visually enriched instructional environments that support holistic Christian character formation. The findings are expected to contribute to the ongoing discourse on pedagogical innovation within Christian education and offer practical implications for teachers seeking to enhance learning interest and spiritual engagement through the effective use of visual learning media.

## **METHODS**

The SLR approach was selected because it provides a structured, transparent, and replicable method for synthesizing existing research, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how visual media contribute to academic engagement, motivation, and value formation. The review process followed three main stages: identification, screening, and synthesis. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014 and 2024 to capture the most recent advancements in multimedia technology and instructional innovation. In the screening stage, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied: studies were included if they examined visual media in formal educational settings, explored learning interest or motivation, or focused on character-related outcomes; studies were excluded if they addressed non-visual media, non-educational contexts, or lacked empirical or theoretical rigor. A total of 68 articles met the initial criteria; after removing duplicates and evaluating methodological quality, 32 articles were selected for final analysis. These studies were systematically analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring patterns related to cognitive engagement, affective responses, character formation, instructional design, and teacher facilitation. To enhance validity, the findings were triangulated with limited qualitative insights obtained from informal interviews with three Christian Religious Education teachers who provided practical reflections on classroom experiences with visual media. The SLR methodology, supported by these supplementary insights, allowed for a rich and holistic synthesis of scholarly perspectives, forming the basis for the interpretative discussion presented in the following section.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The systematic literature review yielded a comprehensive body of evidence demonstrating that visual learning media exert a significant and multifaceted influence on learning interest in Christian Religious Education (CRE) and Character Development. The synthesis of the 32 selected studies shows consistent findings across diverse educational settings, age groups, and cultural contexts. Visual learning media, ranging from images, story illustrations, videos, animations, infographics, digital storytelling, and interactive multimedia, play a crucial role in bridging abstract biblical concepts with students' lived realities. At the broadest level, the findings reveal that visual media enhance students' attention, stimulate curiosity, foster emotional engagement, and promote deeper internalization of Christian values. The following discussion integrates thematic patterns derived from the reviewed studies and supplementary insights from teacher interviews, focusing on four dominant themes: cognitive engagement and comprehension, affective and motivational enhancement, facilitation of Christian character formation, and pedagogical and contextual factors that influence visual media

effectiveness. Together, these themes illuminate how visual learning media shape learning interest within CRE and character development while highlighting the complexity of factors that contribute to motivational outcomes. The theme that emerged from the analysis relates to cognitive engagement and comprehension. Numerous studies highlight that visual learning media facilitate cognitive processing by presenting information in concrete, memorable, and easily digestible forms. Cognitive load theory suggests that visuals reduce unnecessary mental strain and support dual-channel learning, enabling students to process information through both verbal and visual pathways. In the context of Christian Religious Education, many biblical narratives, theological ideas, and moral principles involve abstract symbols, historical contexts, or metaphorical language, which can be challenging for students to interpret through text alone. Visual representations, such as maps of biblical regions, timelines of salvation history, artistic depictions of parables, and animated recreations of biblical events, help students visualize the historical and spiritual dimensions of Scripture. When visuals complement verbal explanations, students can form mental models that strengthen comprehension and retention. The reviewed studies consistently reported that students taught with visual media demonstrated higher levels of understanding, particularly in lessons requiring interpretation of symbolic meaning, moral implications, or sequential events. For example, students who watched short animated videos of biblical stories were able to summarize events more accurately, explain moral lessons more clearly, and recall character actions more precisely than those taught solely through lecture. Teacher interviews further confirmed that visual media helped students grasp complex theological ideas, such as forgiveness, covenant, grace, sacrifice, and stewardship, by illustrating these concepts in relatable, real-world scenarios. These cognitive enhancements, in turn, significantly increased students' interest in learning because the material became more intelligible, relatable, and meaningful. The next theme is the affective and motivational impact of visual learning media. Learning interest is not merely cognitive; it involves emotional engagement, curiosity, and intrinsic motivation. Across the reviewed literature, visual media consistently evoke positive emotional responses that contribute to students' desire to engage with the material. Bright colors, dynamic movements, expressive characters, and structured layouts attract attention and sustain focus. Videos and animations, in particular, stimulate emotional resonance by depicting human struggles, moral dilemmas, and acts of kindness in ways that students can empathize with. In CRE contexts, the emotional depth of biblical narratives is amplified when students can see the expressions, tone, and atmosphere of a story brought to life visually. Emotional arousal, such as empathy, compassion, hope, or moral outrage, plays a critical role in enhancing learning interest because it activates students' inner curiosity and drives them to explore meaning and purpose within the lesson. Several studies show that students who experience emotional engagement through visual media tend to ask more questions, participate more actively in discussions, and express greater willingness to complete follow-up assignments. Teacher interviews corroborate these findings, with teachers noting that visual media often "ignite excitement," "break classroom monotony," and "bring the Bible closer to the students' world." Moreover, because visual media align with students' natural digital habits, such as watching videos, engaging with social media, and processing information visually, the learning environment feels more familiar and stimulating, further enhancing motivation.

The other theme concerns the role of visual media in supporting Christian character formation. Character development in Christian education aims to cultivate values such as love, humility, responsibility, honesty, forgiveness, empathy, and integrity. Visual media contribute to this formation by providing vivid models of behavior, moral dilemmas for reflection, and concrete examples of virtue in practice. Several of the reviewed studies highlight that students respond more deeply to moral instruction when they can see characters embodying virtues or struggling with ethical challenges. For instance, animated parables or dramatized stories of biblical figures allow students to witness the consequences of moral choices and reflect on how to apply these lessons in their own lives. Visual media humanize biblical characters, transforming them from abstract figures into relatable individuals with emotions, struggles, and commitments. This relatability enhances moral imagination, the ability to envision oneself acting virtuously, thus strengthening moral agency. Students exposed to moral lessons through visual media were more likely to articulate personal reflections, express empathy toward characters, and report intentions to practice similar virtues. Interviews with Christian Religious Education teachers revealed that visual media often trigger meaningful discussions about values and behavior, as students refer to visual examples when explaining their thoughts. Teachers also noted that visuals help bridge the gap between biblical teaching and real-life application by showing scenarios that mirror contemporary issues such as bullying, digital ethics, peer pressure, generosity, and conflict resolution. In this way, visual media support not only learning interest but also moral and spiritual development. The all theme pertains to pedagogical and contextual factors that shape the effectiveness of visual learning media. While visual media have clear advantages, their impact depends significantly on how they are integrated into instruction. Several studies caution that visual media can fail to enhance learning interest if they are used passively, without interaction, reflection, or teacher guidance. Effective implementation requires thoughtful planning and alignment with learning objectives. Teachers must ensure that visuals reinforce key concepts rather than serve merely as entertainment. Visuals must also be developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, theologically accurate, and pedagogically purposeful. Many reviewed studies emphasize the importance of pairing visual media with active learning strategies, such as questioning, group discussion, reflective journaling, or problem-solving activities, to maximize engagement and learning interest. For example, videos followed by open-ended questions encourage students to analyze behavior, interpret lessons, and express personal responses. Infographics used during group work promote collaboration and critical thinking. In CRE settings, visuals used during devotional reflections can encourage meditation and spiritual dialogue. Teacher interviews support these findings: educators reported that student engagement increased most when visual media were integrated into a larger pedagogical sequence involving exploration, reflection, and action.

Contextual factors also play an important role. The effectiveness of visual media varies depending on students' technological literacy, classroom infrastructure, teacher competence, and cultural background. In schools with limited digital resources, teachers may rely on printed visuals, posters, or hand-drawn illustrations, which still significantly enhance learning interest when used creatively. In contrast, digital-rich schools can integrate interactive multimedia, virtual reality, or smartboard-based lessons. Cultural

sensitivity is essential, especially in Christian Religious Education, where biblical content must be presented accurately and respectfully. Teachers must evaluate visual media for theological reliability and avoid oversimplification or distortion of Christian teachings. In multicultural classrooms, visuals must be inclusive and relatable to avoid alienating certain student groups. Teacher competence is another critical factor: educators require training to select, evaluate, and use visual media effectively. Several studies noted that teachers who lacked digital skills tended to use visuals minimally or inappropriately, reducing their potential impact on learning interest. Conversely, teachers who skillfully guided visual interactions reported higher levels of student motivation and deeper character engagement. Another important finding concerns the relationship between visual media and students' diverse learning styles. Visual learners benefit directly from imagery, but students with auditory or kinesthetic preferences also gain from multimodal approaches when visuals are paired with sound, narration, movement, and interactive opportunities. This multimodal integration enhances inclusivity and ensures that lessons cater to diverse preferences, thereby increasing overall learning interest. Studies show that when instructional materials address multiple sensory channels, students demonstrate stronger emotional engagement, improved memory, and greater enthusiasm for learning. Visual media thus play a crucial role in differentiated instruction within CRE and character development. The review also highlights the motivational shift from extrinsic to intrinsic engagement triggered by visual media. While initial exposure may spark surface-level interest due to novelty, deeper motivational changes arise when students connect visually presented lessons to personal identity, moral convictions, and spiritual purpose. In Christian education, intrinsic motivation is vital because learning aims not merely at academic achievement but at internal transformation. Visual media help foster intrinsic motivation by making lessons personally meaningful, spiritually enriching, and morally relevant. Students become motivated not because they must learn but because they want to understand and live out the lessons. This aligns with the broader goals of Christian pedagogy, which emphasize holistic transformation over information transmission. The results underscore that the integration of visual learning media in CRE enhances classroom dynamics, participation, and collaborative learning. When visuals are used, students tend to interact more actively with both the material and one another. Group activities using images, role-play based on visual scenarios, and shared interpretations of visual content foster a sense of community and cooperative learning. These classroom interactions reflect core Christian values such as fellowship (*koinonia*), mutual edification, and shared exploration of faith. Teachers reported that visual media often break social barriers, encourage shy students to participate, and stimulate peer-led discussions that enhance overall learning interest. The results demonstrate that visual learning media significantly enhance learning interest in Christian Religious Education and Character Development through cognitive, motivational, emotional, moral, and pedagogical mechanisms. Visual media make learning more engaging, relatable, spiritually meaningful, and cognitively accessible, strengthening not only academic motivation but also character formation, a central goal of Christian education. The findings highlight the need for educators to integrate visuals thoughtfully and purposefully into CRE instruction to optimize learning interest and holistic development.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that visual learning media have a substantial and transformative influence on students' learning interest in Christian Religious Education and Character Development. Through a systematic synthesis of contemporary research, supported by practical insights from educators, it becomes clear that visual media enrich the learning process by making biblical instruction more accessible, engaging, and meaningful for students. Visual representations reduce cognitive barriers by clarifying abstract theological concepts, contextualizing historical narratives, and supporting memory retention. They also enhance emotional engagement, stimulate curiosity, and strengthen intrinsic motivation, factors that are essential for sustained learning interest and deeper comprehension of spiritual and moral teachings. Visual media contribute significantly to Christian character formation by presenting vivid examples of virtues, moral dilemmas, and faithful living that resonate with students' everyday experiences. Through these visual encounters, students develop empathy, moral imagination, and reflective awareness, which translate into a greater readiness to internalize and practice Christian values such as love, forgiveness, responsibility, respect, and integrity. These findings affirm that character development is not merely a cognitive endeavor but a holistic process involving affective and experiential dimensions, both of which are enhanced when visual media are effectively integrated. The study also highlights that the impact of visual learning media is deeply influenced by pedagogical quality, contextual factors, and teacher competence. Visual media are most effective when they are contextually appropriate, theologically sound, developmentally aligned, and embedded within interactive learning strategies that promote discussion, reflection, and application. Teachers play a central role in guiding students through these visual experiences, ensuring that media serve not as passive entertainment but as meaningful tools that facilitate deeper understanding and spiritual growth. Challenges related to technological access, cultural considerations, and teacher readiness underscore the importance of continued professional development and resource planning within Christian educational institutions. Visual learning media represent a highly effective and pedagogically relevant approach for increasing learning interest and promoting character development in Christian Religious Education. As students today inhabit a visual and digital learning culture, leveraging visual media in thoughtful, reflective, and spiritually grounded ways is essential for nurturing holistic learners who are not only academically engaged but also morally and spiritually formed. Future research should expand empirical investigations into classroom-based visual media applications, explore innovative digital platforms, and examine long-term outcomes related to spiritual growth and character transformation. The integration of visual media, when guided by sound pedagogy and Christian values, offers a promising pathway for advancing the mission of Christian education in contemporary learning environments.

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