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The Assertiveness of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Guiding Students at SDN 07 Pangakatan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the assertiveness of Christian Religious Education teachers in guiding students at SDN 07 Pangakatan. Assertiveness is a crucial interpersonal skill that enables teachers to communicate effectively, establish boundaries, and provide guidance while respecting students' rights and dignity. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research involved two Christian Religious Education teachers and 30 students from grades 4-6. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that teachers demonstrate assertiveness through clear communication, active listening, fair discipline, and balanced guidance that respects individual differences. Teachers employ assertive techniques including direct verbal expression, consistent behavioral expectations, empathetic responses, and collaborative problem-solving. However, challenges remain in managing diverse student needs, limited teaching time, and varying levels of family support. The study concludes that assertiveness significantly contributes to effective religious education by fostering positive teacher-student relationships, promoting moral development, and creating a supportive learning environment. Recommendations include professional development programs on assertiveness training, institutional support for religious education, and enhanced collaboration between teachers and parents.

Keywords: *Assertiveness, Christian religious education, teacher guidance*

Introduction

Religious education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' moral and spiritual development within the Indonesian educational system. Christian Religious Education, as mandated by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, aims to develop students' faith, moral character, and ethical values (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2003). The effectiveness of religious education significantly depends on teachers' ability to guide students through assertive communication and interpersonal skills. Assertiveness represents a communication style characterized by honest, direct, and appropriate expression of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs while respecting others'

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rights and dignity (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). In educational contexts, teacher assertiveness influences classroom management, student engagement, and the overall learning atmosphere (Çetin & Bozoğlu, 2018). Assertive teachers can establish clear expectations, provide constructive feedback, and create supportive environments conducive to learning. Public elementary schools typically allocate limited time for religious instruction, and teachers often manage students from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of religious understanding. SDN 07 Pangakatan, located in a culturally diverse community, provides Christian Religious Education to students as part of the national curriculum. Preliminary observations indicated that teachers face challenges in effectively guiding students due to limited instructional time, diverse student needs, and the complexity of conveying religious concepts to young learners. Understanding how teachers exercise assertiveness in this context can provide valuable insights for improving religious education quality. The research questions guiding this study are: (1) How do Christian Religious Education teachers demonstrate assertiveness in guiding students at SDN 07 Pangakatan? (2) What assertive techniques do teachers employ in religious education instruction? (3) What challenges do teachers face in exercising assertiveness, and how do they address these challenges?

This study aims to describe the assertiveness of Christian Religious Education teachers in guiding students, identify assertive techniques employed in teaching, and explore challenges and solutions in implementing assertive guidance. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of effective teaching practices in religious education and inform professional development programs for religious education teachers.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the assertiveness of Christian Religious Education teachers in depth. The qualitative method was chosen to capture the nuanced experiences, perspectives, and practices of teachers in their natural educational setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted at SDN 07 Pangakatan, a public elementary school located in Pangakatan District. The school serves approximately 180 students from grades 1-6, with Christian students comprising approximately 25% of the total student population. Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. The study involved two Christian Religious Education teachers who have taught at the school for more than three years, ensuring they possess substantial experience and familiarity with the school context. Additionally, 30 students from grades 4-6 who receive Christian Religious Education instruction were included as secondary participants to provide perspectives on teacher assertiveness. Data were collected through three primary methods in-depth interviews were conducted with the two Christian Religious Education teachers to explore their understanding of assertiveness, teaching practices, guidance strategies, and challenges encountered. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Six observation sessions were conducted during Christian Religious Education classes to observe teacher-student interactions, communication patterns, guidance techniques, and classroom management strategies. Observation field notes documented verbal and non-verbal behaviors demonstrating assertiveness.

Relevant documents including lesson plans, student assessment records, and school policies regarding religious education were examined to provide contextual understanding and triangulate findings. Data analysis followed Creswell's (2018) interactive model, involving several stages: (1) data organization and preparation, including transcription of interviews and organization of field notes; (2) initial reading to obtain general understanding; (3) coding process to identify themes and patterns related to teacher assertiveness; (4) theme development through grouping related codes; (5) interpretation and description of findings; and (6) validation through member checking and triangulation. Ethical approval was obtained from the school principal, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participant confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of data sources, member checking with participants, prolonged engagement in the field, and reflexivity regarding researcher biases.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Both teachers consistently employed clear, direct language when conveying religious concepts, behavioral expectations, and feedback. Teacher A stated, "I always explain clearly what I expect from students during prayer time and when discussing Biblical stories. I use simple words they can understand, and I'm direct about what behaviors are acceptable." Observations confirmed that teachers articulated instructions explicitly, avoiding ambiguous language that might confuse students. Teachers also demonstrated assertiveness by expressing their own thoughts and feelings openly. When students exhibited disruptive behavior, teachers communicated their concerns directly: "When you talk during prayer, it makes me feel that you're not showing respect for this sacred moment, and it disturbs your friends who want to pray." Assertiveness was manifested not only through speaking but also through attentive listening. Teachers allocated time for students to share their thoughts, questions, and concerns about religious topics. Teacher B explained, "Understanding where students are coming from—their family situations, their questions about God—helps me guide them more effectively. I listen first before responding." Observations revealed that teachers maintained eye contact, used affirming verbal responses ("I understand," "That's a good question"), and paraphrased students' statements to ensure understanding. This empathetic approach demonstrated respect for students' perspectives while maintaining the teacher's authority to guide. Teachers established clear boundaries regarding behavioral expectations during religious education classes. These boundaries included respectful language, attentive listening during prayers, and appropriate participation in discussions. Teacher A noted, "I tell students from the first meeting that we have certain rules during religion class—we speak respectfully about God and each other, and we don't mock anyone's questions or beliefs." Importantly, teachers enforced boundaries consistently and fairly without aggression or passivity. When students violated expectations, teachers addressed the behavior calmly but firmly, explaining the consequences and connecting the correction to religious values such as respect and love. Teachers demonstrated assertiveness by providing guidance that balanced directiveness with student autonomy. While teaching core Christian principles non-negotiably, teachers allowed students to explore personal interpretations and applications. Teacher B stated, "I teach them what the Bible says clearly, but I also

encourage them to think about how these teachings apply to their daily lives. I don't force one interpretation on everything." This balanced approach enabled teachers to guide moral and spiritual development assertively without being authoritarian, fostering students' critical thinking and personal faith development.

Assertive Techniques in Religious Education Instruction

Teachers frequently used "I" statements to express expectations, feelings, and feedback without blaming students. Examples included: "I need everyone to be quiet during prayer time," "I feel concerned when I see you treating your classmate unkindly," and "I appreciate how you shared your thoughts respectfully." When students tested boundaries or repeatedly exhibited problematic behaviors, teachers calmly repeated their expectations without escalating emotionally. Teacher A demonstrated this when a student repeatedly interrupted: "Please raise your hand... I need you to raise your hand... Remember, we raise our hands before speaking." Rather than imposing solutions unilaterally, teachers engaged students in finding solutions to behavioral or learning challenges. When conflicts arose among students, teachers facilitated discussions: "What could you do differently next time? How can we solve this problem together in a way that honors God's commandment to love one another?" Teachers regularly affirmed positive behaviors and student efforts, reinforcing desired conduct. Observations documented frequent positive statements: "I noticed how patiently you waited your turn," "Your prayer was heartfelt and beautiful," and "Thank you for helping your friend understand the lesson." Teachers demonstrated assertiveness by de-escalating potential conflicts early. When tensions arose, teachers intervened calmly, separated students if necessary, and addressed issues before they intensified, maintaining control without aggression.

Challenges in Exercising Assertiveness and Addressing Strategies

1. **Limited Instructional Time**
   Both teachers identified limited class time (typically two 35-minute sessions weekly) as a significant challenge. Teacher B explained, "With only 70 minutes per week, I struggle to cover content, guide students individually, and address behavioral issues assertively without rushing." Teachers addressed this challenge by prioritizing essential content, using time efficiently, integrating guidance into instruction rather than treating it separately, and communicating with students outside class hours when necessary.
2. **Diverse Student Needs and Backgrounds**
   Students came from families with varying levels of Christian faith commitment, creating challenges in providing appropriate guidance. Some students had strong church backgrounds, while others had minimal religious exposure. Teacher A noted, "Being assertive about certain expectations is difficult when students come from very different places spiritually. I need to adjust my approach without compromising core teachings." Teachers responded by differentiating guidance approaches, beginning with foundational concepts, showing respect for different starting points, and maintaining communication with parents about home religious practices.
3. **Balancing Firmness and Compassion**

Teachers occasionally struggled to maintain assertiveness without appearing harsh, particularly when addressing sensitive topics or repeated misbehavior. Teacher B reflected, "Sometimes I worry that being too firm might push students away from faith rather than drawing them closer." Teachers developed strategies including consistent application of consequences, explaining the reasoning behind rules in religious terms, maintaining warm relationships with students outside disciplinary moments, and seeking mentorship from experienced religious educators. Some families provided minimal support for religious education, undermining teachers' guidance efforts. Teachers addressed this through parent communication, inviting family involvement in religious activities, providing resources for home practice, and acknowledging that they could only influence students during limited school time.

The findings demonstrate that Christian Religious Education teachers at SDN 07 Pangakatan exhibit assertiveness through multifaceted approaches encompassing communication clarity, empathetic listening, boundary-setting, and balanced guidance. These manifestations align with Alberti and Emmons' (2017) conceptualization of assertiveness as honest, direct expression that respects both self and others. The teachers' use of clear, direct communication reflects core assertiveness principles. By articulating expectations explicitly and expressing feelings through "I" statements, teachers model healthy communication while maintaining authority (Bishop, 2013). This approach contrasts with passive communication, which might leave expectations unclear, and aggressive communication, which might dominate or belittle students. In religious education contexts, such clarity is particularly important given the abstract nature of many spiritual concepts that require concrete, understandable explanation for elementary students. Active listening and empathy emerged as crucial components of assertive guidance, supporting research indicating that effective teachers balance directiveness with responsiveness to student needs (Wubbels et al., 2015). In religious education, where students grapple with existential questions and moral dilemmas, empathetic listening enables teachers to understand students' spiritual development stages and provide developmentally appropriate guidance. This finding extends previous research by demonstrating that assertiveness in religious education requires not only confident expression but also receptive understanding. The consistent boundary-setting observed in this study reflects assertiveness research emphasizing the importance of clear behavioral expectations and fair enforcement (Çetin & Bozoğlu, 2018). In religious education, boundaries serve dual purposes: maintaining classroom order and teaching religious values such as respect, self-discipline, and community responsibility. By connecting behavioral expectations to Christian principles, teachers transformed discipline into spiritual teaching, demonstrating how assertiveness can be integrated with educational content rather than existing separately as mere classroom management.

The balanced guidance approach—directive regarding core teachings yet open to personal interpretation—reveals a sophisticated form of assertiveness appropriate to religious education. This balance addresses the tension between transmitting established religious traditions and fostering personal faith development (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008). Teachers' ability to maintain this balance reflects mature assertiveness that respects both the teacher's role as religious authority and students' autonomy as developing moral agents. The assertive techniques employed by teachers—"I" statements, broken record

technique, collaborative problem-solving, and positive assertion—represent evidence-based practices documented in assertiveness training literature (Rakos, 2006). The application of these techniques in religious education contexts demonstrates their versatility across different educational domains. Notably, collaborative problem-solving aligns with Christian pedagogical principles emphasizing community, dialogue, and shared responsibility, suggesting that assertiveness can be culturally and religiously adapted rather than implemented uniformly. Challenges identified in this study—limited time, diverse student needs, balancing firmness with compassion, and limited parental support—reflect broader issues in religious education (Franchi, 2020). The teachers' adaptive strategies demonstrate practical wisdom developed through experience. Their approaches to differentiating guidance, maintaining warmth alongside firmness, and extending communication beyond class time illustrate how assertiveness requires flexibility and contextual sensitivity rather than rigid application of techniques. The study's findings have several implications. First, assertiveness training should be incorporated into professional development for religious education teachers, focusing specifically on applications within religious contexts. Second, institutional support, including adequate instructional time and resources, is necessary for teachers to exercise assertiveness effectively. Third, fostering partnerships between teachers and families can enhance the consistency and effectiveness of religious guidance. Limitations of this study include its focus on a single school, small sample size, and potential observer effects during classroom observations. Future research should examine assertiveness across diverse religious education contexts, investigate the relationship between teacher assertiveness and student spiritual development outcomes, and explore how cultural factors influence assertiveness expressions in religious education.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Christian Religious Education teachers at SDN 07 Pangakatan demonstrate assertiveness through clear communication, active listening, consistent boundary-setting, and balanced guidance. Teachers employ specific assertive techniques including "I" statements, broken record technique, collaborative problem-solving, and positive assertion to guide students effectively. Despite challenges related to limited time, diverse student needs, and varying family support, teachers develop adaptive strategies to maintain assertiveness while respecting students' developmental stages and individual differences. Assertiveness emerges as a critical competency for religious education teachers, enabling them to communicate expectations clearly, establish supportive learning environments, model healthy interpersonal skills, and guide moral and spiritual development effectively. The integration of assertiveness with religious pedagogical principles demonstrates that effective religious education requires not only theological knowledge but also sophisticated interpersonal skills. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that assertiveness is not merely a communication technique but a comprehensive approach to religious education that honors both the teacher's responsibility to guide and the student's dignity as a developing person. By cultivating assertiveness, Christian Religious Education teachers can fulfill their calling to nurture students' spiritual growth while modeling the respect, love, and integrity central to Christian faith.

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