



The Use of Church Music in School Worship for the Spiritual Development of Students at SD Negeri 030419 Panggegean - Pakpak Bharat Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation and impact of church music in school worship activities on the spiritual development of students at SD Negeri 030419 Panggegean, Pakpak Bharat Regency. The research aims to analyze how church music serves as a medium for fostering spiritual growth, moral values, and religious understanding among elementary school students. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observations, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation analysis over a three-month period. The findings reveal that church music significantly contributes to students' spiritual development through three main dimensions: enhancing religious knowledge and biblical understanding, cultivating moral and ethical values, and strengthening emotional and spiritual connections with faith. Students demonstrated increased engagement in worship activities, improved understanding of Christian teachings, and enhanced expression of spiritual values in daily behavior. The study concludes that church music serves as an effective pedagogical tool for holistic spiritual formation in elementary education, integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning. Recommendations include curriculum integration, teacher training in sacred music pedagogy, and community collaboration to optimize the spiritual development program.

Keywords: Church music, school, worship, spiritual development

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual development constitutes an essential component of holistic education, particularly in elementary schools where foundational values and character formation are established. In the Indonesian educational context, spiritual development is explicitly mandated through the national curriculum framework, which emphasizes the integration of religious and moral education across all learning activities. SD Negeri 030419 Panggegean, located in Pakpak Bharat Regency, North Sumatra, serves a predominantly Christian community where church music has become an integral element of daily worship activities. Church music, characterized by hymns, gospel songs, and spiritual compositions, represents more than mere musical expression; it functions as a vehicle for transmitting religious teachings, fostering communal identity, and nurturing spiritual

consciousness. The use of sacred music in educational settings has demonstrated potential for enhancing students' engagement with spiritual concepts while simultaneously developing their aesthetic appreciation and emotional intelligence. However, limited research has examined the specific mechanisms through which church music contributes to spiritual development in Indonesian elementary school contexts. The Pakpak Bharat region maintains strong Christian traditions, with church music deeply embedded in cultural and religious practices. Elementary schools in this area have incorporated worship activities featuring church music as part of their daily routines, yet systematic evaluation of these practices' effectiveness in promoting spiritual development remains scarce. Understanding how church music facilitates spiritual growth can inform pedagogical strategies and curriculum development, ensuring that religious education achieves its intended objectives. This research contributes to educational theory by expanding understanding of music's role in spiritual pedagogy, particularly within Indonesian elementary education contexts. Practically, findings provide guidance for teachers, school administrators, and curriculum developers in designing effective spiritual development programs. The study also offers insights for religious education specialists regarding culturally-responsive approaches to fostering spiritual growth among young learners.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the implementation and impact of church music on students' spiritual development. The qualitative paradigm was selected to enable in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and the contextual factors influencing spiritual formation through musical worship. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 030419 Panggegean, Pakpak Bharat Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia, from August to October 2024. The school serves 156 students from grades 1-6, with 98% identifying as Christian. Participants included 12 students (grades 4-6, aged 9-12 years) selected through purposive sampling based on their active participation in worship activities, 6 teachers responsible for religious education and worship coordination, the school principal, and 4 parents representing the school community. Data analysis followed Creswell's qualitative analysis framework, involving: (1) data organization and preparation through transcription and field note compilation; (2) initial reading to obtain general impressions; (3) coding through identification of meaningful units related to spiritual development dimensions; (4) theme development by grouping related codes into broader categories; (5) interpretation through connection of themes to research questions and theoretical frameworks; and (6) validation through member checking and triangulation across data sources. Trustworthiness was established through: (a) triangulation of data sources and collection methods; (b) prolonged engagement in the research setting; (c) member checking with participants to verify interpretations; (d) thick description to enable transferability assessment; and (e) reflexive journaling to acknowledge researcher positionality and potential biases. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants and parents of student participants. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morning worship at SD Negeri 030419 Panggegean occurs daily from 07:00-07:30, incorporating structured musical elements. The worship program follows a consistent format: opening prayer, congregational singing of 2-3 hymns or gospel songs, scripture reading accompanied by reflective music, sermon or devotional message, and closing song with benediction. Songs are selected from the Batak Christian hymnal (*Buku Ende*), contemporary Indonesian gospel repertoire, and international worship music translated into Indonesian. Musical leadership rotates among trained teachers, with student involvement in leading songs, playing traditional Batak instruments (*tagading*, *sarune*), and serving as worship coordinators. The integration of local Batak musical elements with mainstream church music creates culturally-relevant worship experiences. Students participate in weekly choir rehearsals and learn new songs incorporating theological concepts aligned with curriculum themes. Teachers employ multiple pedagogical strategies to maximize spiritual learning through music. These include lyric analysis where students examine song texts to identify theological concepts and biblical references, creative movement incorporating gestures and actions representing song meanings, contextualization relating song messages to students' daily experiences and moral challenges, and multilingual singing in Indonesian, Batak language, and occasionally English to enhance linguistic and cultural appreciation. One teacher explained: "We don't just sing; we help children understand what they're singing. When we sing 'Bapa Yang Kekal' (Eternal Father), we discuss God's attributes and how this affects how we live. The music becomes a teaching tool, not just entertainment."

Dimensions of Spiritual Development Through Church Music

Church music significantly enhanced students' religious knowledge and biblical literacy. Through repeated exposure to doctrinally-rich lyrics, students internalized theological concepts including God's nature, salvation history, Christian virtues, and biblical narratives. Interview data indicated that students could articulate complex religious ideas learned through songs. A fifth-grade student noted: "I understand about Jesus' sacrifice better through the song 'Di Bukit Golgota' (At Golgotha Hill). The song tells the story with emotion, so I remember it and understand why it's important." Teachers reported that students demonstrated improved scripture memorization when verses were set to music, and they frequently referenced song lyrics when discussing moral issues or biblical stories in class. This suggests that musical encoding facilitates both memorization and comprehension of religious content. Church music cultivation of moral and ethical values emerged as a prominent theme. Songs emphasizing virtues such as love, compassion, honesty, forgiveness, and service to others provided normative frameworks for behavior. Students exhibited increased awareness of moral principles and demonstrated application of these values in peer interactions. Observational data revealed instances of students spontaneously singing worship songs during conflict situations, using music as a coping mechanism and moral reminder. Teachers noted measurable improvements in prosocial behaviors, including increased helpfulness, reduced conflicts, and enhanced empathy. One parent shared: "My daughter now often sings 'Kasih Yesus' (Jesus' Love) at home. She says it reminds her to be kind to her younger brother even when he's annoying."

The song has become her moral compass." The emotional engagement fostered through music appeared to create stronger moral motivation compared to didactic instruction alone, suggesting that affective involvement enhances ethical formation. Church music facilitated personal spiritual experiences and devotional practices. Students reported emotional and spiritual encounters during worship, describing feelings of peace, joy, connection with God, and spiritual renewal. The communal singing experience strengthened collective identity and sense of belonging to a faith community. Music served as a bridge between formal religious education and personal spirituality. Students began incorporating songs into private devotions, with 9 of 12 interviewed students reporting that they sang church songs during personal prayer times at home. This transfer of worship practices from school to personal life indicates internalization of spiritual disciplines. The principal observed: "Church music has created a spiritual atmosphere in our school. You can hear students humming hymns during break time, in the library, even while doing homework. It's become part of their spiritual identity, not just a school requirement." Students demonstrated increased attentiveness, enthusiasm, and participation in worship activities, with reduced disruptive behaviors and greater reverence during sacred moments. Students began initiating prayer, singing, and spiritual conversations outside formal worship contexts, suggesting genuine internalization rather than mere compliance. Increased demonstration of Christian values in daily interactions, including forgiveness, sharing, compassion for those in need, and integrity in academic work. Expanded ability to articulate spiritual experiences, theological concepts, and faith questions using language acquired through songs.

Church Music as Spiritual Pedagogy

The cognitive-religious dimension findings support the concept of "embodied theology," wherein theological understanding is not merely intellectual assent but involves emotional, sensory, and communal dimensions. Church music facilitates theological learning through multiple modalities-auditory, linguistic, kinesthetic, and social-creating stronger neural pathways and deeper comprehension than text-based instruction alone. The repetitive nature of congregational singing enables mastery learning, where repeated exposure to theological concepts in varied musical contexts reinforces understanding and retention. The affective-moral dimension highlights music's unique capacity to engage emotions in moral formation. Neuroscientific research indicates that music activates brain regions associated with emotion, memory, and reward, creating powerful learning states. When moral principles are conveyed through emotionally-engaging music, they become associated with positive affect, increasing motivation for moral behavior. The students' spontaneous use of songs during moral challenges suggests that music creates accessible moral scripts that can be retrieved and applied in relevant situations. The experiential-devotional dimension reflects music's role in facilitating transcendent experiences and personal encounter with the divine. Sacred music creates liminal spaces where ordinary consciousness gives way to spiritual awareness. The communal nature of congregational singing reinforces collective identity and provides emotional support for spiritual exploration. Students' transfer of musical worship practices to personal devotions indicates successful internalization of spiritual disciplines, a primary objective of religious education.

Contextual Factors Influencing Effectiveness

The effectiveness of church music for spiritual development at SD Negeri 030419 Panggegean is mediated by several contextual factors. The cultural congruence between Batak musical traditions and Christian worship creates authenticity and relevance for students, who experience their cultural and religious identities as integrated rather than conflicting. This contrasts with contexts where religious music may feel culturally foreign, potentially reducing engagement and identification. The school's predominantly Christian composition creates religious homogeneity that facilitates open spiritual expression without fear of judgment or marginalization. However, this raises important questions about religious pluralism in Indonesian education. While the current study focuses on a Christian majority context, principles derived from this research must be adapted thoughtfully in religiously diverse settings to ensure inclusivity and respect for all faith traditions. Teacher commitment and competency significantly influence program outcomes. Teachers who possess both musical skills and theological depth can facilitate meaningful spiritual reflection, while those lacking these competencies may reduce worship to rote ritual. This underscores the importance of professional development in sacred music pedagogy for religious educators. This study contributes to spiritual development theory by demonstrating music's role as a developmental catalyst. Traditional models of spiritual development emphasize cognitive progression through stages of faith understanding. However, this research suggests that affective and experiential pathways, particularly those facilitated through music, may be equally or more important for spiritual formation in childhood. Music appears to bypass cognitive barriers that may impede spiritual understanding, enabling young children to access spiritual realities through intuitive, emotional, and sensory channels. The findings also highlight the communal dimension of spiritual development. Students' spiritual growth occurred not in isolation but through participation in a worshipping community where shared musical experiences created bonds of belonging and mutual support. This aligns with sociocultural learning theories emphasizing the social construction of knowledge and identity. Spiritual development, from this perspective, is not merely individual maturation but apprenticeship into a community's spiritual practices and wisdom traditions. This study's limitations include its qualitative design limiting generalizability, the relatively short observation period potentially missing long-term developmental patterns, focus on a single school context, and reliance on self-reported and observed behaviors rather than standardized spiritual development measures. Future research could employ longitudinal designs tracking spiritual development over multiple years, comparative studies examining different approaches to music-based spiritual education, quantitative assessment using validated spiritual development instruments, and investigation of church music's role in religiously diverse school contexts.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that church music constitutes an effective medium for fostering spiritual development among elementary school students at SD Negeri 030419 Panggegean, Pakpak Bharat Regency. The implementation of church music in daily worship activities facilitates spiritual growth across cognitive-religious, affective-moral,

and experiential-devotional dimensions. Students exhibit enhanced religious knowledge, strengthened moral values, and deeper personal spiritual engagement through regular participation in musical worship. The study reveals that church music's effectiveness derives from its capacity to engage multiple learning modalities simultaneously, creating emotionally resonant experiences that facilitate internalization of spiritual concepts and practices. The integration of local Batak musical traditions with Christian worship creates culturally-relevant spiritual formation experiences that honor students' cultural identities while nurturing their faith development. Challenges including limited resources, teacher competency gaps, and assessment difficulties require systematic attention. However, significant opportunities exist for program enhancement through community collaboration, professional development, curriculum integration, and technology utilization. Schools seeking to optimize spiritual development programs should recognize church music not as peripheral enrichment but as central pedagogy warranting intentional design, skilled implementation, and ongoing evaluation. Ultimately, this research affirms that when thoughtfully implemented, church music serves as more than aesthetic enhancement of worship; it becomes a transformative educational practice cultivating the cognitive, affective, and spiritual capacities essential for holistic human development. As Indonesian education continues emphasizing character and spiritual formation, music-based approaches offer promising pathways for achieving these crucial objectives.

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