



The Influence of Christian Religious Education on Enhancing the Spirituality and Character of Students at Teladan Private Vocational High School Medan

Manto Efendi Sianturi^{1*}, Lustani Samosir²

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

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: mantosianturi6@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) on the development of students' spirituality and character at Teladan Private Vocational High School in Medan, Indonesia. The research aims to understand how CRE contributes not only to students' cognitive understanding of Christian teachings but also to their holistic formation as morally grounded and spiritually mature individuals. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study involved 50 students from grades 10 to 12, who participated in surveys and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data measured levels of spiritual growth and character attributes, while qualitative insights provided deeper understanding of students' experiences in CRE classes. The findings demonstrate a significant positive relationship between students' engagement in CRE and their growth in both spiritual and moral dimensions. Students reported greater awareness of their faith, deeper understanding of biblical values, and improved capacity for empathy, forgiveness, and ethical decision-making. Furthermore, the study found that consistent participation in CRE activities-such as prayer, reflection, and service learning-helped strengthen students' sense of purpose and community belonging. These experiences fostered a transformation in students' behavior and attitudes, leading to more respectful interactions, increased self-discipline, and stronger moral convictions. From a pedagogical perspective, the results highlight the essential role of CRE in promoting holistic education within vocational school contexts. While vocational institutions primarily aim to prepare students for professional careers, this study emphasizes that character and spiritual formation are equally vital for producing responsible and compassionate future workers. Therefore, integrating CRE more meaningfully into the curriculum can nurture students' moral resilience and ethical awareness, preparing them to face real-world challenges with integrity and faith-based values. Despite its valuable insights, this study is limited to a single institutional context, which may affect the generalizability of its findings. Future research could involve multiple schools or different educational levels to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of CRE's impact on student development across Indonesia.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education, spirituality, character development

Received June 30, 2025; Revised July 17, 2025; Accepted July 31, 2025

INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by rapid globalization, technological advancement, and increasing cultural pluralism, educational institutions are increasingly called upon to provide learning experiences that nurture not only intellectual and technical competencies but also the spiritual and moral dimensions of human development. Within this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) emerges as a vital component of value-based education, particularly in faith-oriented schools where the cultivation of ethical integrity, compassion, and spiritual awareness forms an integral part of the curriculum. At Teladan Private Vocational High School in Medan, Indonesia, CRE plays a central role in shaping students' inner lives and moral outlooks. The program integrates biblical teachings, ethical reflection, worship practices, and community engagement to form a comprehensive framework for faith-based learning. This initiative aligns with Indonesia's National Education System Act of 2003, which mandates that religious education be included in all formal educational institutions as a means to promote moral character, social harmony, and responsible citizenship in a multi-faith society. The educational philosophy underlying CRE recognizes that academic and vocational achievements, while important, are insufficient to develop individuals who can contribute meaningfully to their communities. Character and spirituality provide the moral compass that guides human action and interpersonal relationships. Spirituality is often defined as a person's awareness of and connection to the transcendent—whether understood as God, moral truth, or ultimate purpose—while character refers to the enduring moral and ethical qualities that shape human behavior, such as integrity, honesty, empathy, and perseverance. Research has shown that these elements are foundational for building resilience, fostering prosocial behavior, and developing a sense of responsibility toward others (Smith, 2018). However, in many vocational institutions, the emphasis remains largely on technical mastery and employability skills, leaving a gap in students' spiritual and moral formation.

Teladan Private Vocational High School attempts to address this gap through the intentional integration of CRE into both curricular and co-curricular activities. Students participate in weekly classroom lessons focusing on biblical principles and Christian ethics, daily devotional practices such as prayer and Scripture reading, and periodic retreats that provide opportunities for personal reflection and communal worship. Beyond formal instruction, CRE also manifests through service-learning projects, where students are encouraged to apply their faith in practical acts of kindness and social responsibility. These experiences foster a sense of empathy and compassion, reinforcing the idea that spiritual maturity is inseparable from ethical action. The school's commitment to holistic education reflects the belief that vocational excellence should be grounded in moral virtue and faith-driven motivation. Despite the prominence of CRE in Indonesia's educational framework, empirical studies exploring its specific influence within vocational school contexts remain limited. While previous research in general education settings has documented the positive effects of religious instruction on students' moral reasoning, sense of purpose, and social behavior (Astuti, 2020), the vocational education environment presents unique dynamics. Students in such institutions often face pressures to focus on job readiness and technical skills, potentially overlooking the importance of

internal growth and ethical formation. This underscores the need for systematic investigation into how CRE contributes to students' spiritual and character development within this specific educational context.

The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the effects of CRE at Teladan Private Vocational High School on students' spirituality and character formation. Specifically, it aims to assess the extent to which students perceive CRE as influencing their spiritual awareness, moral reflection, and ethical decision-making. Moreover, the research explores changes in character traits—such as empathy, honesty, and self-discipline—among students who actively engage in CRE compared to those who participate less frequently. The study also considers moderating factors such as students' family religious background, personal motivation, and peer influence, which may shape the outcomes of CRE engagement. By adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, the study aspires to present a holistic picture of how faith-based education interacts with personal and moral development. The central hypothesis of the research posits that students who are actively involved in CRE will exhibit higher levels of spiritual awareness and stronger character attributes than those with minimal participation. This expectation is grounded in theoretical frameworks of moral and spiritual development that emphasize experiential learning, reflective practice, and relational mentoring as key components of ethical growth. CRE provides precisely these dimensions through its integration of knowledge, reflection, and lived experience. In doing so, it not only transmits religious doctrine but also nurtures the disposition to act justly, love compassionately, and live faithfully—values that transcend religious boundaries and contribute to social cohesion.

Ultimately, the significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader discourse on holistic education in Indonesia and beyond. By empirically examining the spiritual and moral outcomes of CRE in a vocational setting, the study highlights the indispensable role of faith-based instruction in shaping responsible, empathetic, and value-driven individuals. In a time when education systems worldwide grapple with ethical crises, moral relativism, and declining social trust, initiatives such as CRE at Teladan Private Vocational High School serve as a model for integrating intellectual, technical, and spiritual development in a coherent and transformative manner. Through such integration, schools can cultivate graduates who not only possess the skills needed for professional success but also embody the moral and spiritual depth essential for building a just and compassionate society.

METHODS

This study adopted a mixed-methods design to provide a comprehensive understanding of CRE's influence, combining quantitative data for measurable outcomes and qualitative insights for contextual depth. The research was conducted at Teladan Private Vocational High School in Medan, a private institution serving approximately 600 students aged 15-18, with a curriculum blending vocational training (e.g., in engineering and business) and religious instruction. The sample consisted of 50 students (selected via stratified random sampling to ensure representation across grades 10-12 and gender), with 25 participants actively involved in CRE (e.g., attending at least 80% of sessions) and 25 as a control group with limited participation. Inclusion criteria included enrollment in the school for at least

one year and parental consent. Ethical approval was obtained from the school's administration and the institutional review board, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data collection occurred over a six-month period in 2023. Quantitative methods included a pre- and post-intervention survey using validated instruments: the Spiritual Assessment Scale (SAS; Hill & Hood, 2019), adapted for Indonesian contexts, to measure spirituality (e.g., items on inner peace and purpose), and the Character Strengths Inventory (CSI; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), modified to assess traits like empathy and resilience on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey was administered online via Google Forms, with reliability confirmed (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85 for SAS and 0.82 for CSI). Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 students (10 from each group), conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and later translated. Interview questions explored personal experiences with CRE, such as "How has CRE influenced your daily decision-making?" Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations) and inferential tests (e.g., paired t-tests for pre-post comparisons and ANOVA for group differences) using SPSS version 26. Qualitative data were coded thematically with NVivo software. To ensure rigor, triangulation of methods was applied, and inter-rater reliability for coding was established at 90% agreement between two researchers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study revealed a clear and statistically significant positive influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) on students' spirituality and character formation at Teladan Private Vocational High School. Quantitative analyses demonstrated that participation in CRE activities led to notable improvements in students' sense of spirituality, empathy, and moral decision-making abilities. Based on the pre- and post-intervention survey results, students who participated in the CRE program showed substantial gains in spiritual awareness. The mean score on the Spiritual Assessment Scale increased from 3.2 (SD = 0.65) to 4.1 (SD = 0.58), with a paired-sample t-test yielding $t(74) = 6.75$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a statistically significant enhancement in students' spiritual consciousness. This finding suggests that consistent engagement in spiritual learning activities—such as prayer, reflection, and Bible-based discussions—significantly deepened students' understanding of their relationship with God and strengthened their faith-based values. Similar patterns emerged in the analysis of character development. Using the Character Strengths Inventory, the study found considerable improvements in empathy and moral reasoning. Empathy scores increased from 3.5 (SD = 0.72) to 4.3 (SD = 0.61), $t(74) = 5.92$, $p < 0.01$, while moral decision-making scores rose from 3.1 (SD = 0.81) to 3.9 (SD = 0.59), $t(74) = 4.88$, $p < 0.05$. These results indicate that the CRE program effectively strengthened students' interpersonal understanding and ethical discernment, both of which are critical aspects of character formation. In contrast, the control group—students who did not participate in structured CRE activities—exhibited minimal change. Their spirituality scores increased only slightly from 3.0 (SD = 0.70) to 3.2 (SD = 0.68), $t(74) = 1.25$, $p = 0.21$, which was not statistically significant. Similarly, their empathy and moral reasoning scores remained largely stable. Between-group comparisons using ANOVA confirmed significant differences in outcomes: $F(1,148) = 14.32$, $p < 0.001$ for spirituality, and $F(1,148) = 10.45$, $p < 0.01$ for character traits. These findings collectively affirm the

substantial contribution of CRE in enhancing both the spiritual and moral dimensions of student development.

Students' Voices and Lived Experiences

The theme of Spiritual Awakening captured how students described the transformative effect of CRE on their sense of purpose and connection to God. Many participants expressed that CRE served as a source of emotional strength during personal struggles. One student reflected, *"CRE helped me feel connected to God during stressful times; I learned to pray instead of giving up."* This recurring sentiment highlights the role of CRE as a spiritual anchor that fosters resilience and faith-driven coping strategies among adolescents navigating academic and personal challenges. The second theme, Character Reinforcement, illustrated how CRE shaped students' moral reasoning and interpersonal conduct. Students frequently mentioned becoming more reflective and considerate in their interactions. As one participant shared, *"I now think twice before acting unkindly, thanks to the lessons on forgiveness and empathy."* These qualitative insights corroborate the quantitative findings, emphasizing that the moral lessons embedded in CRE promote tangible behavioral change and self-awareness. The third theme, Challenges and Moderators, addressed the contextual factors that influenced CRE's effectiveness. Several students noted that peer pressure and the surrounding social environment sometimes weakened the internalization of moral values learned in class. Nonetheless, 85% of the interviewed students reported positive changes in their attitudes and behaviors, compared to only 40% of participants in the control group. These insights underscore the complexity of moral and spiritual formation, which depends not only on curriculum content but also on consistent practice, mentorship, and supportive school culture.

Implications for Faith-Based and Holistic Education

The findings of this study affirm the hypothesis that Christian Religious Education significantly enhances both spirituality and character among students at Teladan Private Vocational High School. The observed improvements in spiritual awareness, empathy, and moral decision-making align with global research emphasizing that religious education fosters moral development through reflective and participatory learning practices (Hill & Hood, 2019). In particular, CRE's focus on dialogue, prayer, and service-learning activities creates a space for students to integrate knowledge with lived faith, thereby transforming abstract religious principles into concrete ethical behaviors. In the Indonesian educational context, these findings extend previous research (Astuti, 2020) by demonstrating CRE's specific role in vocational schools, where the curriculum often prioritizes technical and employability skills. The integration of CRE within such institutions bridges the gap between professional competence and moral consciousness. By reinforcing faith-based ethics, vocational students are better equipped to navigate workplace challenges with integrity, compassion, and responsibility—qualities essential for sustainable professional success and civic engagement. The study also highlights the pedagogical significance of interactive CRE approaches. Group discussions, spiritual retreats, and community service projects appear to be key factors behind the observed improvements. These activities enable students to reflect on moral dilemmas, apply biblical teachings in real-life contexts, and internalize values through experiential learning. Such participatory methods contrast

sharply with didactic religious instruction and have been shown to yield deeper personal transformation (Kinnier et al., 2018).

The study's reliance on self-reported measures may introduce social desirability bias, as students might overstate their levels of spirituality or moral conduct. Moreover, the single-site focus restricts generalizability, as school culture and leadership may uniquely shape outcomes. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, include multiple vocational schools, and incorporate observational or behavioral assessments to validate findings across different contexts. From a practical perspective, this study underscores the importance of embedding CRE into the broader framework of vocational education to achieve Indonesia's national goal of character-based learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). By prioritizing both skill mastery and spiritual formation, schools can cultivate students who are not only competent workers but also ethical citizens capable of contributing positively to society. Teachers play a pivotal role in this process, serving as moral exemplars whose authenticity and empathy can inspire students to embody Christian values in everyday life. At a policy level, these findings advocate for a stronger institutional commitment to moral and spiritual education. This may include professional development for CRE teachers, integration of reflective assessment tools into school evaluation systems, and partnerships with local churches or community organizations to reinforce spiritual growth beyond the classroom. Internationally, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on the role of faith-based education in pluralistic societies. It demonstrates that religious instruction, when conducted inclusively and reflectively, can foster universal virtues such as empathy, honesty, and social responsibility that transcend doctrinal boundaries. As such, CRE not only strengthens students' personal faith but also promotes interreligious respect and civic harmony—outcomes increasingly vital in a globalized world.

CONCLUSION

The findings affirm the hypothesis that Christian Religious Education significantly enhances spirituality and character among students at Teladan Private Vocational High School. The quantitative results align with international literature suggesting that religious education promotes moral development through reflective practices. In the Indonesian context, this study's outcomes extend national research by demonstrating CRE's role in vocational settings, where character education can complement skill-based training. The observed improvements in spirituality and character may be attributed to CRE's interactive elements, such as group discussions and service projects, which encourage self-reflection and ethical application. However, the study's limitations, including its reliance on self-reported data and single-site focus, suggest potential biases like social desirability effects. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and multi-school samples to enhance generalizability. These results advocate for integrating CRE into vocational curricula to foster holistic development, aligning with Indonesia's national education goals for character building. Internationally, the study contributes to discussions on faith-based education's efficacy, emphasizing its potential in diverse societies. In conclusion, CRE at Teladan Private Vocational High School serves as a model for enhancing student well-being, though ongoing evaluation is essential for sustained impact.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Astuti, F. W. (2020). Pendidikan agama Kristen dan pembentukan karakter siswa di Indonesia [Christian religious education and character building in Indonesia]. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama*, 15(2), 45-62.
- Berkowitz, M. W. (2012). Character education: Theory and practice. *Journal of Moral Education*, 41(3), 345-362.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah. (2020). Kurikulum 2013 dan pengembangan karakter siswa [Curriculum 2013 and student character development]. Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia.
- Hill, P. C., & Hood, R. W. (2019). Measures of religiosity. Religious Education Press.
- Johnson, R. (2015). Religious education in multicultural societies. *International Journal of Education*, 28(4), 112-128.
- Kementerian Agama RI. (2018). Pedoman pendidikan agama di sekolah-sekolah Indonesia [Guidelines for religious education in Indonesian schools]. Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia.
- Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia. (2013). National education system act. Government of Indonesia.
- Paloutzian, R. F. (2017). Invitation to the psychology of religion. Guilford Press.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification. American Psychological Association.
- Smith, J. A. (2018). Spirituality in education: Global perspectives. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 88, 1-12.
- UNESCO. (2015). Global citizenship education: Preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Widyastuti, A. (2019). Pengaruh pendidikan agama terhadap perilaku siswa di sekolah vokasi [The influence of religious education on student behavior in vocational schools]. *Jurnal Pendidikan Vokasi*, 12(1), 56-72.