



The Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Shaping the Character of Students at SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu

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ABSTRACT

Character education has emerged as a central priority in Indonesia's educational landscape, particularly through the implementation of the Character Education Strengthening (PPK) policy. In this context, Christian Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen, PAK) serves a pivotal role in fostering students' moral and ethical development by integrating Christian values with daily practice. This study explores the role of PAK teachers in shaping character at SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu, located in Nias Regency, a region characterized by a predominantly Christian population and rich local cultural traditions. Employing a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive design, the study involved purposively selected participants, including teachers, students, parents, and school administrators. Data were collected through interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that PAK teachers function as role models, facilitators of value-based learning, spiritual mentors, and collaborative partners, effectively integrating Christian ethics with local wisdom such as fanolo golo (prioritizing others), fahasara dödö (humility), and fangöta dödö (kindness). Pedagogical strategies, including biblical storytelling, role-playing, simulations, and community service, engage students cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally, fostering moral reasoning and ethical discernment. Spiritual mentorship through structured worship, reflective guidance, and counseling further strengthens students' moral and spiritual formation. Collaborative engagement with families, churches, and classroom teachers operationalizes a systemic approach to character development, reinforcing alignment across educational contexts. This holistic model demonstrates the transformative potential of culturally contextualized, faith-based, and experiential character education. The study provides practical and theoretical insights for enhancing PAK implementation in elementary schools, emphasizing the necessity of integrating local culture, religious values, and active pedagogy to nurture morally grounded, socially responsible, and culturally aware students.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Character, Students*

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central priority in Indonesia's national education system, as reflected in the Character Education Strengthening (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter, PPK*) policy initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This policy responds to growing concerns regarding moral and ethical degradation among young people in the era of globalization and digitalization. Within this context, Christian Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen, PAK) occupies a strategic position as a subject explicitly tasked with fostering character based on Christian values. Nuhamara (2018) emphasizes that PAK extends beyond the transmission of theological knowledge; it serves as a transformative platform, guiding students to internalize and enact Christian virtues in daily life. The urgency of character formation through religious education is increasingly evident in the digital era, where students are exposed to unfiltered information, shifting societal values, and weakening family institutions as the foundational sources of moral guidance. In this complex landscape, formal educational institutions bear a heightened responsibility to cultivate character. Religious-based character education provides a robust and comprehensive value system, grounded not merely in social consensus but in transcendental beliefs that foster intrinsic motivation for internalizing ethical principles. Such education encourages students to align personal behavior with higher moral standards, enabling resilience in navigating societal pressures.

SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu, located in Nias Regency, North Sumatra, presents a distinctive educational context enriched with unique socio-cultural characteristics. As a region predominantly inhabited by Christians, Nias integrates Christian values with local wisdom in its community life. Telaumbanua and Tuhuteru (2020) highlight the synergy between Christian teachings and the local cultural ethos, noting that traditions such as communal cooperation, reverence for ancestors, and integrated spirituality provide a fertile cultural foundation for implementing value-based character education. These socio-cultural resources can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of PAK by situating ethical instruction within familiar and meaningful community practices. In this setting, PAK teachers serve not only as instructors of religious knowledge but also as agents of character formation, combining Christian principles with the local wisdom of Nias society. This strategic role necessitates a comprehensive understanding of how teachers operationalize their responsibilities and the factors influencing their effectiveness. Siahaan (2017) underscores that the success of religion-based character education heavily depends on teachers' competencies in integrating Christian values into pedagogical approaches that resonate with the students' socio-cultural realities. The discourse on character education in Indonesia has evolved significantly since the launch of the National Character Education Movement in 2010, with various theoretical perspectives and implementation models developed to enhance the effectiveness of character formation across educational levels. Marini (2019) identifies that a holistic approach-integrating values into learning processes, modeling ethical behavior, reinforcing conducive environments, and collaborating with families and communities-proves most effective for elementary students. Within PAK, Kristianto (2019) emphasizes the importance of a transformative approach that addresses not only cognitive dimensions but also the affective and behavioral aspects of students.

Despite growing research on character education in Indonesia, empirical studies specifically examining the role of PAK teachers in shaping character in elementary schools, particularly in socio-culturally distinctive regions like Nias, remain limited. Kristianto (2019) notes the necessity of culturally contextualized approaches, yet there is a scarcity of studies investigating the practical integration of local culture and Christian values in character education. Addressing this research gap is crucial for developing pedagogical strategies that are both culturally sensitive and ethically effective. In response to this gap, the present study aims to: (1) analyze the role of PAK teachers in shaping student character at SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu; (2) identify the strategies employed by PAK teachers in character development; and (3) explore factors influencing the effectiveness of teachers' roles in fostering student character. The findings are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of PAK within elementary character education, particularly in regions with unique socio-cultural contexts such as Nias. By examining the intersection of religious instruction, pedagogical practice, and local cultural values, this study seeks to inform strategies for nurturing morally grounded, socially responsible, and culturally aware students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive method to explore in depth the role of Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen, PAK*) teachers in shaping student character at SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu. The selection of this approach was guided by the need to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena while taking into account the context and perspectives of participants, as emphasized by Creswell and Poth (2018). A qualitative design allows researchers to examine the subjective meanings and interpretations of educational actors within the specific socio-cultural setting of the Nias community, providing rich insights into the processes of character formation. The research setting was SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu, purposively selected based on its status as a public elementary school in a predominantly Christian area and its integration of PAK into the character education curriculum. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure direct involvement with PAK instruction and experience relevant to character education implementation. The study involved two PAK teachers, the school principal, five classroom teachers, ten students from grades 4-6, and five parents. Inclusion criteria for participants included at least two years of experience in the school, active participation in PAK learning activities, and willingness to engage in the research process. Data collection utilized methodological triangulation, including in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for exploring participants' experiences, perspectives, and reflections on character education practices. Participatory observation was conducted across twelve PAK lessons and related extracurricular activities, using a systematic observation instrument designed according to the theoretical framework of PAK-based character education. Document analysis examined lesson plans (RPP), teaching materials, teacher reflection journals, and relevant school policies to complement and contextualize primary data. Data analysis followed the six-

step thematic analysis model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), comprising data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. The analysis was conducted iteratively, with cyclic movement between raw data, codes, and potential themes. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed source and method triangulation, member checking with key participants, and peer debriefing with independent researchers experienced in PAK and character education. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Formal approval was obtained from the Nias District Education Office and the school principal. Informed consent was secured from all adult participants, while parental consent and child assent were obtained for student participants. Participant confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage were fully guaranteed, consistent with ethical principles in educational research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that PAK teachers at SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu play a pivotal role as exemplars of Christian values, manifested in everyday interactions within the school environment. Classroom observations showed that PAK teachers consistently modeled the values they taught, extending their influence beyond formal instruction into informal interactions with students and school staff. The principal emphasized the importance of teacher role modeling as a concrete embodiment of Christian principles, highlighting the consistent demonstration of love, honesty, patience, and integrity. Such behaviors provide students with observable frameworks for internalizing these values directly. The exemplary behavior exhibited by PAK teachers encompasses a broad spectrum of Christian values that are integrated with the local wisdom of the Nias community. Observations revealed the consistent application of cultural values such as *fanolo golo* (prioritizing others), *fahasara dödö* (humility), and *fangöta dödö* (kindness) in pedagogical approaches. Students acknowledged that the influence of teachers' modeling transcends formal learning boundaries. One Grade 6 student reflected, "Our teacher doesn't just talk about loving others; she shows it. She treats every student equally and is always ready to help us with learning or personal issues." This aligns with the view of Nuhamara (2018), who asserts that character formation in PAK is both cognitive and experiential, requiring teachers to live the values they teach. Teacher reflection journals further confirmed that role modeling is a deliberate strategy in character education. One PAK teacher noted that students learn more from observation than from verbal instruction, emphasizing the necessity of consistency between words and actions to establish credibility and effectiveness in shaping students' character. This approach resonates with Bandura's (1977) theory of observational learning, which posits that behavior is acquired not only through direct instruction but also through observing and imitating significant models.

Role as a Facilitator of Value-Based Learning

The study also revealed that PAK teachers serve as facilitators of value-based learning, employing pedagogical strategies designed to actively engage students cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. Analysis of lesson plans (RPPs) and classroom observations indicated that teachers implement a variety of approaches, including biblical narratives,

role-playing, simulations, and community service projects. Biblical storytelling was found to be a central strategy, contextualized to explore character values relevant to students' daily lives. For example, the story of David and Jonathan was used to illustrate loyalty and sacrifice, followed by reflective discussions on authentic friendship and application in school relationships. Such narrative-based instruction demonstrates the transformative potential of PAK beyond cognitive knowledge, fostering students' moral reasoning and ethical discernment. Role-playing and simulations provide experiential learning opportunities, allowing students to practice moral decision-making in controlled scenarios. Observations documented exercises in which students confronted ethical dilemmas, such as finding a lost wallet and choosing a course of action based on honesty. Post-activity reflection sessions encouraged students to analyze their decisions critically, enhancing both moral understanding and self-awareness. Community service projects emerged as another significant component of value-based learning. Teachers initiated activities such as orphanage visits, environmental cleanups, and support programs for disadvantaged students, creating practical opportunities for students to apply Christian values. One teacher explained that active participation in service fosters intrinsic understanding of compassion and responsibility, allowing students to experience the joy of living out Christian ethics. Student interviews confirmed the effectiveness of these approaches. A Grade 5 student stated, *"Visiting the orphanage helped me understand what it really means to share and love others. Now, I help classmates more often when they struggle."*

Role as a Spiritual Mentor

An important dimension of the PAK teacher's role identified in this study is spiritual mentorship, facilitating students' spiritual growth through structured and informal interventions. Observations indicated three primary approaches: regular worship practices, reflective guidance, and values-based counseling. Regular worship sessions, including morning prayers, pre- and post-class devotionals, and weekly school services, were intentionally framed as formative experiences rather than routine rituals. Teachers encouraged students to connect worship with practical moral applications. During one morning service, the teacher facilitated sharing of personal experiences of applying Christian values, illustrating a pedagogical integration of spirituality and ethical formation. Reflective guidance provided students with opportunities to explore and interpret their spiritual experiences. Dedicated reflection sessions allowed students to link daily experiences with Christian principles, supported by teacher-facilitated journaling and discussions. These reflective practices align with Mezirow's (2021) transformative learning theory, emphasizing critical reflection as a mechanism for personal transformation and value internalization. Values-based counseling addressed individual student challenges, offering personal guidance grounded in Christian ethics. Interviews with classroom teachers and parents confirmed the positive impact of such counseling, noting improvements in students' spiritual awareness, moral decision-making, and behavioral consistency outside the school environment. This finding supports Fowler's (1981) model of faith development, highlighting the influence of significant figures on the evolution of students' spiritual and ethical understanding.

Role as a Collaborative Partner

The research highlighted the strategic role of PAK teachers as collaborative partners within the broader educational ecosystem. Documentation of coordination meetings and collaborative programs revealed effective engagement with families, local churches, and classroom teachers, reflecting the implementation of the “three-centered education” concept articulated by Ki Hajar Dewantara and revitalized by Sutiyono (2020). Collaboration with parents included regular meetings, interpersonal communication, and the creation of “Character Journals,” fostering consistency in character education between school and home. Epstein et al. (2018) emphasize that two-way communication, parental involvement in learning, and joint decision-making are critical for effective school-family partnerships. This approach strengthened value internalization by ensuring alignment between educational environments. Partnerships with local churches facilitated alignment of religious instruction, child development programs, and celebration of Christian holidays. Regular meetings between PAK teachers and church leaders ensured curricular coherence and reinforced students’ spiritual and moral formation. These efforts reflect Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (White, 2007), where harmonious interactions across microsystems create conducive mesosystems for character development. Collaboration with classroom teachers further integrated Christian values into holistic learning experiences. The principal noted that PAK teachers function as key catalysts in creating a collaborative character education ecosystem, reinforced by church and family partnerships. Informal interactions and community engagement complemented formal programs, reflecting the high social cohesion characteristic of Nias society and emphasizing collective responsibility for education.

The convergence of teacher role modeling and active value-based learning underscores a holistic approach to character education. Observational learning theory (Bandura, 1977) explains how consistent modeling fosters the internalization of observed behaviors. The “hidden curriculum” concept (Novia, 2019) further elucidates how character formation occurs through daily interactions, cultural norms, and school ethos, beyond formal instruction. Importantly, the integration of Christian values with local wisdom—such as *emulö* (diligence), *fangöta dödü* (kindness), and *fahasara dödü* (humility)—illustrates contextualized PAK, enhancing relevance and meaning for students (Telaumbanua & Tuhuteru, 2020; Sidjabat, 2019). Experiential learning strategies, including biblical narratives, role-playing, and community service, operationalize Kolb’s (2017) experiential learning cycle, ensuring that students cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally engage with moral principles. This holistic integration aligns with Lickona’s (1991) model of character education, incorporating moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Role modeling cultivates affective appreciation for values, while active learning fosters conceptual understanding and practical application. Such an approach addresses critiques of conventional character education that overemphasizes cognition at the expense of affective and behavioral dimensions.

PAK teachers’ spiritual mentorship highlights a dimension unique to faith-based character education. Regular worship, reflective guidance, and values-based counseling foster

spiritual growth and ethical discernment. This approach provides an intrinsic motivational foundation for character development, complementing social and psychological interventions (King, 2007). Spiritual integration into daily school life embodies an integrative theology approach, where faith permeates all aspects of student experience (Sidjabat, 2019). The collaborative role of PAK teachers in engaging parents, churches, and classroom teachers demonstrates a systemic approach to character education. The “*tripusat pendidikan*” model (Ki Hajar Dewantara; Sutiyono, 2020) was effectively operationalized through formal and informal mechanisms, ensuring coherence between school, family, and church environments. Such collaboration reflects the social cohesion and communal responsibility embedded in Nias culture, enhancing the sustainability and impact of character education initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted and pivotal role of PAK teachers at SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu in shaping students’ character within a socio-culturally rich Nias context. PAK teachers function simultaneously as exemplars of Christian values, facilitators of value-based learning, spiritual mentors, and collaborative partners, creating a comprehensive framework for moral and ethical development. Their consistent modeling of virtues such as love, honesty, patience, and integrity provides students with tangible examples of how Christian principles can be lived in daily life. This role modeling, integrated with local Nias wisdom—such as *fanolo golo* (prioritizing others), *fahasara dödö* (humility), and *fangöta dödö* (kindness)—ensures that character education is both culturally relevant and morally grounded. The observation that students internalize values not merely through verbal instruction but by witnessing consistent teacher behavior supports Bandura’s (1977) theory of observational learning and highlights the critical function of educators as behavioral models. As facilitators of learning, PAK teachers employ diverse pedagogical strategies that actively engage students cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. The use of biblical narratives contextualized to students’ lives, role-playing exercises, simulations of moral dilemmas, and community service projects allows learners to experience values directly and reflect on their practical implications. Such experiential approaches operationalize Kolb’s (2017) learning cycle, ensuring that knowledge, emotion, and action converge in character development. Students’ reflections on activities, such as orphanage visits or ethical role-playing, confirm the effectiveness of active learning strategies in fostering internalization of compassion, honesty, and social responsibility. The integration of local cultural norms with Christian ethical frameworks further enhances the relevance, engagement, and sustainability of character formation. The study also highlights the distinctive dimension of spiritual mentorship offered by PAK teachers. Through structured worship practices, reflective guidance, and values-based counseling, students are guided to link daily experiences with Christian teachings, fostering moral discernment and spiritual maturity. This holistic integration of faith into the educational process provides intrinsic motivation and reinforces ethical decision-making beyond external compliance. The approach aligns with Fowler’s (1981) model of faith development and demonstrates the transformative potential of religiously grounded character education. Equally significant is the collaborative function of PAK teachers in establishing systemic partnerships with parents,

churches, and classroom teachers, effectively operationalizing the “*tripusat pendidikan*” concept. Engagement through parent meetings, character journals, church coordination, and informal community interactions ensures alignment between school, family, and community values. This systemic collaboration not only strengthens character internalization but also reflects the communal orientation of Nias society, where education is a shared responsibility. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory provides a useful lens to understand how these interconnections create mesosystems conducive to sustained moral development. In conclusion, the role of PAK teachers at SD Negeri 075046 Lolofitu exemplifies a holistic and contextually responsive model of character education. By integrating role modeling, active pedagogy, spiritual mentorship, and collaborative engagement, they provide a coherent framework that nurtures morally grounded, culturally aware, and socially responsible students. The study reinforces the necessity of culturally contextualized, faith-based, and experiential approaches in character education and offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and communities seeking to enhance the effectiveness of PAK in elementary education. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring longitudinal impacts, comparative studies across diverse cultural settings, and the scalability of integrated pedagogical strategies in broader educational contexts.

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