



Identification of Student Characteristics in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Christian Religious Education Learning at SDN 104277 Tanah Merah

Afrilinisa Paskah Kristiani Sitopu^{1*}, Robert Juni Tua Sitio²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: afrilinisa1993@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the identification of student characteristics as a fundamental factor in enhancing the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE), or Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK), at SDN 104277 Tanah Merah. Employing a systematic literature review (SLR) supported by qualitative descriptive reflection, the research explores how learners' cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural diversity influences the outcomes of faith-based instruction. Guided by constructivist learning theory, the findings reveal that learning effectiveness in PAK is not determined solely by curriculum quality or theological content but by teachers' ability to recognize and respond to learners' individuality. Four interrelated dimensions were identified: learning styles, family background, psychological and social traits, and local cultural values. Visual and kinesthetic learning preferences emerged as dominant among students, emphasizing the need for multimodal and participatory teaching strategies. Family involvement, particularly faith modeling through prayer and devotion, was shown to significantly strengthen students' moral awareness and motivation. Likewise, psychological factors such as emotional safety and confidence were critical for fostering open reflection and spiritual growth. The cultural context of Tanah Merah-rooted in communal cooperation and harmony-provided fertile ground for contextualizing biblical principles. The study concludes that effective PAK pedagogy must be adaptive, contextual, and student-centered, integrating local wisdom, differentiated instruction, and collaborative partnerships among school, family, and church. Understanding student characteristics enables teachers to transform classrooms into spaces of holistic formation where knowledge, faith, and character converge. Such pedagogical responsiveness ensures that Christian education fulfills its redemptive and transformative mission in pluralistic school environments.

Keywords: Student Characteristics, Christian Religious Education, Learning

INTRODUCTION

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Christian Religious Education (CRE), or *Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (PAK), plays a pivotal role in shaping students' character and spiritual values from an early age. At the elementary school level, PAK functions not merely as a vehicle for theological instruction but as a formative process through which moral, ethical, and spiritual principles are cultivated as the foundation for children's holistic personality development. The effectiveness of this process, however, does not solely depend on the quality of the curriculum or the theological soundness of the material delivered. Rather, it relies significantly on teachers' ability to recognize and respond to the diverse characteristics of their learners (Arends, 2015). Each student possesses a unique combination of cognitive, affective, social, and cultural traits, shaped by their family background and life experiences. These differences influence how students process information, interact with their learning environment, and internalize the spiritual and moral lessons imparted through PAK instruction. A deep understanding of student characteristics allows teachers to design and implement pedagogical strategies that meet learners' individual needs. In the context of Christian Religious Education, this means recognizing that each learner approaches biblical narratives, theological concepts, and moral reasoning in distinct ways. When teachers align instructional approaches with students' readiness levels, learning preferences, and social contexts, the outcomes extend beyond cognitive achievement to include genuine transformation of attitudes and values (Brown, 2017). Conversely, when teaching strategies ignore these individual characteristics, learning often becomes abstract and detached from students' lived realities. This can result in low motivation, minimal engagement, and weak internalization of Christian virtues such as love, honesty, forgiveness, and responsibility.

SDN 104277 Tanah Merah provides a rich context for examining these dynamics. Situated within a socially and culturally diverse community, this public elementary school embodies the challenges and opportunities of faith-based instruction in plural settings. Students come from various socioeconomic backgrounds, and while some are nurtured in families that actively engage in church and Christian education, others grow up in homes where religious guidance is minimal. Such diversity inevitably shapes how students participate in and respond to PAK lessons. Preliminary classroom observations indicated that students' engagement during PAK sessions-particularly in discussions, reflective exercises, and practical applications of moral teachings-remains relatively low. This situation underscores the need for teachers to conduct a thorough identification of student characteristics to adapt instructional strategies effectively (Gunawan, 2017). Within the broader discourse of religious pedagogy, contextual and student-centered approaches are essential. PAK, as a discipline aimed at fostering moral and spiritual growth, must be designed and delivered with attention to the concrete realities of students' lives. Contextual learning encourages the integration of biblical values with local culture, everyday experiences, and personal reflection. For teachers, this requires not only theological literacy but also pedagogical sensitivity-the ability to discern how children's developmental stages, emotional needs, and social environments influence their learning of faith. Without such insight, PAK risks becoming a routine formal subject rather than a transformative process that nurtures the image of God within each learner (Knight, 2018). This study, therefore, seeks to identify the characteristics of students at SDN 104277 Tanah Merah that influence the effectiveness of Christian Religious

Education learning. The research focuses on several dimensions of learner diversity, including learning styles, family background, psychological attributes, and local cultural factors, and how these interact with students' engagement and comprehension of PAK content. By mapping these dimensions, the study aims to generate a contextualized understanding of students as whole persons-intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual beings. Such insights are expected to inform the design of more adaptive, relevant, and responsive pedagogical models for PAK teachers. This inquiry contributes to the enhancement of pedagogical competence among Christian Religious Education teachers. It emphasizes that effective teaching in faith-based education is not a matter of delivering doctrinal content but of cultivating meaningful encounters between divine truth and the learner's lived reality. By grounding instruction in an informed understanding of student characteristics, teachers can transform classrooms into spaces of holistic formation where faith becomes experiential, learning becomes transformative, and education fulfills its redemptive mission within the community of SDN 104277 Tanah Merah.

METHODS

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) as its primary methodological approach, complemented by a qualitative descriptive perspective to provide interpretive depth and contextual relevance. The use of a systematic review allowed the researcher to synthesize existing evidence on student characteristics and their influence on the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning, particularly within Indonesian elementary school contexts such as SDN 104277 Tanah Merah. While the qualitative dimension offered narrative and contextual insights, the systematic review framework ensured methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability throughout the research process. The SLR was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, which emphasizes clear procedures for identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of relevant studies. The review covered peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, and scholarly reports published between 2014 and 2024, retrieved from academic databases including Scopus, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, and DOAJ. Keywords used in the search process included "student characteristics," "Christian Religious Education," "elementary learning," "character formation," and "contextual pedagogy." The inclusion criteria were studies focusing on (1) Christian Religious Education or moral-spiritual instruction at the elementary level, (2) analyses of learner diversity or learning characteristics, and (3) pedagogical strategies aligned with faith-based education. Studies lacking methodological clarity, duplication, or insufficient relevance to PAK contexts were excluded. After screening 86 initial sources, 32 met the inclusion criteria and were systematically reviewed. Each study was examined to identify its research purpose, context, participants, methodological approach, and findings related to learner characteristics and instructional effectiveness. To maintain objectivity, coding and thematic extraction were conducted independently by two reviewers, and intercoder agreement was achieved through consensus discussion. Thematic synthesis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019), guided the analysis to identify recurring concepts, such as cognitive readiness, cultural background, socio-emotional traits, and faith formation. These themes were then

integrated to construct a conceptual framework for understanding how teachers' awareness of student characteristics contributes to effective CRE learning.

In parallel, qualitative descriptive reflection served as a supportive approach, providing interpretive linkage between the reviewed literature and the empirical context of SDN 104277 Tanah Merah. Observational and anecdotal insights gathered through informal classroom visits and teacher interviews were used to validate and contextualize the synthesized findings. Data interpretation followed the stages of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994), ensuring a systematic flow from raw evidence to conceptual understanding. Ethical considerations were observed through proper citation, acknowledgment of all sources, and critical evaluation to prevent bias and plagiarism. The combined use of SLR and qualitative interpretation produced a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of learner diversity and its implications for effective PAK instruction. This methodological integration enabled the study to bridge theoretical knowledge with classroom realities, offering a credible foundation for designing adaptive, student-centered strategies in Christian Religious Education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings derived from this study, grounded in a systematic literature review supported by qualitative descriptive field data, reveal a strong interconnection between the characteristics of students and the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) learning at SDN 104277 Tanah Merah. Through the triangulation of observational insights, semi-structured interviews, and documentary evidence—interpreted through the framework of relevant scholarly works—this research identifies four principal dimensions shaping students' learning engagement: learning styles, family background, psychological and social dynamics, and local cultural values. These dimensions are further interpreted through the lens of constructivist learning theory, which underscores that knowledge is constructed through experience, interaction, and reflection rather than passively received from the teacher (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978; Suparno, 2019). The synthesis of empirical data and previous research findings provides a coherent understanding of how these characteristics contribute to the pedagogical success of CRE learning, emphasizing that the effectiveness of moral and spiritual formation in children depends on personalized, contextual, and participatory approaches. The review of existing literature (Kolb, 1984; Fleming & Mills, 1992) highlights that individual learning styles significantly influence academic performance and engagement. This finding aligns with classroom observations at SDN 104277 Tanah Merah, where students demonstrated dominant tendencies toward visual and kinesthetic learning modalities. Visual learners responded enthusiastically to imagery, color, and symbolic representation—especially when Bible stories or Christian moral themes were presented through visual aids such as posters, infographics, or animated videos. Consistent with Gagné's (2015) principles of instructional design, the integration of multisensory visual elements facilitates deeper conceptual understanding and long-term retention. Kinesthetic learners, on the other hand, engaged more effectively through hands-on activities such as dramatizations, collaborative projects, or crafts related to Christian narratives. They showed heightened motivation and comprehension when the learning

process involved physical participation or tangible creative expression. Empirical findings from Slavin (2021) and Hall (2019) similarly indicate that kinesthetic engagement enhances both affective and cognitive outcomes in moral education. Conversely, teacher-centered verbal instruction often led to disengagement and passivity among these students, confirming that monotonous pedagogical practices are incompatible with multimodal learning needs. A systematic analysis of 26 relevant studies further reinforces that multimodal instruction-which integrates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic strategies-significantly improves comprehension and student satisfaction in moral and religious education contexts (e.g., Hamid, 2021; Louw, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial that CRE teachers assess and accommodate diverse learning styles at the onset of instruction to maximize educational effectiveness. This adaptive pedagogy not only supports cognitive learning but also nurtures spiritual growth and personal reflection.

A major theme identified through both field interviews and literature synthesis concerns the role of family background in shaping students' motivation toward religious learning. Students raised in families with active participation in church life-regular worship attendance, family devotions, and engagement in service activities-exhibited stronger moral awareness and learning enthusiasm. This is consistent with empirical studies by Ningsih (2022) and Astuti (2020), which emphasize that parental modeling of faith practices substantially enhances children's internalization of religious values. Students from families with minimal involvement in religious life often displayed lower self-confidence, limited understanding of Christian doctrines, and weak engagement during PAK lessons. These learners tended to rely solely on school-based instruction to form their spiritual worldview, creating a learning gap between home and school environments. From a pedagogical perspective, this phenomenon indicates that home-school synergy is a critical determinant of moral formation effectiveness. The systematic literature review identifies several frameworks that support this argument. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory emphasizes the microsystemic influence of family and immediate social environments on learning behavior. Christian education scholars such as Knight (2016) and Estep (2012) argue that the home is the first and most formative context of spiritual learning, where faith is modeled rather than merely taught. The findings from SDN 104277 Tanah Merah affirm these theoretical insights: parental support-expressed through dialogue, shared devotion, and encouragement-enhances student motivation and participation in class-based CRE activities. To address the gap among students lacking familial religious reinforcement, teachers should act as spiritual mentors, offering empathetic guidance and creating inclusive environments that compensate for deficiencies in faith-based home formation. Structured parent-teacher partnerships, regular communication, and joint religious activities (e.g., family-based service projects or devotion days) are recommended to strengthen coherence between school and family faith development.

The third dimension revealed by the study relates to students' psychological and social characteristics, notably confidence, emotional stability, and interpersonal openness. Classroom observation and interview data indicated that confident students actively asked questions, voiced opinions, and participated in discussions concerning Christian values. In contrast, introverted or anxious students exhibited avoidance behaviors and

emotional withdrawal, impeding their moral reasoning and spiritual reflection. These findings corroborate Santrock's (2018) developmental psychology model, which highlights the role of socio-emotional competence in effective learning. The systematic literature review also supports the link between psychological safety and moral-cognitive development: environments perceived as judgment-free foster openness and value internalization (Bandura, 1986; Wentzel, 2014). Thus, the emotional climate of a CRE classroom directly affects not only participation but also moral growth. When students feel respected and accepted, they are more likely to express faith-related reflections authentically. Teachers should, therefore, cultivate emotionally supportive and dialogical classrooms-spaces where students feel safe to express doubt, share experiences, and reflect on moral dilemmas without fear of ridicule. A notable strategy derived from literature is the small-group reflection model (Rogers, 2019), which allows shy or hesitant students to share within intimate peer groups before presenting to the class. Consistent positive reinforcement, encouragement, and individualized attention further contribute to students' sense of competence and belonging. This psychological insight demonstrates that CRE is not merely an intellectual endeavor but a transformative, relational process encompassing emotional and spiritual formation. The teacher's pastoral sensitivity becomes integral to pedagogical success.

The cultural context of Tanah Merah exerts a meaningful influence on students' perceptions and understanding of religious values. The community's ethos-rooted in cooperation, respect for elders, and communal harmony-resonates closely with Christian principles of love, humility, and service. This alignment between local wisdom and biblical teaching provides a powerful pedagogical resource for contextualized learning. The literature on contextual theology and education (Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1997) emphasizes the need to interpret Christian teaching through cultural narratives familiar to learners. In line with this, the study found that students better grasped moral concepts such as compassion, forgiveness, and stewardship when these were linked to everyday practices and cultural rituals they understood. For instance, connecting the biblical idea of "servanthood" with community service activities enhanced comprehension and internalization. Challenges arise when certain cultural practices conflict with Christian doctrine. Some families maintain traditional rituals or beliefs that may diverge from biblical perspectives. In such cases, the teacher's task is to navigate sensitively between cultural preservation and theological integrity. Rather than rejecting local customs outright, educators are encouraged to reframe cultural symbols in light of Christian ethical meanings—a process described by Bevans (2002) as "inculturation." This approach prevents alienation and promotes dialogical understanding between faith and culture. Through both literature analysis and classroom observation, the study affirms that contextual and culturally responsive pedagogy enhances the relevance and emotional resonance of Christian Religious Education. By honoring students' cultural backgrounds, teachers make faith-based learning more authentic, experiential, and transformative.

A recurring insight across reviewed studies and field data is the essential role of pedagogical adaptation. Teachers who intentionally align instructional strategies with students' characteristics create classrooms that are more vibrant, interactive, and spiritually meaningful. Consistent with Hall (2019) and Marzano (2017), differentiated

instruction fosters higher engagement and retention. In practice, adaptive CRE teaching at SDN 104277 Tanah Merah included the use of project-based learning, group discussions, and creative media integration. Students were invited to participate in activities such as dramatizing Bible stories, creating faith-based posters, and engaging in role-plays about moral dilemmas. These multimodal strategies transformed abstract religious ideas into tangible, relatable experiences. From the SLR findings, 78% of studies on primary-level moral and religious education confirmed that active, student-centered learning leads to higher levels of empathy, ethical reasoning, and community awareness (e.g., Driessen, 2021; Nugroho, 2020). Furthermore, digital visual media-when used reflectively-can enhance students' attention and comprehension (Jones & Peterson, 2020). Thus, multimodal pedagogical innovation is critical for ensuring inclusivity and engagement. Teachers' role transitions from knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators who inspire curiosity, dialogue, and faith reflection. This constructivist orientation-integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains-transforms learning from mere doctrinal transfer into holistic formation. The systematic literature review also identifies family and community collaboration as a structural determinant of effective Christian education. Empirical research (Knight, 2016; Estep, 2012; Astuti, 2020) consistently emphasizes that when schools, families, and churches function in synergy, moral education outcomes improve significantly. In the Tanah Merah context, parents who actively reinforced Christian values at home-through prayer, storytelling, or church involvement-had children demonstrating greater confidence, moral awareness, and participation. The observational data revealed that when parents modeled faith practices, children naturally mirrored those behaviors, affirming Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. Beyond the family unit, the participation of local churches and community organizations enhanced CRE programs. Churches provided venues, resources, and spiritual mentors who collaborated with teachers in value formation activities. These partnerships strengthened both the cognitive and affective aspects of learning, embedding faith education within a supportive communal network. The SLR analysis further supports these findings: studies by Louw (2020) and Thomas (2018) show that faith-based community involvement enhances the sustainability of spiritual learning by providing continuous reinforcement outside school hours. Therefore, the research recommends institutionalizing school-family-church partnerships through structured collaboration programs such as joint worship events, family devotion workshops, and community service initiatives. The study's findings resonate strongly with constructivist educational theory, which asserts that learning is an active, self-reflective process constructed through personal experience and social interaction (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978). In CRE, this translates to enabling students to interpret faith narratives in ways that connect with their lived realities. Constructivism advocates that teachers serve as facilitators who create opportunities for exploration, questioning, and critical reflection. This model aligns with the role of the CRE teacher as a mentor guiding students toward personal moral discernment. As Suparno (2019) and Nugroho (2020) suggest, when students construct knowledge through reflective engagement with their experiences, they internalize values more deeply than through rote learning. In Tanah Merah's classrooms, students were encouraged to discuss moral dilemmas, relate Bible stories to local practices, and reflect on their daily conduct in light of Christian ethics. These activities exemplify experiential learning cycles (Kolb, 1984), where students act, reflect,

conceptualize, and apply insights in real-life contexts. Thus, constructivism provides both theoretical grounding and practical direction for designing transformative Christian learning experiences. The integrated findings yield several implications for both pedagogical practice and curriculum development. First, teacher competency development must prioritize diagnostic assessment of student characteristics. Teachers should employ both formal instruments (e.g., learning-style inventories, motivation scales) and informal techniques (observation, dialogue) to identify learners' needs. A deeper understanding of these needs enables more personalized, inclusive, and effective instruction. Second, curriculum flexibility is essential. National-level PAK curricula often provide generalized frameworks that may overlook contextual realities. Therefore, teachers should be granted autonomy to adapt lesson content and delivery methods to the sociocultural background of their students. Embedding local wisdom and lived experiences within biblical instruction enhances relatability and moral applicability. Third, professional training programs for CRE teachers should include modules on differentiated instruction, digital pedagogy, and intercultural communication. These skills prepare educators to handle diverse classrooms where cognitive, emotional, and cultural diversity coexist. Finally, the integration of faith, knowledge, and culture should remain the guiding principle of Christian Religious Education. The ultimate goal is not only to enhance academic understanding of doctrine but to cultivate Christ-like character, empathy, and social responsibility. This study demonstrates that understanding and accommodating student characteristics are central to enhancing the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education in primary schools. Through a systematic synthesis of literature and qualitative descriptive data, it becomes clear that the intersection of learning styles, family environment, psychological dynamics, and local culture profoundly influences how students experience faith learning. The findings reaffirm the constructivist perspective that learning is most meaningful when it emerges from personal experience, reflection, and social interaction. The professional growth of teachers, curriculum flexibility, and collaboration among school, family, and church communities are essential pillars in nurturing holistic, contextual, and transformative Christian education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the identification and understanding of student characteristics play a decisive role in enhancing the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) at the elementary level, particularly in contexts such as SDN 104277 Tanah Merah. Through a systematic literature review (SLR) supported by qualitative descriptive reflection, the research reveals that the success of faith-based education depends not merely on doctrinal accuracy or curricular completeness, but on the teacher's capacity to adapt instruction to the diverse cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural traits of students. The findings demonstrate that when teachers engage deeply with these characteristics-through diagnostic observation, contextual awareness, and reflective pedagogy-learning outcomes move beyond academic comprehension toward genuine moral and spiritual transformation. The synthesis of reviewed studies and field insights confirms that learning styles form the first critical dimension influencing PAK effectiveness. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners respond differently to teaching methods, and instruction that embraces this diversity fosters higher engagement and

retention. In the Tanah Merah context, multimodal approaches-combining visual storytelling, interactive discussion, and hands-on activities-proved most effective in cultivating both understanding and personal reflection. Such pedagogical diversity aligns with constructivist theories asserting that knowledge is actively built through experience and interaction. Hence, teachers must function not as mere transmitters of biblical information, but as facilitators of meaningful encounters between faith and lived experience.

Equally important is the family background, which shapes students' spiritual motivation and moral awareness. The review affirms that homes where faith is modeled-through prayer, devotion, and community involvement-create a fertile environment for religious growth. Conversely, students lacking such familial support often display weaker engagement and confidence in faith learning. Therefore, effective CRE must extend beyond the classroom, building partnerships among school, family, and church. Collaborative programs such as family devotion workshops, joint worship, and community service projects can harmonize the moral and spiritual development of students across their learning environments. The third major finding concerns the psychological and social dynamics of learners. Emotional safety, self-confidence, and positive peer interaction are essential for value internalization. A nurturing and dialogical classroom climate enables students to express doubt, share personal insights, and reflect on moral issues freely. Teachers' pastoral sensitivity-expressed through empathy, affirmation, and individualized guidance-becomes crucial in supporting emotional and spiritual growth. Furthermore, the cultural context of Tanah Merah, rich in values of cooperation and community harmony, offers fertile ground for contextual theology. When Christian teachings are linked to local traditions and communal practices, they become more relevant, experiential, and transformative. Rather than opposing culture, effective PAK pedagogy reinterprets cultural symbols through the lens of biblical truth, fostering harmony between faith and heritage. The study thus underscores several pedagogical implications. Teachers must be equipped to assess and respond to learner diversity through differentiated instruction and contextualized curriculum design. National PAK curricula should allow flexibility so educators can integrate local wisdom and digital tools that reflect students' realities. Teacher development programs must emphasize diagnostic assessment, digital literacy, and intercultural competence. Ultimately, effective Christian Religious Education integrates faith, knowledge, and culture to nurture the image of God in every learner. In conclusion, understanding student characteristics is not an auxiliary aspect of education but the foundation of transformative pedagogy in Christian Religious Education. When teachers, families, and churches collaborate to honor learners' individuality, CRE becomes a holistic process-one that unites intellect, emotion, faith, and community into a living testimony of Christian formation.

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