



## The Exemplary Role of Christian Religious Education and Character-Building Teachers in Shaping the Character of Eleventh-Grade Students SMK Swasta Taman Pendidikan Perdagangan

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### ABSTRACT

*The research method employed is qualitative, utilizing data obtained through phenomenological observation. This approach seeks to understand and interpret lived experiences within the educational environment of Taman Pendidikan Private Vocational High School, located in Bandar Perdagangan District, Simalungun Regency. Data were gathered through direct observation of phenomena occurring in the school setting, followed by systematic analysis and conclusion drawing. The phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the essence of students' behavioral patterns and the moral atmosphere shaped by teacher-student interactions. Several observable phenomena emerged during the study, including students arriving late to school, failing to complete assignments on time, and instances of students engaging in smoking behavior. These patterns reflect a decline in moral discipline and a need for stronger character formation within the school context. Through this lens, the study highlights the significant role of Christian Religious Education and Character-Building teachers in addressing such behavioral challenges. The findings demonstrate that teachers serve not only as educators but also as moral exemplars and mentors, guiding students to internalize values such as responsibility, discipline, and respect. By implementing structured character education programs and consistently modeling virtuous behavior, teachers influence students' moral development in meaningful ways. Ultimately, this research underscores the crucial role of Christian Religious Education and Character Education teachers in shaping the moral and ethical character of eleventh-grade students at Taman Pendidikan Private Vocational High School, emphasizing that effective teaching extends beyond cognitive instruction to the holistic formation of students' personalities and virtues.*

**Keywords:** Exemplary role, Christian Religious, Character Education, teachers

### INTRODUCTION

Becoming a teacher is not merely a matter of possessing professional qualifications or mastering pedagogical techniques; it requires embodying a character worthy of imitation—one that reflects integrity, compassion, and a genuine sense of vocation. For Christian

educators, the ultimate model of such a teacher is Jesus Christ, the Supreme Teacher, whose life and ministry exemplify the highest ideals of teaching and moral leadership. Christ's approach to education was holistic-nurturing not only the intellect but also the heart, spirit, and moral consciousness of His followers. His teaching methods, rooted in love, humility, patience, and wisdom, continue to serve as an enduring paradigm for all who embrace the sacred duty of guiding others toward truth and righteousness. A teacher with strong moral integrity and spiritual grounding influences not only students' academic achievement but also their personal growth and ethical formation. When teachers demonstrate excellence in their calling, students are more likely to develop into individuals of strong character, critical thinking, and compassionate behavior. This relationship between teacher quality and student development underlines that teaching is not merely an occupation—it is a divine vocation. True teaching flows from a calling of the soul, an inner conviction and commitment that surpasses material or external motivation. Without this sense of calling, the teaching profession risks becoming mechanical, devoid of empathy and inspiration. When teachers recognize that their vocation originates from God, their work transcends routine duties and becomes a transformative mission that shapes both hearts and minds. In the reality of daily educational practice, teachers frequently encounter challenges in carrying out their responsibilities. Difficulties may arise from both the teacher and the students. On the students' side, issues such as lack of motivation, behavioral problems, and difficulty adjusting to learning environments often emerge. Some students struggle to concentrate, participate, or compete academically. These problems are not isolated from the teacher's responsibility; rather, they call for self-reflection and professional transformation. Teachers must evaluate their teaching strategies, classroom management, and interpersonal approaches to identify areas that require improvement. A teacher's role extends beyond imparting knowledge; it encompasses mentoring, guiding, and nurturing students to reach their full potential. Teachers must constantly refine their teaching strategies to address students' diverse learning needs. This includes adopting innovative teaching methods, utilizing technology effectively, and creating an engaging classroom environment that promotes critical and reflective thinking. A competent teacher is also a lifelong learner—continually developing professionally, emotionally, and spiritually. Teaching requires humility to keep learning from experiences, colleagues, and students themselves. In the context of Christian Religious Education, this responsibility becomes even deeper. Teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but also witnesses of faith who embody the values they teach. Their behavior, attitudes, and interactions must reflect the love and wisdom of Christ. Jesus Christ Himself provides the ultimate example of a teacher who taught through personal example rather than mere words. His teachings were lived out daily in His compassion for the poor, forgiveness toward sinners, and patience with His disciples. Therefore, Christian teachers are called to reflect these same attributes in their classrooms, demonstrating kindness, understanding, and moral consistency. The Gospel of Matthew 28:19, which commands, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,"* serves as a foundational principle for Christian educators. This verse emphasizes that teaching is not confined to the classroom but extends to the moral and spiritual formation of individuals. Teachers are thus commissioned to shape lives—to help students not only acquire knowledge but also cultivate virtue and faithfulness. Following the example of Christ

means teaching with purpose, humility, and a servant's heart. Teachers must recognize that effective teaching requires emotional intelligence and moral sensitivity. They must discern when students struggle not only academically but emotionally or spiritually. By providing empathy and encouragement, teachers create a safe and nurturing learning environment. Such an environment allows students to feel valued and understood, fostering deeper engagement and motivation to learn. To fulfill this sacred responsibility, teachers must integrate spiritual reflection into their professional practice. Daily prayer, meditation on Scripture, and participation in spiritual fellowship strengthen a teacher's inner life and sustain their sense of calling. These practices help teachers remain steadfast amidst challenges and inspire them to approach every teaching moment as an opportunity to serve God through their students. The calling to teach is a reflection of divine trust. Teachers are entrusted with shaping the next generation—individuals who will carry forward moral integrity, faith, and social responsibility. By emulating the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, teachers become living testimonies of truth, love, and service. The classroom thus becomes not only a space for intellectual growth but also a spiritual sanctuary where values are cultivated, faith is strengthened, and lives are transformed.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it aims to gain a deep understanding of the experiences and perceptions of research subjects regarding phenomena occurring within the educational context, particularly concerning the exemplary role of Christian Religious Education and Character Education teachers in shaping students' moral character. This approach focuses on capturing the lived experiences of both teachers and students in the educational environment of SMK Swasta Taman Pendidikan, located in Bandar Perdagangan District, Simalungun Regency. The observed phenomena include students' tardiness, failure to complete assignments on time, and smoking behavior within the school environment. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to uncover the underlying meanings behind these behaviors, particularly in relation to the moral example set by teachers. The study took place over several months, encompassing multiple stages: initial observation, data collection, analysis, and conclusion. The subjects of the research consisted of eleventh-grade students and teachers of Christian Religious Education and Character Education at the institution. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, targeting individuals deemed to possess relevant and in-depth information about the studied phenomena. These included Christian Religious Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and selected students who exhibited behaviors central to the research focus. Data collection was carried out using several techniques to ensure the validity and richness of the findings. Participant observation was conducted to directly observe students' behaviors in the school setting, particularly concerning punctuality, discipline, and general conduct. This allowed the researcher to gain firsthand insights into how teacher role models influenced student behavior. In-depth interviews were also conducted with teachers and students to explore their perceptions and lived experiences related to teacher exemplarity and its impact on character formation. These interviews helped reveal the relational dynamics between teacher behavior, moral instruction, and student response. Furthermore, documentary analysis was utilized to

complement the observational and interview data. Documents included teachers' daily records, student attendance data, and archives of character education programs implemented by the school. This triangulation of data sources strengthened the study's credibility by allowing cross-verification of findings from multiple perspectives. Through this comprehensive qualitative process, the study sought to illuminate how the moral and spiritual example of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to the development of students' character. By examining the lived experiences and behavioral patterns within the school environment, the research provides a deeper understanding of how teacher modeling serves as a transformative force in guiding students toward moral integrity, discipline, and responsible conduct.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Jesus Christ, in addition to being the Messiah and Savior, is also known as the "Teacher" or literally "the Great One." The term *Rabbi* derives from the Hebrew root word *Rav*, meaning "great" or "distinguished." Within Judaism, *Rabbi* is understood as "teacher," affirming that Jesus was not only a Savior but also a great and eminent Teacher. In the Gospel of Matthew, the title *Rabbi* appears multiple times (Matthew 23:7-8; 26:25, 49), demonstrating that Christ's role as a teacher is deeply embedded in Scripture. A teacher who embodies moral values grounded in the example of Jesus will be able to teach effectively and cultivate high-quality students. According to James M. Cooper, "A teacher requires greater teaching skills than those who are not teachers." Teachers serve as vital figures for students in several ways. First, the teacher as a source of learning—as Siburian notes, Jesus, as *didaskalos* or "teacher," demonstrated a teaching ministry distinguished by endless wisdom and understanding (Matthew 9:11-13). As such, Jesus is recognized as the ultimate source of learning. In classrooms, students often show disinterest or absenteeism when they cannot find a reliable source of learning in their teachers. To become a true source of knowledge, teachers must master the material they teach, communicate it effectively, and provide relevant explanations. The Bible illustrates that Jesus taught with truth and authority, emphasizing the need for teachers to be competent and communicative. Teachers who fail to master their material tend to teach monotonously, avoid student engagement, and ultimately diminish learning outcomes. Second, the teacher as a guide or mentor—according to Lasmaria Lumban Tobing, the role of Christian Religious Education and Character Education teachers is to lead students from darkness into light. Teachers act not only as instructors but also as mentors who help students shape their life goals and moral direction. Like a farmer nurturing crops, teachers guide students patiently, providing care and encouragement without forcing outcomes. Phillip Jensen, referencing Romans 8:28, notes that God works through all things to fulfill His purpose; likewise, teachers must guide students toward personal growth using their talents, potential, and abilities. Effective mentorship requires understanding students' social values, psychological conditions, and individual needs. Motivational teachers inspire creativity, encourage lifelong learning, and prevent students from losing focus or enthusiasm.

### ***Forms of Teaching Strategies***

As Christian Religious Education and Character Education teachers grounded in the moral life of Jesus, educators must use various teaching strategies. Strategy refers to a carefully designed plan for achieving educational goals. According to Wina Sanjaya, strategy is “*a plan of operation for achieving something.*” In education, it represents a structured process of learning activities aimed at success. One strategy is Expository Teaching, modeled after Jesus’ storytelling and verbal explanations. This strategy emphasizes clear communication and structured content delivery. Teachers must define objectives, maintain effective communication, assess student readiness, and ensure continuity of learning beyond the classroom. The Inquiry Strategy encourages critical, analytical, and systematic thinking. It is student-centered and promotes independent problem-solving. Its principles include intellectual development, questioning, interaction, reflective thinking, and openness to exploration. The Contextual Learning Strategy connects lessons to real-life experiences. Students relate classroom material to social realities, encouraging practical reflection and community application. The Cooperative Learning Strategy involves teamwork and shared problem-solving. Through group activities, students learn collaboration, mutual responsibility, and participatory engagement in both school and social contexts. The Problem-Based Learning Strategy presents real-life problems to develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, teaching students to face and resolve challenges constructively. The Foxfire Learning Strategy emphasizes project-based research. Students conduct field studies, such as examining community traditions, and document findings for discussion or publication. Teachers act as mentors, guiding and supervising fieldwork. The PAIKEM Strategy (Active, Innovative, Creative, Effective, and Joyful Learning) integrates engaging methods and media to create a dynamic learning environment that promotes understanding and creativity. Finally, the Thematic Learning Strategy integrates multiple subjects under a single theme, allowing students to connect concepts meaningfully while saving instructional time.

### ***Common Teaching Challenges and Solutions***

Teachers often face obstacles such as differences in student characteristics, limited technological skills, inadequate preparation, lack of interaction, student motivation issues, insufficient learning resources, and failure to model good behavior. These can be addressed through adaptive teaching methods, professional development, careful planning, increased teacher-student communication, motivational techniques, creative resource use, and consistent moral exemplarity. Character refers to a set of attitudes, values, and behaviors reflected in one’s actions and habits, both in communication and daily life. Character formation occurs through personal development shaped by family, social environment, and habitual influences. The findings of this study highlight that teacher exemplarity significantly contributes to students’ moral development. Through character education programs that emphasize discipline, moral reflection, and spiritual formation, teachers play a crucial role in cultivating ethical awareness among students. Consequently, the role of Christian Religious Education and Character Education teachers in shaping the moral character of eleventh-grade students at Taman Pendidikan Private Vocational High School, Bandar Perdagangan, Simalungun Regency, lies in their ability to model Christ-like behavior, guide students toward moral integrity, and inspire them to live according to Christian and ethical values.

## CONCLUSION

As a Christian Religious Education and Character Education teacher, one is called not only to educate but also to live as a follower of Christ, emulating His example as the ultimate teacher during His ministry on earth. A Christian Religious Education teacher must therefore embody a sense of divine calling, demonstrating not merely pedagogical competence but also deep moral integrity and a commitment to serving with sincerity and responsibility. Teaching, in this sense, becomes both a profession and a vocation grounded in Christian ethics and spiritual devotion. Within the educational environment of the Taman Pendidikan Private Vocational School in Bandar Perdagangan District, Simalungun Regency, teachers are expected to fully understand their role as moral and spiritual mentors. They are responsible for addressing various challenges that commonly arise during the teaching and learning process, such as students' lack of discipline, disengagement, and moral indifference. By applying appropriate pedagogical strategies suited to students' needs, teachers can foster an environment that promotes respect, discipline, and compassion. Teachers are encouraged to integrate faith-based values into classroom practices, allowing students not only to acquire academic knowledge but also to develop virtuous character traits aligned with Christian teachings. Through consistent modeling of Christ-like behavior—patience, humility, and love—teachers can profoundly influence students' personal growth and spiritual maturity. Ultimately, the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education lies not only in what is taught but in how teachers exemplify the moral and spiritual principles they seek to instill, shaping the character of eleventh-grade students at SMK Swasta Taman Pendidikan into individuals of faith, integrity, and purpose.

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