

Negotiation of Symbolic Meaning in Visual-Participatory Catechesis Using YOUCAT for Kids: Perspectives of Symbolic Interactionism and Faith Development Dayak Children in Palangka Raya

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ABSTRACT

Forming children's faith in the digital era requires a shift from conventional lecture-based methods toward visual and interactive approaches. While studies have examined visual media in faith education, research on how children negotiate the meaning of religious symbols within local culture, particularly Dayak culture, remains limited. This study analyzes the implementation of visual-participatory catechesis using *YOUCAT for Kids* within the Children's Catholic Faith Formation Program at the Cathedral Parish of Saint Mary, Palangka Raya. Using a qualitative case study design with photo-elicitation, the study involved 14 informants: children, the parish priest, the head of evangelization, catechists, and parents, over one month. Analysis draws on George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism and James Fowler's Theory of Faith Development to understand how children negotiate Western religious symbols within Dayak cultural experience. Results show visual media significantly improves material retention and active participation, and reveal a process of meaning negotiation as children interpret sacramental symbols through local cultural experience. The study proposes a five-stage catechetical model Observing, Listening, Dialoguing, Participating, and Living as a pastoral solution for addressing Generation Alpha needs. Findings are limited to a single parish over a short period and cannot yet be generalized to broader contexts.

Keywords: Visual Catechesis, *YOUCAT for Kids*, Symbolic Interactionism, Faith Development, Dayak Culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Forming the faith of children is a fundamental and urgent pastoral responsibility of the Church, as it determines the continuity of the faithful's belief in the future. The Second Vatican Council, through *Gravissimum Educationis*, affirms every child's right to receive integral education that encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. However, real-world conditions reveal a significant gap; the practice of Children's Catholic Faith Formation in Indonesia is still often dominated by one-way lecture methods that fail to address the existential needs of today's children.

This challenge becomes even more complex for Generation Alpha, who grow up within a digital visual culture. They are accustomed to processing information

through images, colors, and visual narratives. From James Fowler's perspective, children at the elementary school age fall into the *Mythic-Literal Faith* stage, where stories and visual symbols serve as the primary means of forming religious understanding. Beyond the challenges of the times, the local context such as Dayak culture in Central Kalimantan presents its own unique dimension. Dayak culture possesses a rich symbolic heritage that often differs from the Western aesthetic found in international catechetical resources such as *YOUCAT for Kids*.

This study uses the framework of Symbolic Interactionism to view how the meaning of faith is not transferred linearly, but rather constructed through interaction between the child and visual symbols. The central issue addressed is how catechesis based on *YOUCAT for Kids* is implemented, and how children negotiate the meaning of these visual symbols within the local cultural context of Central Kalimantan.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Symbolic Interactionism (George Herbert Mead)

This theory asserts that meaning is formed through social interaction and the interpretation of symbols. A key concept from Mead *taking the role of the other* is applied in catechesis, where the child does not merely look at images but internalizes the identity of a "disciple of Christ" through visual imagination.

In greater depth, Mead distinguishes between the concepts of the "I" and the "Me" in the formation of the self. The "I" represents the spontaneous and creative side of the individual, while the "Me" is the aspect of the self formed through internalizing the attitudes and expectations of significant others, as well as the "generalized other." In the context of catechesis, catechists, parents, and the parish community function as significant others who shape the child's religious "Me," while the child's "I" emerges when they creatively interpret symbols of faith through the lens of their own cultural experience, as seen in the process of negotiating the meaning of water discussed in the findings section.

Another central concept from Mead is the *significant symbol* a symbol whose meaning is understood similarly by all parties interacting, thereby enabling communication and shared understanding (Halik, 2024). Illustrations in *YOUCAT for Kids* function as significant symbols when they are consistently understood by catechists and children as representations of specific truths of faith. However, on education as a symbolic arena emphasizes that the meaning of a symbol is never static; it is continuously renegotiated through concrete social interaction between educators and learners. Within Children's Catholic Faith Formation at the Palangka Raya Cathedral, this renegotiation occurs when children connect the sacramental symbol of water with their experiences of the Kahayan River (Acin et al., 2026).

The concept of *taking the role of the other* (Mead, 2015) is particularly relevant to the Dialoguing and Participating stages of the Five-Step Model. At these stages, children are invited to imagine themselves in the place of biblical figures, as well as in the position of a modern "disciple of Christ." This role-taking is not merely an imaginative game; it is a social-psychological mechanism that Mead identifies as the foundation for developing self-awareness and moral maturity. When a child imagines being a disciple baptized, healed, or fed miraculously by Jesus in the illustrations of *YOUCAT*, they are practicing

the ability to adopt the perspective of Christ and others simultaneously a practice Mead calls the foundation of a mature social self.

This framework also explains why visual media is considered more effective than verbal lectures alone for Generation Alpha. Images and illustrations provide symbols that are more concrete and cognitively accessible to children, making the interaction between child and symbol more intense and meaningful than listening to verbal narratives. This intense interaction ultimately allows for deeper internalization of faith values into the structure of the child's religious "Me."

It should be noted that Symbolic Interactionism is not without criticism, particularly for its tendency to focus on micro-level interpersonal dynamics and its limited attention to broader social structures such as the institutional authority of the Church or family economic factors. In this study, this limitation is addressed by placing the analysis of child-symbol interaction within a larger structural framework: parish pastoral policies, limitations in catechist training, and the socio-cultural context of the Dayak community. Thus, the meaning constructed by children is understood as the result of interaction shaped and constrained by the surrounding social structures (Halik, 2024).

Accordingly, Mead's framework is not used here as a standalone theory of individual interaction, but rather as a lens to understand how the "definition of the situation" of who Christ is, who a disciple is, and what a sacrament is formed collectively by children, catechists, parents, and visual symbols within an interconnected pastoral process.

As a concrete example: when a child at the Cathedral Parish looks at the image of Jesus washing the disciples' feet in *YOUCAT for Kids*, they do not passively absorb the visual information (YOUCAT Foundation, 2018). Instead, they actively interpret the image through the framework of the "generalized other" formed from their experiences within their Dayak family and community such as the value of *handep*, or mutual cooperation, which is deeply rooted in traditional life. The interaction between the universal symbol (foot-washing as a sign of Christ's humility) and the local framework (the value of communal service) is the core of the symbolic interaction process described by Mead, and serves as a practical example of how this theory operates in daily catechesis (Halik, 2024).

Theory of Faith Development (James Fowler)

Children aged 8–12 years fall into the *Mythic-Literal Faith* stage, where "the power of images" becomes central. Symbols help bridge abstract concepts such as grace or sin into concrete, imaginable forms.

Fowler, J. W. (1981) theory divides human faith development into six stages, beginning with *Primal Faith* in infancy and extending to *Universalizing Faith* in those who reach the highest level of spiritual maturity. Children aged 8–12 the primary subjects of this study are in the second stage: *Mythic-Literal Faith*. At this stage, children begin to construct narratives to interpret their life experiences, but their understanding of religious symbols remains literal and story-centered. They are not yet able to grasp more abstract symbolic meanings, as seen in the *Synthetic-Conventional Faith* stage that emerges during adolescence.

As Fowler emphasizes, the defining characteristic of this stage is the dominance of “the power of images and stories” in shaping a child’s moral and religious framework. Children at this age absorb religious teachings primarily through concrete narratives miracles, parables, and accompanying images far more effectively than through abstract doctrinal explanations. on Christian religious education from Fowler’s perspective, which confirms that faith educators must adapt their teaching methods to the cognitive-religious development of learners, rather than imposing theological explanations that exceed their capacity (Boiliu, 2021).

An important implication of the *Mythic-Literal Faith* stage for catechesis is the need for visual symbols that are clear, concrete, and retellable in the child’s own words. *YOUCAT for Kids* is specifically designed to meet this need through colorful illustrations and simple question-and-answer narratives. However, this study finds that the power of images and stories becomes far more meaningful when connected to cultural symbols familiar to children from early childhood such as rivers, traditional trees, or water vessels in Dayak culture. The encounter between the universal imagery of *YOUCAT* and local cultural symbols strengthens the retention and internalization of faith, as observed in the process of meaning negotiation.

This stage is also marked by the emerging ability to understand reciprocal fairness and loyalty to concrete moral rules. This explains the pastoral outcomes reported by parents such as increased empathy toward others and willingness to share observed after children engage with biblical stories through visual-participatory catechesis. Symbols and narratives understood concretely at this stage tend to be translated directly into actions, without requiring complex abstract reasoning about why such actions are morally good.

It is also important to note that Fowler’s stages are descriptive and developmental, not prescriptive or culturally fixed. His theory was developed from research conducted in individualistic Western societies, while the Dayak community has a strong communal structure of faith, where a child’s religious identity is formed not only through individual psychological stages but also through participation in rituals and collective narratives of the extended family (*betang*) and traditional community. Therefore, this study views the *Mythic-Literal Faith* stage not as an isolated individual phase, but as one that constantly interacts with the communal faith narratives lived by the Dayak Catholic families and communities in Palangka Raya.

The transition from the *Mythic-Literal Faith* stage to the next is not always linear for every child. Some informants approaching age 12 already show early signs of more reflective symbolic thinking for example, asking why two different cultural symbols baptismal water and ritual water can carry parallel spiritual meanings. This aligns with Fowler’s view that boundaries between stages are gradual and overlapping, so catechists must remain sensitive to variations in cognitive-religious readiness among children within the same age group, rather than treating all Children’s Catholic Faith Formation participants uniformly .

The synergy between Fowler’s psychological-individual approach and the communal dimension of Dayak culture represents one of the novel contributions of this research (Boiliu, 2021). Most applications of Fowler’s theory in Indonesia, remain focused on general Christian education without specifically examining its intersection

with local cosmological worldviews something this study addresses within the context of Dayak communities in Central Kalimantan.

Pedagogy of YOUCAT for Kids

YOUCAT for Kids is an adaptation of the official Catechism of the Church, structured in a visual-narrative format designed to encourage active participation through question-and-answer methods and colorful illustrations. This structure aligns with the (*Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2020*), which emphasizes the importance of visual language as a means of evangelization.

Historically, (Fagnant & Patrice, 2020) was first published for adolescents and young adults before being adapted into the children's version, *YOUCAT for Kids*, tailored to the cognitive abilities of elementary school-aged children. Unlike conventional catechisms organized in long narrative form, *YOUCAT for Kids* uses short question-and-answer formats inspired by the Church's classical catechetical method, combined with full-color illustrations on every page so every doctrinal explanation is accompanied by a concrete visual representation.

This pedagogical structure offers three key advantages. First, the question-and-answer format encourages active participation, inviting children to respond before reading the official answer, rather than remaining passive listeners. Second, the colorful illustrations serve as a cognitive bridge that facilitates memory retrieval of faith content, consistent with the principle of generative learning described by (Fiorella, 2023) : learning is most effective when learners actively construct meaning from material, rather than receiving it passively. Third, the language used is adapted to the literacy level of children aged 8–12, allowing complex theological concepts such as grace, sin, and redemption to be simplified without losing the substance of Church teaching.

This visual-participatory approach aligns with the direction of global evangelization policy outlined in (*Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2020*) from the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. This document explicitly highlights the importance of visual and digital languages as tools for evangelization in a society increasingly shaped by images and digital media. For Generation Alpha who grow up with mobile devices and visual content from an early age research (Nggolaon & Supu, 2025). on character formation through digital media confirms that visual and narrative approaches represent both a major pedagogical opportunity and a challenge in shaping the character and faith of children in the digital era.

Despite its strong pedagogical value, *YOUCAT for Kids* remains a product of Western culture, evident in its artistic style, social and cultural settings, and visual idioms. This aesthetic does not always directly align with local contexts such as Dayak culture in Central Kalimantan, requiring active mediation and contextualization from catechists, consistent with models of contextual theology that call for a dynamic dialogue between Gospel content and local culture (Bevans, 2002), as described in the discussion on integrating Dayak water symbolism. Thus, the pedagogy of *YOUCAT for Kids* should be understood not as a final or closed curriculum, but as an open visual-participatory framework that can be enriched through inculturation by local catechists.

From a teaching methodology perspective, the question-and-answer structure of *YOUCAT for Kids* also aligns with findings on integrating visual media into Arabic vocabulary instruction. Their research shows that combining verbal elements (questions, vocabulary) with visual elements (illustrations, color) consistently improves memory retention across learning contexts whether language acquisition or faith education. This cross-disciplinary parallel reinforces the argument that visual-participatory principles are universal enough to be adapted contextually without losing effectiveness (Anwar Abd. Rahman et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the concise, illustration-based format of *YOUCAT for Kids* opens opportunities for further development into digital formats for example, through QR codes linking printed images to short videos, songs, or related animations. This potential is relevant given Generation Alpha's familiarity with technology from early childhood, and provides additional space for catechists to incorporate Dayak visual elements more dynamically such as animations of the Kahayan River flowing toward the cross to complement existing printed illustrations.

On the other hand, overreliance on a single visual resource also carries the risk of limiting perspective, if catechists do not intentionally supplement it with other culturally diverse sources of imagery and narrative. Field observations show that when catechists rely solely on *YOUCAT for Kids* without contextualization, some children tend to view biblical figures as "people from another world," disconnected from their daily lives. This confirms that the effectiveness of *YOUCAT for Kids* depends more on how catechists enrich the material with local references than on the quality of the illustrations themselves.

Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework: Toward Contextual Catechesis

The three frameworks above Mead's Symbolic Interactionism, Fowler's Theory of Faith Development, and the Pedagogy of *YOUCAT for Kids* do not stand in isolation, but rather complement one another to build a unified analytical lens. Mead explains the mechanism through which faith meaning is formed via interaction between child and visual symbol; Fowler explains the developmental capacity of the child to absorb this meaning according to their age; and *YOUCAT for Kids* provides concrete content and format for these processes to take place within the Children's Catholic Faith Formation setting.

These frameworks converge specifically around the concept of "negotiation of meaning," which is the central finding of this research. From Mead's perspective, negotiating meaning is a natural process of symbolic interaction that occurs when the universal symbols of *YOUCAT* encounter the local experiences of children. From Fowler's perspective, this negotiation is possible because children at the *Mythic-Literal Faith* stage actively construct narratives to bridge two different symbolic worlds. And from the pedagogical perspective of *YOUCAT for Kids*, this negotiation is facilitated by its visual-participatory structure, which opens space for interpretation rather than imposing a single rigid meaning.

This synthesis forms the conceptual foundation for the Five-Step Model of Contextual Children's Catholic Faith Formation proposed in the discussion section. The Observing and Listening stages draw from Fowler's principle of "the power of images";

the Dialoguing stage is rooted in Mead's concept of *taking the role of the other*; while the Participating and Living stages operationalize the active participation that defines the pedagogy of *YOUCAT for Kids*, and provide space for catechists to intentionally inculturate Dayak cultural symbols. Thus, the theoretical framework serves not only as a tool for analyzing field data, but also directly shapes the structure of the proposed pastoral model.

In summary, the three frameworks contribute at distinct but interconnected levels: Mead operates at the process level (how meaning is formed); Fowler at the subject level (who interprets and to what capacity); and the pedagogy of *YOUCAT for Kids* at the medium level (what content and format facilitate the process). These three dimensions process, subject, and medium form a three-dimensional analytical framework used to examine field data in the findings and discussion, and provide the basis for each step in the proposed model.

This three-dimensional approach distinguishes this study from previous research on visual catechesis, which typically focuses only on the pedagogical medium without explicitly linking it to the social interaction dynamics of meaning formation or the developmental capacity of the child. By integrating these dimensions, this research aims to offer a more holistic theoretical contribution to the development of visual media-based children's catechesis within local cultural contexts in Indonesia, particularly the Dayak community in Central Kalimantan.

Finally, it must be emphasized that Mead, Fowler, and the pedagogy of *YOUCAT for Kids* are not used here as value-neutral frameworks, but as lenses intentionally directed toward the pastoral goal of the Church: authentic faith formation rooted in local culture. In other words, these theories are positioned as supporting tools for theological-pastoral reflection, not as independent explanations separate from the Church's evangelizing mission. This placement avoids reducing catechesis to merely a psychological or sociological process without sufficient theological content, as this study remains grounded in the objectives of Catholic faith as outlined in *Gravissimum Educationis* and the *Directory for Catechesis*.

The framework described above will be used as an analytical lens in the methodology and findings sections to interpret field data collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002) with Children's Catholic Faith Formation children, catechists, the parish priest, and parents at the Cathedral Parish of Saint Mary, Palangka Raya.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design at the Cathedral Parish of Saint Mary, Palangka Raya. The research subjects consist of 14 informants: Children's Catholic Faith Formation children aged 8–12, the parish priest, the head of the evangelization ministry, catechists, and parents.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and photo-elicitation. In the photo-elicitation process, children were shown illustrations from *YOUCAT for Kids* and asked to explain their meaning from their own perspective. Data analysis used thematic analysis through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify substantial theological themes.

The 14 informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different roles within the Children's Catholic Faith Formation ecosystem: eight children aged 8–12 were chosen based on varying lengths of participation in the program (newcomers to those with more than two years of experience); one parish priest; one head of evangelization; two catechists with different levels of catechetical training; and two parents actively supporting their children's involvement in Children's Catholic Faith Formation and at home. This diversity of perspectives ensures that findings regarding the negotiation of meaning reflect a complete and balanced view, not only from the perspective of the children.

Photo-elicitation sessions were conducted separately from regular Children's Catholic Faith Formation activities, lasting approximately 20–30 minutes per child, to allow them to speak freely without time constraints or influence from peers. Each session was recorded with parental consent and transcribed verbatim before open coding began. To ensure trustworthiness of the data, the study employed source triangulation comparing children's interview responses with direct observations from catechists and parental confirmation of behavior at home. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing initial findings with the head of evangelization and some catechists, to ensure that the researchers' interpretations aligned with the actual conditions observed in the field.

Thematic analysis began with open coding of all interview transcripts and observation notes to identify keywords and initial patterns, followed by axial coding to group these codes into broader categories such as "responses to visual media," "negotiation of cultural symbols," and "affective and behavioral impacts." The final stage selective coding integrated these categories into the core theme of the study: the negotiation of meaning as a form of faith inculturation. All coding was performed manually using classification tables, given the limited volume but rich qualitative nature of the data.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

Methodological Reality in Children's Catholic Faith Formation at Palangka Raya Cathedral

The results show that before the introduction of *YOUCAT for Kids*, Children's Catholic Faith Formation activities were dominated by prayers, songs, and oral storytelling. While these practices were well-established, catechists acknowledged challenges: children were easily bored and found it difficult to maintain focus during long lectures.

Children's Response to Visual Media

When the visual resources of *YOUCAT for Kids* were introduced, a significant shift in engagement occurred. Informant G (age 10) stated that the images helped understand stories of Jesus' miracles more clearly and interestingly than listening alone. Informant D (age 11) noted that attention improved when there were illustrations to examine. This data confirms that visual media enhances the ability of children to absorb faith content, consistent with the cognitive theory of multimedia learning, which holds

that combining images and words strengthens comprehension and retention more effectively than words alone (Mayer, 2001).

Negotiation of Meaning: The Encounter Between Western Symbols and Dayak Culture

A key finding of this research is the process of “negotiation of meaning.” The symbol of “water” in *YOUCAT* depicted in formal sacramental contexts was frequently interpreted by children in Palangka Raya through their experience of rivers as the lifeblood of the Dayak cosmological worldview. Similarly, the concept of “saints” was understood by some children as “spiritual ancestors.” This process is not a theological error, but rather a form of faith inculturation, where children bridge universal teachings with their own local lived experiences.

Concrete Steps for Integrating Dayak Water Symbolism into Catechesis

The findings regarding the negotiation of water symbolism led the research to explore how this process can be translated into intentional pastoral practices, rather than occurring only spontaneously. Based on interviews with the parish priest, evangelization coordinator, and catechists, five specific steps were identified.

Initial Symbolic Mapping: Before each catechetical session, catechists together with traditional leaders and parents identify the meaning of water within the local Dayak cosmology: the Kahayan River as the source of life, the *Tampung Tawar* ritual, or traditional ceremonies involving water as a sign of purification and blessing. This mapping ensures that the negotiation of meaning is grounded in an accurate contextual understanding of the cultural significance of water, before connecting it to the sacramental meaning of baptism in *YOUCAT for Kids*.

Enriching the Observing Stage: Display local images alongside the book’s illustrations such as photographs or sketches of rivers and community life along their banks so children can directly compare the sacramental symbol of water with the water they encounter in daily life. According to Informant K, this visual comparison helps children quickly understand that baptismal water is not merely a liquid, but a sign of new life, just as the river is understood as the source of life for the Dayak community.

Enhancing the Listening Stage: Develop connecting narratives that link the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River to the children’s experiences of rivers in Central Kalimantan. These narratives do not equate the two literally, but place the local river as an entry point to understanding the theological meaning of water as a channel of grace. This approach aligns with the concept of inculturation of local traditions into Catholic teaching, as explored in research on Dayak cosmology and Christian spirituality (Kristeno et al., 2026).

Deepening the Dialoguing Stage: Invite children to share their personal experiences with water whether swimming in rivers, rain, or traditional ceremonies they have witnessed before guiding them to reflect on the meaning of baptism. This process positions the child as an active subject who “takes the role” between their cultural identity and their faith identity, consistent with Mead’s concept of *taking the role of the other*.

Expanding the Participating and Living Stages: Guide children to create visual art that combines baptismal water and Dayak water symbolism such as coloring a drawing of a river flowing toward a cross or participate in role-playing activities such as “crossing the river of life” to reach the family of God. Concrete commitments agreed upon with parents such as protecting river cleanliness or conserving water at home serve as expressions of gratitude for the grace of the sacraments received. Catechists emphasize that these steps require ongoing theological supervision from the parish priest, so that inculturation does not become syncretism the inappropriate mixing of sacramental and traditional meanings.

Pastoral Impact on Faith Formation

Interviews with parents (Informants W.K and A.M) show tangible outcomes beyond the classroom. Children became more diligent in prayer, showed greater empathy toward others (such as the poor), and were more willing to retell Bible stories at home. This confirms that visual-participatory catechesis addresses the affective and behavioral dimensions of faith, not only the cognitive.

Parental Perspectives on Cultural Negotiation in Faith

Beyond impacts on the children themselves, this study also examined how parents respond to the process of cultural negotiation, as it touches on the sensitive intersection between official Church teaching and family cultural heritage.

In general, parental responses were positive and supportive. Informant W.K expressed relief when his child connected the Kahayan River to the meaning of baptism, explaining that it helped the child view the Catholic faith not as something foreign or separate from daily life in Dayak territory. Informant A.M added that he began sharing traditional stories with his child at home after noticing the child’s enthusiasm in linking Children’s Catholic Faith Formation lessons to family cultural experiences.

However, not all parents were entirely without reservations. A small number of parents particularly those with formal catechetical backgrounds raised concerns about whether using the term “spiritual ancestors” to explain “saints” might create theological confusion later in life. This concern shows that the negotiation of cultural meaning is not universally accepted by all families, but varies according to levels of theological understanding and family connection to Dayak traditions.

To address these concerns, the head of evangelization emphasized the importance of open communication between catechists and parents for example, through brief Children’s Catholic Faith Formation parent meetings that explain the purpose and boundaries of the inculturative approach. These gatherings help parents understand that the negotiation of meaning is not an attempt to equate Church teaching with traditional beliefs, but rather a pedagogical method to make the truths of faith more accessible through familiar cultural experiences.

Another outcome reported by parents was strengthened intergenerational communication within families. When children retold Children’s Catholic Faith Formation lessons that included local cultural symbols, parents and grandparents were motivated to explain traditional meanings that had not been discussed explicitly in recent years. Thus, visual-participatory and inculturative catechesis not only forms

children's faith, but also revives family dialogue regarding cultural identity and faith, reinforcing the role of the family as the Church's primary partner in evangelization, as affirmed in the conclusion of this study.

DISCUSSION

Gap Analysis

Researchers identified a discrepancy between the children's needs for visual and interactive learning and the capacity of catechists, who still rely heavily on lectures due to limited resources and training. This gap highlights the need for a more structured and intentional model.

Key Challenges in Implementing the Five-Step Model

Follow-up interviews with Children's Catholic Faith Formation catechists revealed that the greatest challenge in implementing the Five-Step Model is not conceptual, but rather the availability of human resources and supporting facilities at the parish level.

Limited Visual-Pedagogical Competence: Most Children's Catholic Faith Formation catechists are volunteer laypeople who have not received formal training in visual-participatory methods, leading them to revert to familiar one-way lecture styles. Informant P acknowledged that crafting reflective questions for the Dialoguing stage is far more difficult than simply reading stories, as it requires sensitivity to respond spontaneously to children's contributions.

Insufficient Facilities and Learning Materials: Copies of *YOUCAT for Kids* are limited in quantity, while activities in the Participating stage require coloring supplies, role-play props, and adequate space. In parishes with large groups but limited funding and staffing, it is often necessary to shorten the process, with the Living stage frequently omitted due to time constraints.

Theological Risks in Inculturation: Bridging the symbolism of baptismal water with Dayak cosmology, or the concept of saints with the idea of spiritual ancestors, requires solid theological knowledge to ensure that the negotiation of meaning does not devolve into syncretism. Not all catechists have sufficient formal training to make these distinctions accurately, making the guidance of the parish priest critical but often limited due to competing pastoral responsibilities.

Sustained Consistency: Because the Five-Step Model requires more detailed preparation than traditional lectures, some catechists acknowledged applying it only on special occasions, such as feast days, before returning to standard methods during regular weekly sessions. This inconsistency risks limiting the long-term impact on faith formation.

To address these challenges, the study recommends three mitigation strategies: (1) regular training for Children's Catholic Faith Formation catechists on visual pedagogy and foundational principles of liturgical and catechetical inculturation; (2) development of simple guidebooks containing sample reflective questions and participatory activities that can be reused; and (3) establishment of regular coordination meetings between the parish priest and Children's Catholic Faith Formation catechists

to ensure that all cultural adaptations remain within the framework of sound Church teaching.

Designing the Visual-Participatory Catechetical Model

Based on field findings, this study proposes a five-stage catechetical model known as the Five-Step Model of Contextual Children's Catholic Faith Formation:

Observing: Examine illustrations from *YOUCAT for Kids* to spark curiosity and attention.

Listening to the Word: Read relevant Scripture passages using simple, accessible language.

Dialoguing: Engage in reflective discussion, inviting children to connect images and stories to their daily experiences.

Participating: Complete hands-on activities such as coloring, role-playing, or creating visual narratives.

Living the Faith: Make a concrete commitment to act out the lesson at home and in daily life.

This model integrates sociological insights (symbolic interaction) and theological foundations (Church teaching) to create a space where faith is not only taught, but also lived by children.

CONCLUSION

Implementing visual-participatory catechesis using *YOUCAT for Kids* at the Cathedral Parish of Saint Mary, Palangka Raya, has proven effective in increasing interest, participation, and understanding of faith among children. Visual media helps children in the *Mythic-Literal Faith* stage build a strong religious imagination. Although *YOUCAT for Kids* originates from Western culture, with creative guidance from catechists, its symbols can be negotiated and adapted to align with the values of local Dayak culture.

The Church must invest more significantly in training catechists to use visual media systematically and to inculturate faith content appropriately. Collaboration between the Church and family remains the key to ensuring that values learned visually in the parish are translated into acts of love within the wider community.

This study has limitations to note for future research: the data is limited to one parish and a relatively short observation period, so findings regarding cultural negotiation require further testing in other parishes with different ethnic backgrounds. Future research could also develop quantitative assessment tools to measure the long-term impact of the Five-Step Model on faith retention through adolescence, and explore how the model can be replicated in other Catholic communities across Indonesia such as the Batak, Flores, or Minahasa each with their own rich cultural symbols.

Ultimately, this study confirms that effective children's catechesis must simultaneously address three elements: sensitivity to the child's stage of faith development, the power of visual media as a means of evangelization, and respect for the richness of local culture in which the child grows. Sensitivity to developmental stages ensures that content and language remain accessible to the child's cognitive capacity, as Fowler's concept of *Mythic-Literal Faith* reminds us preventing the presentation of

truths beyond their understanding. The power of visual media transforms abstract concepts into living images and narratives, while encouraging active participation rather than passive listening. And respect for local culture confirms that the Catholic faith is not a foreign entity imposed from outside, but a universal truth that can take root and flourish in any cultural soil including Dayak culture in Central Kalimantan.

These three elements are not separate agendas, but rather an interconnected pastoral whole that strengthens one another. Mead's Symbolic Interactionism explains the mechanism of meaning formation; Fowler's Theory of Faith Development explains the readiness of the subject receiving the meaning; and the pedagogy of *YOUCAT for Kids* provides the concrete medium through which the process unfolds. When combined intentionally by attentive and creative catechists, the result is not merely improved cognitive understanding, but the formation of an integrated faith that touches the heart and actions, while nurturing pride in cultural identity. In this way, the Church's goal of forming young Dayak Catholics with strong faith and pride in their cultural roots is not an unrealistic ideal, but a tangible outcome of catechesis designed with theological, psychological, and cultural awareness one that can endure across generations, continuously adapted to the times and places in which it is lived.

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