

Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning Approach in Religious Education To Enhance Student Learning Motivation

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Abstract: Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an engaging and enjoyable method within the teaching and learning process. This approach is based on the understanding that academic success alone is insufficient to support students' holistic development. One of the factors contributing to low learning motivation among students is the lack of implementation of social-emotional learning strategies in the classroom. This study aims to examine how the application of social-emotional learning in Catholic Religious Education influences student learning motivation. The research employed a quantitative method using a quasi-experimental design. The subjects were Grade 10 students at St. Joseph Catholic Vocational High School (SMK Katolik St. Yosef Nenuk). A total of 15 students from the Automotive Engineering class formed the experimental group, while another 15 students from the Building Construction and Computer Networking classes were assigned to the control group. The sample was selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and documentation, then analyzed using an independent two-sample t-test to test the hypothesis. The results showed a significant difference in student motivation between those taught with SEL and those taught with conventional methods. This is evidenced by a t-test significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. In other words, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. These findings reinforce that social-emotional learning is more effective than conventional teaching methods in increasing student motivation, particularly in Catholic Religious Education

Keywords: Learning Approach, Social-Emotional Learning, Student Motivation

1. Introduction

Catholic Religious Education is a subject of great importance, especially for students of the Catholic faith. The Gravissimum Educationis document issued by the Second Vatican Council on October 28, 1965, affirms that the primary aim of education is the holistic formation of the human person—intellectually, morally, socially, and spiritually. In line with this, the Catholic Religious Education and Character Education Learning Outcomes emphasize that religious education aims to guide students to become faithful individuals who internalize and practice their religious teachings in everyday life. Therefore, teachers are expected to design learning processes that not only develop cognitive understanding but also encourage creativity and the internalization of religious values, enabling students to deepen their faith and morals.

However, in practice, Catholic Religious Education often faces challenges due to its need for deep understanding and spiritual reflection. Several studies and observations indicate that this subject is often perceived as uninteresting by students (Atok, 2019; Reed, 2016; Whitehouse, 2004). One contributing factor to this lack of interest is the predominantly monotonous teaching methods. Lectures and reflective assignments still dominate the classroom, with little variation in instructional strategies (Nabhani et al., 2023). While these methods carry essential value, in practice, they often fail to capture students' attention or foster deeper comprehension (Suardi, 2018). This challenge becomes more apparent when lessons take place during the last period of the day or when complex theological concepts,

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such as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, are discussed. As a result, many students struggle to understand religious teachings on a deeper level, ultimately leading to decreased motivation to engage in the subject.

To address these challenges, innovation and creativity in designing more effective teaching strategies are essential. This becomes particularly important at the secondary education level, a critical phase in shaping students' religious identity. With appropriate strategies, students' learning motivation can be enhanced.

Learning motivation, according to Winkel (2005:160), is the psychological force that drives individuals to participate in the learning process with a specific goal in mind. Sardiman A.M. (2007:75) further explains that learning motivation not only serves as an internal drive within students but also ensures the continuity of the learning process and directs individuals toward achieving academic goals. In other words, learning motivation plays a crucial role in determining how actively students participate in learning activities. High motivation allows students to be more achievement-oriented and enables them to absorb and internalize the values taught, including those in Catholic Religious Education. Conversely, low learning motivation can lead to passive behavior, lack of engagement, and difficulty in understanding and applying religious teachings in daily life. Therefore, learning motivation is not just a supporting factor—it is a key element in the success of the learning process. One approach that can enhance student learning motivation is the use of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies.

The Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) approach aims to develop four core competencies: self-awareness, emotional regulation, social skills, and social responsibility. In the context of Catholic Religious Education, implementing SEL not only helps students gain a deeper understanding of spiritual values but also teaches them how to apply those values in daily life. Several studies have shown that low student motivation is often linked to the lack of approaches that consider the social and emotional aspects of learning. Habeahan (2022) found that integrating SEL into the classroom positively affects learning motivation, particularly at the elementary level. This approach not only supports a better understanding of religious teachings but also contributes to character development, enhances self-confidence, and strengthens students' social skills.

Therefore, SEL plays a vital role in Catholic Religious Education because it helps students not only understand religious teachings but also grow into individuals who can manage their emotions, build healthy social relationships, and make responsible decisions. These skills align with the ultimate goal of Catholic Religious Education—to shape young generations who are faithful, morally upright, and possess integrity in their community lives.

2. STUDY LITERATURE

Catholic Religious Education plays a crucial role in shaping the character and morality of young people so they become individuals of faith, integrity, and strong moral values (Gasper & Nurjanto, 2022). As a central pillar in spiritual and ethical development, religious education aims to equip students with foundational values that guide them in navigating life.

Through the teaching of faith, worship practices, and moral ethics rooted in Catholic tradition, Catholic Religious Education serves as a fundamental platform for character formation. This subject not only introduces students to the basic teachings of the Catholic faith but also helps them internalize and practice noble values such as love, compassion, justice, and loyalty in their daily lives (Wijaya & Gaudiawan, 2020). Amid the increasing complexity of social life, Catholic Religious Education becomes a moral compass for students in developing sensitivity and the ability to make decisions based on Christian values.

Beyond its essential role in character building, Catholic Religious Education also plays a strategic role in moral development. Therefore, its implementation in classroom learning needs to be taken seriously. More than just delivering theological knowledge, religious education serves as a vehicle to instill moral and ethical values reflected in real-life actions. Thus, Catholic Religious Education not only deepens students' understanding of Church teachings but also helps form individuals who are strong in faith, morally upright, and committed to spiritual and social values (Permana, 2020).

As part of the learning process, Catholic Religious Education involves dynamic interactions between teachers and students in a structured and purposeful learning environment. This process includes the development of critical thinking, faith reflection, and deep understanding of Church teachings. Various teaching methods are applied to help

students understand, internalize, and apply religious teachings more effectively (Setiawan, 2015). Therefore, religious education aims not only to transmit knowledge but also to shape attitudes and behaviors in accordance with Catholic values that can be practiced in everyday life.

According to the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), there are four main principles in Catholic Religious Education (Supriyanto, 2017), namely: A means for the formation of faith and morality; An effort to develop spirituality; A medium to convey Christian values; A way to strengthen relationships with God and others.

In Catholic Religious Education, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a collaborative approach applied within the educational environment. This approach helps students acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes that reflect religious values in daily life. The primary objectives of SEL in Catholic Religious Education include:

1. Instilling a deep understanding of faith and morals.
2. Developing self-regulation and spiritual reflection.
3. Fostering empathy and compassion toward others.
4. Building and maintaining harmonious relationships in social life.
5. Training students in decision-making aligned with Church teachings.

The application of SEL in Catholic Religious Education involves three main components (Ika et al. in Widiastuti, 2022):

1. Routine Activities: Activities conducted outside academic hours, such as communal prayers before classes, celebration of Catholic holidays, school worship, community service as acts of love, spiritual seminars, and group reflections.
2. Integration into Learning: Strategies incorporated into the teaching process, such as post-lesson reflections on Catholic teachings, group discussions on Christian values, case studies based on Church doctrine, and problem-solving guided by Catholic moral principles.
3. School Protocols: Agreed-upon rules that instill religious values in the school environment, including showing respect to others, attentive listening, maintaining silence in prayer spaces, and participating reverently in school liturgies.

The implementation of social and emotional learning in Catholic Religious Education aims to equip students with skills to face life challenges, resolve conflicts wisely, and build personalities grounded in Christian teachings. By balancing personal development with social and spiritual relationships, students are expected to thrive in both community and faith settings.

One effective SEL method is the STOP technique (Stop, Take a deep breath, Observe, Proceed), as recommended by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). This technique enhances focus, fosters positive behavior, and develops reflective decision-making. The steps include:

1. Stop – Students pause and sit comfortably.
2. Take a deep breath – Inhale slowly and exhale steadily.
3. Observe – Notice changes in body and emotion after breathing.
4. Proceed – Resume learning after completing the emotional regulation exercise.

Social and emotional learning in Catholic Religious Education can be applied through various strategies such as prayer before class, group discussions to understand religious teachings, and self-reflection to enhance students' spiritual and emotional awareness. This approach also trains students in self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Motivation plays a vital role in the learning process, including in Catholic Religious Education. According to Drost (2018) and Riberu (2020), motivation in this context refers to internal and external forces that encourage students to understand, internalize, and practice Catholic teachings in their daily lives. Nasution (2021) states that the primary functions of motivation in religious learning are:

1. Encouraging students to understand and live out religious teachings.
2. Guiding the internalization of Christian values in daily life.
3. Driving students to apply religious teachings through real actions.

Widyatama (2019) adds several roles of motivation in Catholic Religious Education:

- a. A primary driving force in religious learning activities.

- b. A guide for learning direction toward practicing Christian teachings.
- c. A filtering tool for shaping behavior based on religious values.
- d. An internal and external factor in learning, where internal motivation comes from within students, while external motivation arises from teachers, environment, and family.
- e. A factor that enhances understanding and appreciation of religious teachings.

With strong motivation, students are expected to better understand, appreciate, and apply Christian values in their daily lives.

3. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method. The sample consisted of 30 students divided into two groups: 15 students in the experimental class and 15 in the control class. In the experimental group, students received Catholic Religious Education through the social-emotional learning approach, while the control group followed a conventional teaching method.

Data collection was conducted through questionnaires and documentation. The questionnaire was distributed individually to each student at the end of the learning session to measure the effectiveness of the social-emotional approach in increasing learning motivation in the Catholic Religious Education subject. The primary data from the questionnaire were then scored based on student responses.

Table 1. Scoring Guidelines for Learning Motivation Questionnaire

Statement Type	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Positive	5	4	3	2	1
Negative	1	2	3	4	5

Before further analysis, the questionnaire data were tested using basic assumption tests such as normality and linearity tests to ensure the data were normally distributed and had a linear relationship. Hypothesis testing was also conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in student motivation before and after treatment. Finally, the N-Gain test was used to evaluate the increase in learning motivation following the implementation of the social-emotional learning method.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research relied on primary data obtained through questionnaires that measured students' learning motivation before and after the application of the social-emotional learning approach. The analysis results indicated a significant increase in learning motivation among students in the experimental class after the method was applied in Catholic Religious Education.

Prior to the implementation of the social-emotional learning approach, 7 students (46.67%) in the experimental class were categorized as having moderate motivation. However, after the method was introduced, the number of students in the high motivation category increased to 10 (66.67%), compared to only 2 students (13.33%) before the intervention. In contrast, the control class, which received conventional instruction, showed that most students initially had moderate motivation (6 students or 40%), which later increased to 8 students (53.33%). These findings suggest that the experimental class experienced a significantly greater improvement in learning motivation compared to the control class.

Table 2. Students' Learning Motivation in the Experimental and Control Classes

Motivation Category	Experimental Class Before	Experimental Class After	Control Class Before	Control Class After
Very High	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
High	2 (13.33%)	10 (66.67%)	0 (0%)	2 (13.33%)
Moderate	7 (46.67%)	3 (20%)	6 (40%)	8 (53.33%)
Low	4 (26.67%)	2 (13.33%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)
Very Low	2 (13.33%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.33%)

In addition, the study also revealed an increase in various aspects of motivation within the experimental class. Students' intrinsic motivation rose from 60.12% to 91.25%, while the control class only saw an increase from 55.43% to 68.32%. The self-regulation factor also showed substantial growth in the experimental class, from 65.87% to 90.42%, compared to the control class's increase from 57.12% to 66.89%. Similarly, self-efficacy improved in the experimental class from 67.21% to 89.37%, whereas in the control class, it increased only from 58.24% to 62.18%.

Table 3. Percentage of Students' Learning Motivation Based on Motivation Factors

Motivation Factor	Experimental Class Before	Experimental Class After	Control Class Before	Control Class After
Intrinsic	60.12%	91.25%	55.43%	68.32%
Self-Regulation	65.87%	90.42%	57.12%	66.89%
Self-Efficacy	67.21%	89.37%	58.24%	62.18%
Utility Value	72.19%	94.31%	55.89%	60.45%
Anxiety	45.76%	28.39%	46.98%	42.15%

Moreover, the social-emotional learning approach also contributed to a reduction in student anxiety. In the experimental class, the level of anxiety dropped significantly from 45.76% to 28.39%, while in the control class, it decreased slightly from 46.98% to 42.15%.

To determine the effectiveness of the approach, an N-Gain score test was conducted. The result showed that the implementation of the social-emotional learning method in Catholic Religious Education increased students' learning motivation to a moderate category, with an N-Gain score of 0.3721 or 37.21%. This indicates that the method is an effective strategy for enhancing students' learning motivation

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of implementing the social-emotional learning (SEL) approach in Catholic Religious Education to increase students' learning motivation. The findings revealed that this method had a significant positive impact on student motivation. Although the increase in the experimental class fell within the moderate category, it was still substantially better than the outcomes observed in the control class, which received conventional instruction.

These results carry important implications for educators, especially teachers of Catholic Religious Education. It is recommended that they begin incorporating the social-emotional learning approach into their teaching practices, as it has been proven to improve both student motivation and comprehension of the subject matter. With this approach, students are not only more motivated to learn but also more capable of understanding and internalizing the values taught in Catholic Religious Education.

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