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The Role of Participatory Confirmation Preparation in Enhancing the Spiritual Maturity of Children and Adolescents at St. Mary Immaculate Parish in Lewolaga.

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ABSTRACT

Confirmation formation plays an important role in helping children and adolescents develop faith maturity within the Catholic Church. However, in practice, confirmation formation is often administrative in nature and less connected to participants' lived faith experiences. This community service activity aimed to improve participants' understanding of faith, spiritual awareness, and active involvement through a contextual and participatory confirmation formation model. The activity employed a descriptive qualitative approach supported by simple quantitative data through pre-test and post-test assessments. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and participant evaluations involving 30 children and adolescents aged 12–17 years at Santa Maria Immaculata Lewolaga Parish. The results indicate a clear improvement in participants' understanding of faith, reflected in the increase of average scores from 48% in the pre-test to 86% in the post-test. Participants also showed greater confidence in expressing opinions, stronger engagement in discussions, and more active participation in liturgical activities. In addition, the activity contributed positively to strengthening youth pastoral formation within the parish community. These findings suggest that contextual and participatory formation approaches are effective in supporting faith maturity among children and adolescents and can be further developed in parish-based pastoral ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Faith formation is a form of pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church that plays a vital role in fostering the spiritual maturity of the faithful, particularly children and adolescents as the Church's future generation. One concrete form of this formation is preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, which aims to strengthen faith and instill a sense of Christian responsibility in daily life. However, in practice, Confirmation formation is often still understood merely as an administrative obligation, thus failing to deeply engage the participants' spiritual experience (Boeve, 2021).

This situation is also observed among children and adolescents preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Mary Immaculata Parish in Lewolaga, where some participants still demonstrate a limited understanding of the faith, a lack of active engagement in formation activities, and a minimal appreciation of the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation in daily life.

During adolescence, individuals undergo complex development cognitive, emotional, and social requiring a more contextual and participatory approach to faith formation. One-way faith guidance tends to be less effective in fostering deep faith awareness. Conversely, a participatory approach involving experience, reflection, and active participant engagement has proven effective in enhancing faith understanding and involvement (Utami, 2022). This indicates that faith formation methods must be adapted to the developmental characteristics of adolescents to be more relevant and effective. The need for such participatory faith formation is also evident among confirmation candidates at St. Mary Immaculata Parish in Lewolaga, where participants tend to engage more easily and grasp the material better when given space to discuss, share their faith experiences, and actively participate in the formation process.

Additionally, the development of digital technology has influenced the lifestyles and ways of thinking of young people, leading many adolescents to be more interested in social media and digital entertainment than in faith formation activities and church life (Kurniawan, 2021). This situation was also observed among candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Maria Immaculata Lewolaga based on initial observations, where some participants appeared unfocused during formation, passive in discussions, and less active in participating in spiritual activities within the parish community. Therefore, a more interactive, communicative, and contextual faith formation method is needed to effectively engage participants actively (Lestari, 2021).

A number of previous studies indicate that participatory-based faith formation has a positive impact on enhancing young people's faith awareness and engagement. Research findings show that methods such as group discussions, faith reflection, and contextual approaches can improve participants' understanding of faith teachings and encourage active participation in pastoral activities (Rohman, 2022). Other studies also confirm that faith formation involving participants' personal experiences is more effective than conventional lecture methods (White, 2021). However, most of these studies still focus on formal educational contexts or classroom learning, so they have not yet specifically examined Confirmation preparation within the context of community service at the parish level.

Based on initial observations at the Santa Maria Immaculata Parish in Lewolaga, it was found that most participants in Confirmation formation attended activities merely as a requirement to receive the sacrament, without a deep understanding of the meaning of faith. This is evident from low participation in liturgical activities, a lack of personal prayer habits, and minimal involvement in parish life. This situation indicates a gap between the ideal goals of faith formation and the reality on the ground (Herline, M., & Rieuwpassa, 2022).

Based on these issues, the novelty of this initiative lies in the development of a contextual and participatory model for the formation of the Sacrament of Confirmation through thematic workshops, group discussions, and faith reflection. Unlike previous formation models, which have tended to be one-sided and administrative, this initiative positions participants as active agents in the formation process. This model not only emphasizes cognitive aspects but also integrates participants' life experiences, making the formation more meaningful, interactive, and applicable to daily life (Hapsari, 2021).

As a solution, this community service activity was implemented by applying interactive and participatory mentoring methods to enhance participants' understanding of faith, spiritual awareness, and active involvement in church life (Sihotang, 2022). This approach is expected to address the challenges of faith formation for young people in the modern era (Simamora, 2021). The objective of this activity is to deepen the faith of children and adolescents through contextual and participatory preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation (Manullang, 2023) so that participants not only understand the teachings of the faith theoretically but are also able to live them out in their daily lives (Situmorang, 2022).

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This community service activity was conducted in the form of faith formation for candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation using a qualitative descriptive approach supported by simple quantitative data. This approach was used to describe the implementation process of the activity,

participant engagement, and changes in faith understanding experienced during the activity. The implementation method applied consists of a combination of community education, training, and mentoring tailored to the partners' needs, particularly in enhancing faith understanding, active participant engagement, and youth participation in church life (Darmawan, 2022).

The participatory mentoring approach is considered capable of helping participants actively engage in the formation process, thereby making the activities more effective and meaningful (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, 2021). Additionally, implementing activities oriented toward community needs helps create more contextual formation that aligns with the participants' situations within the parish environment. With a participatory and contextual approach, this activity is expected to address the faith formation needs of children and adolescents in the Parish of St. Maria Immaculata Lewolaga.

The target audience for this activity is children and adolescents preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Mary Immaculata Parish in Lewolaga, Titehena Subdistrict, East Flores Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, with a total of 30 participants aged 12-17 years. The participants are in the early to mid-adolescent developmental stage, undergoing a process of self-discovery and requiring intensive faith accompaniment. The variation in participants' ages was addressed through a flexible mentoring approach, such as group discussions, sharing of faith experiences, and the presentation of materials in a communicative manner appropriate to the participants' level of understanding. This target group was selected based on initial observations indicating a low level of faith understanding and youth involvement in liturgical and pastoral activities at the parish.

This activity will be held at the Santa Maria Immaculata Parish in Lewolaga in August 2025. This location was chosen because it is a partner parish that is actively facing challenges in the faith formation of young people. The formation program consisted of four sessions throughout August, with materials structured progressively, ranging from foundational understanding of the faith, an introduction to the Sacrament of Confirmation, reflections on faith experiences, to participants' engagement in parish life. The materials and resources used in this program include the Holy Bible, catechism books, a Confirmation formation module developed by the implementation team, and presentation materials tailored to the participants' context (Huda, 2021). Supporting tools and resources include whiteboards, writing materials, participant worksheets, and simple visual aids to assist in delivering the content.

The implementation stages of the activity were carried out systematically and structurally. The first stage involved problem identification through initial observation and communication with parish officials to assess the existing state of faith formation. The second stage was program planning, which included developing materials, methods, and the activity schedule. The third stage involved coordination with partners the parish priest and catechists to ensure readiness for the activity's implementation. The fourth stage is the implementation of the activities, which includes presenting material on the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the responsibilities of faith, combined with focus group discussions and faith reflections. The fifth stage is accompanying participants throughout the formation process to help them gain a deeper understanding of the material. The sixth stage is the evaluation of the activity to measure the program's success rate. The final stage involves follow-up recommendations to the parish to continue the formation on an ongoing basis (Siahaan, 2024).

Data collection techniques in this activity were conducted through direct observation of the formation process, informal interviews with participants and mentors, documentation of activities, as well as the administration of pre-tests and post-tests to measure participants' level of understanding. The evaluation instrument used consisted of 10 short questions in the form of multiple-choice and simple essay questions related to the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the attitude of life as a person of faith. The questions used in the pre-test and post-test were the same so that changes in participants' understanding could be directly compared.

Each correct answer is scored 10 points, so the maximum score a participant can achieve is 100. The percentage score is derived from the average of the participant's total score, which is then converted into a percentage to assess the improvement in understanding before and after the

formation activity. In addition to cognitive evaluation, this activity also uses an observation sheet to assess participants' level of participation during the activity. Observation indicators include active participation in discussions, the ability to collaborate in groups, the courage to express opinions, engagement in faith reflection, and discipline in following the training activities. (Sugiyono, 2021).

The data obtained were analyzed using simple qualitative and quantitative descriptive analysis techniques. Quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test results were analyzed by comparing the percentage of participants' understanding levels before and after the activities. Meanwhile, qualitative data from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the mentoring activity in enhancing participants' spiritual maturity (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Confirmation preparation program at the Santa Maria Immaculata Parish in Lewolaga demonstrated significant changes in the aspects of faith understanding, participant engagement, and religious attitudes. The results were obtained through a combination of quantitative data pre-tests and post-tests and qualitative data observations and interviews conducted during the program. An initial evaluation was conducted via a pre-test to determine participants' baseline understanding of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The results indicated that the majority of participants still had a low level of understanding. After the formation program was conducted using methods such as interactive lectures, group discussions, and faith reflection, a post-test was administered to measure the changes that occurred.

Table 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results Participants

Assessed Aspects	Pre-test	Post-test
Understanding of the Meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation	45%	85
Understanding the role of the Holy Spirit	40%	88
Attitude toward life after Confirmation	55%	90%
Awareness of one's religious responsibilities	50%	87

The percentages in the table above represent the average results of all participants, derived from pre-test and post-test scores following the training activity. The data indicates an increase in participants' understanding and awareness of faith across all assessed aspects following the implementation of participatory and contextual Confirmation training. Based on Table 1, an increase is evident across all assessed aspects. The average level of participants' understanding rose from the 45-55% range to 85-90% after participating in the formation program. The highest increase occurred in the aspect of lifestyle following the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. This indicates that participants not only grasped the material cognitively but also began to internalize the values of faith in their daily lives.

This improvement is supported by the formation method, which emphasizes faith reflection, sharing of experiences, and participatory discussion, making it easier for participants to connect the formation material with their daily life experiences. This approach helps participants understand the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation not only as ecclesiastical knowledge but also as the foundation for the formation of a genuine Christian way of life within the family, school, and social environment. In addition to quantitative data, observational results indicate changes in participants' attitudes and behaviors during the program. Participants became more active in group discussions, demonstrated the ability to collaborate, and showed courage in expressing their opinions. Their engagement in faith reflection activities also indicated an increase in spiritual awareness, evident in their ability to connect the material with their personal life experiences.

Results from brief interviews with participants and mentors also indicated that the formation method used was more engaging and easier to understand compared to previous methods. Participants stated that the discussion and reflection activities helped them understand the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation more deeply. One participant shared that previously they had attended the formation sessions only because it was a requirement for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, but through the reflection and sharing activities, they began to understand the importance of living a life of faith and engaging in Church activities. Another participant also noted that the group discussion method made them more confident in expressing their opinions and asking questions about aspects of the Catholic faith they did not yet understand. Furthermore, observations during the activities showed that participants appeared more actively engaged in discussions, were more confident when presenting the results of group reflections, and demonstrated higher enthusiasm compared to the initial formation meetings.



Figure 1. Stages of Activity Implementation.

The results of the activity indicate that a participatory formation approach has a significant impact on enhancing participants' understanding of the faith. The increase in pre-test and post-test scores demonstrates that the method used effectively helped participants grasp the deeper meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation. This aligns with the findings of (Groome, 2021), which emphasizes that faith education in the modern era needs to integrate participants' life experiences to make it more meaningful. Additionally, (Darmawan, 2021) states that contextual faith formation can significantly enhance young people's religious awareness. Participants' active involvement in group discussions indicates that participatory methods can boost motivation and engagement in learning. This is supported by research (Utami, 2022), which states that participatory learning is effective in enhancing participants' interaction and understanding. Similar findings were also reported by (Suryani, 2023), who emphasized that active participant engagement is the key to success in values-based learning processes.

In the context of youth ministry, active engagement is a crucial factor in shaping faith awareness. Research (White, 2021) indicates that an interactive approach in youth ministry can enhance engagement and religious commitment. This is reinforced by (Rohman, 2022) who states that faith accompaniment for adolescents must be grounded in life experiences to yield tangible attitudinal changes. Improvements in life attitudes following the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation indicate that this activity impacts not only cognitive aspects but also affective and behavioral aspects. This aligns with the findings of (Zaluchu, 2021), who affirm that sustained faith formation fosters stronger religious commitment. Furthermore, (Suharto, 2021) state that education based on religious values plays a role in shaping an individual's character and behavior.

In the context of social development, the influence of digital technology poses a serious challenge to the faith formation of young people. (Gurusinga, 2025) found that excessive use of digital media can affect the spiritual development of adolescents. This is also supported by (Kurniawan, 2021), who states that lifestyle changes resulting from technology have led to a decline in participation in religious activities. The guidance approach used in this activity is also consistent with the principles of active and contextual learning. (Huda, 2021) explains that learning that directly involves participants enhances understanding and memory retention. Furthermore, (Siahaan, 2024) emphasizes that an approach aligned with the developmental stages of adolescents is more effective in fostering self-awareness and spiritual values.

When compared to previous studies, the results of this study show similarities in the effectiveness of participatory approaches in faith formation. Research (Herline & Rieuwpassa, 2022) indicates that youth engagement in church activities increases through interactive approaches. This is further supported by (Prayitno, 2023), who states that participatory catechesis methods can significantly enhance participants' understanding of faith. Although the formation activities yielded positive results, several challenges arose during implementation, such as limited supporting facilities, time constraints, and varying levels of participant understanding based on age and educational background. Additionally, some participants were initially less active and tended to be shy about participating in discussions or group reflections.

To address these challenges, the implementation team took several mitigation steps, such as using simple, easy-to-understand learning materials, dividing participants into small groups to make them more comfortable discussing, and adapting the method of presenting the material to suit the participants' age characteristics. The team also adopted a more personalized approach and provided intensive support to less active participants to help them gradually engage in the formation activities. Through these measures, the formation process remained effective and participatory. This demonstrates that the success of a formation program is significantly influenced by planning, methodological flexibility, and systematic implementation (Yusuf, 2021). Overall, this activity has a tangible impact on enhancing participants' understanding of faith, engagement, and religious attitudes. Thus, the contextual and participatory approach to the Sacrament of Confirmation formation has proven effective in fostering the spiritual maturity of young people and can serve as an alternative model for developing pastoral programs at the parish level.

CONCLUSION

The community service activity through the preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Santa Maria Immaculata Parish in Lewolaga demonstrates that a contextual and participatory approach to formation is effective in enhancing the spiritual maturity of children and adolescents. This improvement is evident in the increased understanding of the faith, spiritual awareness, and active participation of the participants in the formation activities and church life. Methods such as group discussions, faith reflection, and thematic workshops help participants not only understand the teachings of the faith cognitively but also live them out in their daily attitudes and behaviors. Practically, this initiative benefits both participants and the parish by implementing a faith formation model more relevant to the needs of young people. This model can be sustainably developed within the parish's youth pastoral programs and enriched with more creative and technology-based methods to further support the spiritual growth of young people in the future.

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