



Enhancing Learning Outcomes in Christian Religious Education through a Character-Based Example Method among Students at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the character-based example method in improving student learning outcomes in Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat. The character-based example method is a learning approach that integrates real-life examples with the development of student character. This classroom action research was conducted in two cycles involving 32 eighth-grade students as research subjects. Data were collected through learning outcome tests, observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' learning outcomes, with classical mastery increasing from 43.75% in the pre-cycle to 68.75% in the first cycle and 87.5% in the second cycle. The average class score also improved from 65.78 in the pre-cycle to 75.47 in the first cycle and 83.22 in the second cycle. In addition, there was a notable enhancement in students' character traits, including responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. This study concludes that the implementation of the character-based example method is effective in enhancing both learning outcomes in Christian Religious Education and the formation of positive character traits among students at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, example method, character education, learning outcomes*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is one of the subjects that holds a strategic role in the national education system, particularly in shaping students' character and morality. CRE does not merely aim to transfer knowledge about Christian teachings but, more importantly, seeks to shape students' personalities based on Christian values. These values include love, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, humility, and obedience to God. In the context of Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious national education, CRE serves as an essential medium for forming a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also spiritually and morally mature (Sidjabat, 2019). The implementation of

CRE in various schools continues to face challenges that hinder the achievement of these goals. In many schools, including at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat, the effectiveness of CRE learning has not been fully optimal. This is reflected in the low academic achievements of students and their weak internalization of Christian values that should be manifested in their daily behavior. A preliminary study conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat revealed that, out of 32 eighth-grade students, only 14 students (43.75%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) score of 75. The remaining 18 students (56.25%) were still below the required standard. The class average score was only 65.78, which is considered low and indicates the urgent need for improvement in the CRE learning process.

Beyond academic performance, classroom observations also revealed several critical issues in the implementation of CRE learning. First, students appeared passive during lessons, showing little engagement in discussions, questioning, or reflecting on the material. Second, the teaching methods employed by teachers remained conventional, largely lecture-centered, and failed to actively involve students. Third, the Christian values taught in CRE lessons were not sufficiently reflected in students' behavior outside the classroom. For instance, instances of mocking among peers, a lack of empathy, and minimal mutual respect were still observed. Fourth, the weak connection between CRE content and students' real-life contexts made learning feel irrelevant and less meaningful. These issues highlight the need for innovation in CRE teaching methods. One promising alternative is the character-based example method, which emphasizes the use of concrete examples that students can emulate. Such examples may come from biblical stories, inspiring Christian figures, or real-life practices in modern contexts that embody Christian values. In practice, this method integrates the teaching of character values so that students do not merely understand concepts cognitively but are also motivated to implement them in real actions (Kristianto, 2020). The character-based example method offers several advantages in the context of CRE learning. First, it helps students connect lesson content with their real-life experiences. When students encounter relevant and inspiring examples, they are more likely to understand and internalize the values taught. Second, the method reinforces the internalization of Christian values by providing figures or events that serve as tangible models. Third, this approach fosters moral and spiritual awareness by encouraging students to reflect on their own lives and strive to become better individuals.

Previous studies support the effectiveness of the example method in religious education. Hutapea (2019) found that its application significantly improved students' understanding of CRE material. Similarly, Silitonga (2020) emphasized that character-based learning positively influences the affective domain, particularly in shaping attitudes and behaviors aligned with moral values. These studies demonstrate the strong potential of integrating the example method with character formation to address the challenges of CRE learning in schools. Research specifically examining the implementation of the character-based example method in CRE learning at middle schools—particularly in regions such as Mandrehe Barat—remains limited. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how this method is applied, how it impacts students' learning outcomes, and the extent to which it contributes to character formation in alignment with Christian values. Based on this background, the present study is designed with the following objectives: (1) to describe the implementation of the character-based example method in Christian

Religious Education at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat; (2) to analyze the improvement of students' CRE learning outcomes following the application of this method; and (3) to identify the impact of example-based CRE learning on students' character formation. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of CRE teaching strategies in schools.

This research is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in religious education, particularly regarding effective and contextual learning models. It may also serve as a reference for developing a CRE curriculum that not only emphasizes mastery of subject matter but also holistic personality development. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide guidance for CRE teachers in selecting and applying teaching methods that are relevant to students' needs. Teachers are encouraged to design learning experiences that are inspiring, contextual, and meaningful, thereby enhancing students' motivation to learn and shaping their character in accordance with Christian teachings. The challenges of education in today's fast-paced and complex era demand new approaches that are not only academically effective but also capable of instilling strong life values. In this context, CRE plays a vital role in cultivating goodness as a moral and spiritual foundation for students. By implementing contextual and character-based teaching methods such as the example method, it is hoped that students will not only acquire knowledge but also develop the ability and willingness to live according to the values they have learned. In this way, Christian Religious Education becomes more meaningful and relevant in shaping a generation that is intelligent, virtuous, and God-fearing.

METHODS

This study employs a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which encompasses four main stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This model was chosen because it aligns with the research objective—namely, to directly improve the quality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) through actions carried out in the classroom. The research was conducted over two cycles, with each cycle consisting of two meetings. Each cycle was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the character-based example method in enhancing students' learning outcomes and shaping their character in a measurable and systematic manner. The subjects of this study were 32 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat in the 2024/2025 academic year, comprising 15 male and 17 female students. This class was selected based on preliminary observations that revealed low learning outcomes in CRE and weak application of character values in students' daily lives. The research was carried out at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat, located in West Nias Regency, North Sumatra Province, where all stages of the classroom action research were conducted. Data collection in this study employed several methods: 1) Learning outcome tests, administered at the end of each cycle to measure students' mastery of the material across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. 2) Observation of teacher and student activities during the learning process, including character formation, using observation sheets validated by experts. 3) Interviews with the CRE teacher and several students to explore their responses and perceptions of the teaching method applied. 4) Documentation, such as activity photos, field notes, and other supporting documents to strengthen the validity of the data. The research procedure began with a pre-cycle stage,

which involved problem identification through observation, collection of baseline data, and preparation of research instruments. In Cycle I, the researcher developed lesson plans, prepared the material *“Living by Faith in Society”*, implemented learning using the character-based example method, conducted observations, and reflected on the outcomes. The results of the Cycle I reflection were then used to design improvements for Cycle II, which included revised planning, enhanced implementation strategies, further observations, and a final reflection.

The implementation of the character-based example method was carried out in three phases. In the preparation phase, the teacher selected concrete examples and formulated the character values to be instilled. In the implementation phase, the teacher delivered the material contextually, provided real-life examples, encouraged student analysis, and facilitated group discussions and presentations. In the evaluation phase, the teacher assessed students’ understanding and character development, while also engaging them in reflection. Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive techniques. The success of the study was measured against the following indicators: at least 85% of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criteria (75), a class average score of at least 80, and an increase of at least 3 points in each aspect of character assessment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Description of Initial Condition (Pre-Cycle)

The results of the preliminary study indicated that CRE learning in Grade VIII at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat still relied on conventional methods dominated by lectures and simple question–answer sessions. Based on the initial test administered to 32 students, the class average score was 65.78, with a classical mastery level of only 43.75% (14 students achieved mastery, while 18 students did not). The distribution of student scores in the pre-cycle is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Students’ CRE Scores in the Pre-Cycle

Score Interval	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Category
90–100	2	6.25	Excellent
80–89	5	15.63	Good
75–79	7	21.88	Fair
< 75	18	56.25	Poor
Total	32	100	

The initial observation also revealed that students’ character formation needed further improvement. Out of the four character aspects observed (responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and discipline), most students fell into the “fair” category with an average score of 2.45 on a scale of 4.

Description of Research Findings: Cycle I

In the planning stage, the researcher designed lesson plans with the theme *“Living by Faith in Society”* using the character-based example method. Research instruments were also prepared, including observation sheets for teacher and student activities, character assessment forms, and achievement test items. Cycle I was conducted in two sessions, each allocated 2 × 40 minutes. The learning process applied the character-based example

method, emphasizing the use of concrete examples from daily life related to living faithfully in society. In the first meeting, the teacher discussed the concept of living by faith and provided examples of biblical figures who demonstrated strong faith in their lives. Students engaged in group discussions to identify character values that could be learned from these figures. In the second meeting, the teacher guided students to apply these values in daily life contexts through role-playing activities and reflection. Observations indicated that the teacher implemented learning activities according to the planned steps. Student engagement began to improve, although some students still appeared passive. The learning outcome test in Cycle I showed progress compared to the pre-cycle, with the class average increasing to 75.47 and classical mastery reaching 68.75% (22 students achieved mastery, while 10 students did not). The distribution of student scores in Cycle I is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' CRE Scores in Cycle I

Score Interval	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Category
90–100	4	12.5	Excellent
80–89	10	31.25	Good
75–79	8	25.0	Fair
< 75	10	31.25	Poor
Total	32	100	

Character observation results in Cycle I showed improvement, with an average score of 2.87 on a scale of 4. Details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Student Character Observation Results in Cycle I

Character Aspect	Average Score	Category
Responsibility	2.91	Fair
Honesty	2.84	Fair
Tolerance	3.03	Good
Discipline	2.72	Fair
Average	2.87	Fair

Based on the observations and evaluation in Cycle I, several areas required improvement: (1) examples provided were not sufficiently contextualized to students' lives in Mandrehe Barat; (2) not all students actively participated in group discussions; (3) some students struggled to relate the material to character values; and (4) classical mastery had not reached the success indicator of 85%. Therefore, improvements were planned for Cycle II.

Description of Research Findings: Cycle II

Based on the Cycle I reflection, the researcher revised the lesson plans for Cycle II with several improvements: (1) preparing examples more relevant to students' daily lives in Mandrehe Barat; (2) optimizing the use of visual and audiovisual media; (3) designing more collaborative learning activities; and (4) providing additional support for students who did not achieve mastery in Cycle I. Cycle II was conducted in two sessions with the theme "Developing a Spirit of Solidarity in Society." In the first session, the teacher presented a video about community cooperation (*gotong royong*) in Nias society and facilitated discussions on the Christian values embedded in these practices. Students then

worked in groups to plan a mini-project promoting solidarity within the school environment. In the second session, students presented their project outcomes and reflected on the character values they had learned.

Observations revealed increased student activity during learning. Students appeared more enthusiastic and actively participated in discussions and classroom activities. The learning outcome test in Cycle II showed significant improvement, with the class average reaching 83.22 and classical mastery rising to 87.5% (28 students achieved mastery, while 4 did not). The distribution of student scores in Cycle II is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Students' CRE Scores in Cycle II

Score Interval	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Category
90–100	8	25.0	Excellent
80–89	14	43.75	Good
75–79	6	18.75	Fair
< 75	4	12.5	Poor
Total	32	100	

Character observation results in Cycle II also demonstrated improvement, with an average score of 3.28 on a scale of 4. Details are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Student Character Observation Results in Cycle II

Character Aspect	Average Score	Category
Responsibility	3.34	Good
Honesty	3.22	Good
Tolerance	3.41	Good
Discipline	3.16	Good
Average	3.28	Good

Based on the observations and evaluation in Cycle II, it can be concluded that CRE learning through the character-based example method successfully met the predetermined success indicators. Classical mastery reached 87.5% (exceeding the 85% target), the class average score was 83.22 (surpassing the minimum target of 80), and student character scores reached the "good" category with an average of 3.28. Therefore, the classroom action research was concluded at Cycle II.

Comparison of Results across Cycles

To provide a clearer picture of the improvement in students' learning outcomes and character development, the following presents a comparison of data from the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. In terms of learning outcomes, the highest score increased from 92 in the pre-cycle to 95 in Cycle I and 98 in Cycle II, while the lowest score rose from 45 to 55 and then to 65 across the same cycles. The class average also showed a steady improvement, from 65.78 in the pre-cycle to 75.47 in Cycle I and 83.22 in Cycle II. The number of students achieving mastery increased significantly, from 14 students (43.75%) in the pre-cycle to 22 students (68.75%) in Cycle I, and further to 28 students (87.5%) in Cycle II, while the number of students who had not yet achieved mastery declined accordingly. Similarly, the observation results for character development showed a consistent increase, as illustrated in the comparison of scores across the four observed

aspects—responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and discipline—from the pre-cycle through Cycle I and Cycle II.

Improvement in Christian Religious Education Learning Outcomes through the Character-Based Example Method

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the character-based example method effectively improved the learning outcomes of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat in Christian Religious Education (CRE). This is evidenced by the increase in the class average score from 65.78 in the pre-cycle to 75.47 in Cycle I, and further to 83.22 in Cycle II. Similarly, the percentage of students achieving mastery improved from 43.75% in the pre-cycle to 68.75% in Cycle I, and ultimately reached 87.5% in Cycle II. This improvement is closely linked to the distinctive characteristics of the character-based example method, which emphasizes the use of concrete and contextual examples. By presenting examples that are relevant to students' everyday lives, the learning material became more accessible, meaningful, and easier to internalize. This finding is consistent with Kristianto (2020), who argues that CRE becomes more effective when employing a contextual approach that considers students' backgrounds and experiences. Furthermore, the method fosters active learning, where students are not passive recipients of knowledge but are instead engaged in analysis, group discussion, and reflection. Such active participation positively influences comprehension and retention of the subject matter. Sidjabat (2019) similarly emphasizes that effective CRE requires the active involvement of students in constructing knowledge and internalizing values. The improvement in learning outcomes was also supported by the varied use of instructional media, such as videos, images, and stories, which facilitated students' understanding of abstract concepts. In Cycle II, for instance, the use of a video depicting communal work in Nias provided students with a tangible illustration of Christian values in a local context, thereby enhancing both comprehension and application.

Character Formation through the Character-Based Example Method

Beyond enhancing academic achievement, the implementation of the character-based example method also successfully fostered students' character development. This is reflected in the increase of the average character score from 2.45 in the pre-cycle to 2.87 in Cycle I, and 3.28 in Cycle II, with all four assessed aspects—responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and discipline—reaching the “good” category by Cycle II. The method created opportunities for students to observe, analyze, and internalize character values through the provided examples, resulting in a deeper value-learning process than approaches that focus solely on cognitive aspects. This aligns with Lickona (2012), who contends that effective character education involves three components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. In this study, moral knowledge was fostered through the delivery of information and examples of Christian values; moral feeling was nurtured through discussion and reflection; and moral action was developed through role-playing activities and mini projects. The integration of these three components enabled a more comprehensive internalization of values. Character development was further supported by the implementation of student-centered and collaborative learning strategies. Through group discussions and project-based tasks, students learned to cooperate,

respect differing opinions, and take responsibility for their assigned roles. These experiences indirectly nurtured positive character traits in students.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The success of the character-based example method in CRE was supported by several factors, including: (1) support from the school principal and CRE teacher in facilitating the study; (2) students' enthusiasm in engaging with the new learning method; (3) the availability of instructional media; and (4) the relevance of the learning material to students' real-life contexts. Nonetheless, several challenges were also encountered, such as: (1) the limited instructional time of only two 40-minute periods per week; (2) variations in students' prior abilities; (3) some students' habitual reliance on conventional teaching methods; and (4) the scarcity of learning resources contextualized to the local culture of Mandrehe Barat. To address these obstacles, the study employed several strategies, including: (1) optimizing the use of instructional time through careful planning; (2) providing additional support for students with lower initial abilities; (3) introducing the method gradually to allow adjustment; and (4) developing contextual learning resources relevant to the local culture.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the character-based example method in Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Barat has proven effective in enhancing students' learning outcomes and character development. The implementation process was carried out through three main stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. In the preparation stage, the teacher designed the learning process by preparing concrete examples relevant to the subject matter as well as to the character values to be developed. In the implementation stage, the teacher not only presented the material contextually but also provided examples that students could analyze through group discussions and collective reflection. This process encouraged active student engagement in understanding the connection between CRE content and the application of Christian values in daily life. In the evaluation stage, the teacher assessed students' comprehension of the material as well as the targeted levels of character development.

The results of the study indicate a significant improvement in students' learning outcomes. The average class score increased from 65.78 in the pre-cycle to 75.47 in cycle I and reached 83.22 in cycle II. Similarly, classical learning mastery rose from 43.75% in the pre-cycle to 68.75% in cycle I, and finally achieved 87.5% in cycle II. Beyond academic progress, positive growth was also observed in students' character development, particularly in responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. The average character score improved from 2.45 in the pre-cycle to 2.87 in cycle I, and 3.28 in cycle II. This success was supported by several factors, including the support of the school principal and teachers, students' enthusiasm, the availability of learning media, and the relevance of the subject matter to students' daily lives. Nevertheless, some challenges were encountered, such as limited instructional time, differences in students' initial abilities, conventional learning habits, and restricted access to contextual learning resources.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that CRE teachers apply the character-based example method more broadly by contextualizing the examples provided according to local contexts and students' characteristics. Schools are also expected to support this innovative method by providing adequate learning facilities and training for teachers. Further research may be conducted focusing on more specific aspects of character, other subjects, or different school contexts to broaden the scope of these findings. In addition, CRE curriculum developers are encouraged to take these findings into consideration when designing a more contextual and character-oriented curriculum.

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