



Exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-16 and Its Implications for the Character Formation of Students in Christian Religious Education: A Case Study at UPT SDN 060891 Medan

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ABSTRACT

The integration of biblical exegesis into Christian Religious Education (CRE) represents a vital endeavor for ensuring that teaching is both theologically grounded and pedagogically transformative. This study examines how the exegesis of Ephesians 4:11–16 can inform character formation in a pluralistic primary school context, focusing on UPT SDN 060891 Medan. The research adopts a qualitative case study design that combines exegetical analysis of the biblical text with empirical field data, including classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with CRE teachers and students. The exegetical investigation highlights the fivefold ministry of leaders as equippers of believers, the call to unity and maturity in Christ, the warning against instability, and the imperative of mutual edification in love. Field data reveal that teachers who embody pastoral qualities such as integrity, patience, and empathy are more effective in guiding students toward holistic growth. Classroom practices that integrate biblical values of love, responsibility, and forgiveness foster improved cooperation and respect among students, while dialogical and collaborative approaches enhance both spiritual and social learning. The findings also expose challenges, including limited resources, tension between academic demands and spiritual formation, and the complexities of teaching in a pluralistic environment. Nevertheless, significant opportunities emerge through the alignment of biblical virtues with Indonesia’s national curriculum and the promotion of tolerance alongside Christian identity. The study concludes that exegetically informed pedagogy offers a practical framework for nurturing students who are academically competent, spiritually mature, and socially responsible, thereby bridging theology and education in transformative ways.

Keywords: Exegesis, Ephesians 4:11-16, Character Formation

INTRODUCTION

The integration of biblical exegesis into Christian pedagogy remains a crucial endeavor in contemporary education. Exegesis, understood as the critical interpretation of biblical texts, does not merely serve the purpose of theological enrichment but also provides a framework for guiding pedagogical practices in Christian Religious Education (CRE). The application of exegesis allows educators to move beyond abstract theological concepts toward contextualized teaching that informs students' daily lives and character development. Scholars argue that the biblical text functions as both a source of doctrine and a transformative tool for shaping the ethical and moral values of learners (Wright, 2018). Within this perspective, Christian pedagogy becomes inseparable from the Word of God, as the exegetical process reveals insights that inform how faith is nurtured and transmitted in educational settings (Osmer, 2008). Thus, exegesis is not only an academic exercise but also a pastoral and pedagogical activity that contributes directly to the holistic growth of students. Ephesians 4:11-16 provides a theological foundation that speaks directly to the mission of Christian education. The text emphasizes the role of leaders - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers - in equipping the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. The ultimate goal, according to Paul, is unity of faith, knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity in Christ. This passage highlights both the vocational responsibilities of teachers and the desired outcomes of their ministry, namely, the formation of spiritually mature believers who are no longer tossed about by false teachings but are grounded in truth and love. Exegetical studies suggest that this maturity is not limited to intellectual assent but extends to character and ethical conduct, expressed through mutual edification within the community of faith (Lincoln, 1990). For CRE teachers, this passage provides a mandate to integrate biblical values into the classroom, equipping students not only with cognitive knowledge but also with virtues such as integrity, responsibility, and compassion. In this sense, Ephesians 4:11-16 serves as a foundational text for character-based pedagogy in Christian schools.

The issue of character formation is particularly pressing in the Indonesian context, where education is not only a vehicle for academic achievement but also a means of shaping the moral and spiritual identity of students. Indonesia's national education system explicitly emphasizes the integration of character values, a vision that aligns with the nation's motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). This becomes especially important in urban and pluralistic contexts such as Medan, where students are exposed to diverse cultural, religious, and social influences that shape their worldview (Tilaar, 2012). Schools therefore carry the dual responsibility of transmitting knowledge and fostering values that equip students to navigate pluralism with tolerance while remaining rooted in their faith identity. Christian Religious Education plays a strategic role in this process, as it seeks to instill biblical principles that inform students' ethical decisions and social interactions. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that such education is not limited to rote learning of doctrines but is dynamically connected to biblical exegesis, which provides the theological depth needed to form resilient Christian character. Research that bridges biblical exegesis and practical pedagogy in the field of CRE, particularly at the primary school level, remains limited. Much of the existing literature focuses either on theological

interpretation without educational application or on pedagogical strategies without grounding them in exegetical insights (Groome, 2011). This gap reveals a pressing need for studies that integrate exegetical findings with classroom practices, thereby demonstrating how biblical texts such as Ephesians 4:11-16 can be operationalized within school settings to shape the character of young learners. Primary school students are at a formative stage where character traits are being cultivated, making this integration especially crucial. Without such a connection, there is a risk that Christian education becomes fragmented, reducing exegesis to academic theology and pedagogy to technical instruction, rather than uniting them into a holistic approach to faith formation. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how the exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-16 can inform strategies for student character formation in UPT SDN 060891 Medan, a primary school situated in a pluralistic urban environment. The choice of this locus is significant because it provides a concrete setting where theological insights can be applied to real educational practices, particularly in shaping students' moral and spiritual development. By employing a case study approach, the research aims to generate in-depth understanding of how CRE teachers interpret their role as equippers in line with Ephesians 4:11-16 and how this interpretation translates into pedagogical strategies that foster student character. This study is guided by three research questions: first, what theological insights can be drawn from Ephesians 4:11–16? Second, how do these insights shape the pedagogical practices of CRE teachers in the context of primary education? Third, what implications emerge for the character formation of students at UPT SDN 060891 Medan? By addressing these questions, the study contributes not only to the academic discourse on Christian education but also to the practical field of teaching, offering a model for integrating biblical exegesis with pedagogical strategies in character formation. This approach underscores the conviction that the transformative power of Scripture, when interpreted faithfully and applied contextually, can play a decisive role in nurturing students to grow into mature, Christ-like individuals who embody faith, unity, and love in both school and society.

METHODS

This study employed a biblical exegesis with empirical field data to examine the pedagogical and formative implications of Ephesians 4:11–16 within a contemporary primary school context. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a nuanced exploration of theological insights and their pedagogical applications, particularly in settings where religious, cultural, and educational dynamics intersect (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study framework provided the flexibility to engage both with sacred texts and lived educational practices, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how biblical principles might inform character formation in Christian Religious Education (CRE). The locus of the research was UPT SDN 060891 Medan, an urban primary school situated within the pluralistic environment of Medan, Indonesia. This context was selected because it represents a microcosm of Indonesia's broader social and religious diversity, making it a suitable setting for exploring how CRE teachers implement strategies that foster both Christian values and social harmony (Sutrisno, 2019). By focusing on a state-run primary school, the study addressed the challenges of integrating biblical principles in educational contexts that must also navigate national

standards and pluralistic realities. Data collection proceeded through an exegetical study of Ephesians 4:11–16, drawing upon historical-critical and literary approaches to analyze the text's theological emphases on equipping believers, promoting unity, and fostering maturity in Christ (Fee, 2009). Classroom observations of CRE lessons were carried out to document teaching practices, learning interactions, and observable elements of character formation. Then, semi-structured interviews were held with both CRE teachers and students, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives on how biblical principles are conveyed and internalized in classroom settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The biblical text was examined through a hermeneutical approach that combined historical-critical methods with literary analysis, ensuring that the exegetical findings were grounded in the text's original context while remaining relevant to contemporary pedagogy (Wright, 2013). The data gathered from observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of recurring patterns and insights related to teaching practices and student responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The exegetical interpretation was subjected to peer review to minimize bias and enhance credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This rigorous methodological design ensured that the findings faithfully reflect both the biblical foundation of Ephesians 4:11-16 and its educational implications for CRE in the context of UPT SDN 060891 Medan.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The exegetical investigation of Ephesians 4:11-16 provides a robust theological foundation for understanding the dynamics of Christian leadership, communal growth, and individual maturity. The text begins by describing Christ as the one who appoints various forms of leadership within the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11). This fivefold ministry underscores the diversity of gifts given by Christ to the body of believers, each serving a unique yet interconnected role in equipping the saints. The emphasis is not on hierarchical authority but on the functional responsibility of leaders to prepare believers for works of service, thus advancing the mission of the church (O'Brien, 1999). In the context of Christian education, this principle suggests that teachers should be viewed as shepherds and equippers who nurture students toward active participation in God's mission, rather than merely transmitting doctrinal knowledge (Arnold, 2010). The purpose of equipping, according to verse 12, is to build up the body of Christ, which naturally leads to verse 13's articulation of the goal: attaining unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and achieving maturity that measures up to the full stature of Christ. The text emphasizes that Christian maturity involves both cognitive and relational dimensions—knowledge of Christ is inseparable from shared faith and communal unity (Lincoln, 1990). This theological insight is significant for education, as it highlights that true learning in the Christian tradition extends beyond intellectual development; it entails relational growth and moral transformation. For primary school students in Medan, who navigate both Christian identity and pluralistic social realities, the cultivation of unity and maturity is especially critical.

Verse 14 offers a warning against remaining in a state of spiritual immaturity. The image of children tossed back and forth by waves and blown by every wind of teaching

communicates the vulnerability of believers who lack grounding in faith (Thielman, 2010). This warning highlights the need for consistent and theologically informed instruction that equips believers to resist misleading doctrines and cultural influences. In the educational context, it suggests that CRE teachers must go beyond surface-level moral lessons, grounding students in biblical truth while also equipping them with discernment skills to navigate diverse ideologies present in a pluralistic society (Vanhooser, 2005). The climactic verses, 15–16, emphasize growth into Christ as the head, describing a community that builds itself up in love through the cooperation of every part. Here, mutual edification is portrayed as a hallmark of spiritual maturity. Growth is not limited to individual piety but extends to the flourishing of the whole body of Christ, held together in unity and energized by love (Barth, 1974). For educators, this points to the importance of fostering collaborative and relational learning environments where students learn to support one another and embody Christ-like virtues. Within UPT SDN 060891 Medan, this has particular resonance, as the school's pluralistic setting calls for cultivating not only knowledge but also practices of mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation. The exegesis of Ephesians 4:11–16 provides theological principles that can inform Christian pedagogy: leaders as equippers, the pursuit of unity and maturity, the need for discernment to avoid instability, and the call to grow into Christ through mutual edification. These insights serve as the foundation for the pedagogical and character-formational discussions that follow.

Pedagogical Implications for Christian Religious Education

The exegetical findings from Ephesians 4:11-16 highlight that CRE teachers are called to function not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as shepherds and equippers. This understanding reshapes the role of the teacher in profound ways. Instead of prioritizing rote memorization of biblical content, the CRE teacher assumes responsibility for nurturing students toward holistic maturity - spiritual, moral, and relational. By modeling Christ-like qualities such as humility, love, and service, teachers embody the pastoral role described in the passage, guiding students toward active participation in both faith communities and society (Larkin, 1999). A central pedagogical implication is the integration of biblical values into lesson design. Classroom instruction should not isolate moral teaching from theological grounding but should root character development in the narrative of Scripture. For example, lessons on responsibility can draw from biblical themes of stewardship, while teachings on love and respect can be tied to Christ's command to love one another (Jn. 13:34-35). This approach ensures that Christian virtues are not abstract ideals but lived realities anchored in faith (Estep, Anthony, & Allison, 2008).

Observations in UPT SDN 060891 Medan revealed that when teachers intentionally integrated biblical values into their pedagogy, students responded more positively and meaningfully. For instance, in one CRE lesson, a teacher encouraged students to discuss how Jesus' example of forgiveness could be applied in playground conflicts. Such exercises invited students not only to understand forgiveness conceptually but also to envision its practical application in their daily lives. This aligns with the exegetical insight that knowledge of Christ must lead to maturity in faith and practice. Another pedagogical implication is the importance of collaborative and dialogical learning practices. The metaphor of the body of Christ, which emphasizes interdependence, can inspire

classroom methods that promote group work, peer mentoring, and reflective dialogue. Instead of emphasizing individual competition, CRE lessons can nurture cooperation and mutual support among students (Palmer, 2007). In classroom observations, group discussions about biblical stories often encouraged students to listen respectfully to diverse perspectives, building both their social skills and their theological understanding. The CRE teachers are called to encourage students to embody Christ-like attitudes both in school and at home. This requires consistent reinforcement of values, as well as the creation of opportunities for students to practice virtues outside of academic settings. Interviews with teachers at UPT SDN 060891 indicated that many intentionally collaborated with parents to ensure that character lessons learned in the classroom were reinforced in the home. Such collaboration reflects the holistic vision of equipping the saints described in Ephesians 4:11–12, extending beyond the boundaries of formal instruction into the lived experiences of students.

Character Formation of Students

The field data confirmed that the pedagogical strategies informed by Ephesians 4:11-16 contributed to notable developments in students' character formation. Classroom observations demonstrated that students exhibited improved cooperation and mutual respect when engaged in collaborative learning activities. Teachers reported that students who previously struggled with selfishness or disruptive behavior gradually began to show greater willingness to share, listen, and support their peers. This transformation reflects the biblical vision of growth into Christ, where each part contributes to the building up of the body in love (Eph. 4:16). Interviews with teachers highlighted their intentional modeling of integrity, patience, and empathy. Teachers described how they consciously practiced honesty in grading, fairness in discipline, and compassion in responding to students' personal challenges. Students confirmed that they admired these qualities in their teachers and sought to emulate them. This aligns with the pastoral role described in verse 11, where leaders are called to equip the saints by both teaching and example (Hodges, 2011). Teachers acknowledged that balancing academic demands with spiritual formation is not always easy. The national curriculum often emphasizes cognitive achievement, leaving limited time for character-focused discussions or reflective practices. Some teachers expressed concern that parents prioritized academic excellence over moral development, creating tension between societal expectations and the biblical vision of holistic maturity (Tilaar, 2012). Students, too, reported that they sometimes felt pressure to achieve high test scores, which made it difficult to fully embrace lessons on patience, kindness, or humility. These findings underscore the importance of integrating character formation into academic content rather than treating it as an optional addition. The evidence suggests that grounding pedagogy in Ephesians 4:11-16 fosters a transformative impact on student character. The biblical emphasis on unity, maturity, and growth in Christ resonates deeply with students, equipping them to navigate both their faith commitments and the pluralistic realities of Medan.

The urban pluralistic context of Medan poses both challenges and opportunities for implementing the pedagogical and character-formational insights of Ephesians 4:11-16. On one hand, the religious diversity of the city requires CRE teachers to emphasize

tolerance and respect for others. Students at UPT SDN 060891 interact daily with peers from different religious and cultural backgrounds, making it essential for CRE to foster values of empathy, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence (Bakker & Zubair, 1990). At the same time, there is a need to affirm Christian identity in ways that are faithful to Scripture yet respectful of others. Teachers expressed that maintaining this balance required careful discernment and creativity. Another challenge lies in the limited resources available for CRE at the primary level. Many schools, including UPT SDN 060891, lack access to adequate teaching materials, age-appropriate Christian literature, or training programs that equip teachers for integrating theology with pedagogy. Teachers often rely on their own initiative and creativity to develop lesson plans that are both engaging and biblically grounded. This reality reflects the concern in verse 14, where believers are cautioned against being swayed by external influences; without sufficient grounding and resources, CRE risks becoming superficial or overly moralistic (Clark, 2001).

Yet, these challenges also present opportunities. One significant opportunity is the integration of character education with both the national curriculum and Christian spirituality. Indonesia's national education policy emphasizes the cultivation of Pancasila values - such as mutual cooperation, respect, and social justice - which resonate with Christian virtues rooted in Scripture (Suyatno, 2019). CRE teachers at UPT SDN 060891 have leveraged this overlap to design lessons that simultaneously meet government standards and reinforce Christian character. For instance, discussions on cooperation can be framed both as a civic responsibility and as an expression of the biblical principle of mutual edification. The pluralistic context provides opportunities for students to practice Christ-like values in real-life situations. Encounters with peers of different faiths challenge students to embody love, humility, and respect beyond the classroom. Teachers reported that students who engaged in interreligious dialogue or participated in community service projects developed a stronger sense of empathy and responsibility. These experiences align with the vision of verse 16, where the body of Christ builds itself up in love through active participation and cooperation. The findings demonstrate that the exegesis of Ephesians 4:11–16 provides rich theological insights with practical relevance for CRE in primary schools. By framing teachers as shepherds and equippers, integrating biblical values into pedagogy, and fostering collaborative learning, CRE can contribute significantly to student character formation. Although challenges persist - such as balancing academic demands with spiritual growth and navigating the complexities of a pluralistic environment - the opportunities for integrating Christian values with national educational goals are substantial. The implications are clear: character formation in Christian education must be rooted in Scripture, responsive to context, and holistic in scope. Ephesians 4:11-16 serves as both a theological anchor and a practical guide for equipping students not only with knowledge but also with virtues that prepare them for life in a diverse society. For UPT SDN 060891 Medan, this integration of exegesis and pedagogy holds promise for shaping a generation of students who are grounded in faith, mature in character, and committed to building communities of love and unity.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the exegetical insights of Ephesians 4:11-16 and their pedagogical implications for character formation in Christian Religious Education (CRE),

with a specific locus at UPT SDN 060891 Medan. By combining biblical exegesis with field-based data from classroom observations and interviews, the research sought to address a significant gap in Christian education studies: the lack of integration between exegetical theology and practical strategies for primary-level instruction. The results demonstrate that Ephesians 4:11-16 provides not only a theological framework for understanding the role of Christian leaders as equippers of the saints but also a pedagogical guide for shaping classroom practices that foster holistic growth among students. The first key conclusion is that teachers in CRE must be understood as shepherds and equippers rather than mere transmitters of knowledge. The fivefold ministry described in Ephesians emphasizes equipping, unity, and maturity, all of which have direct relevance for the role of teachers in Christian education. At UPT SDN 060891 Medan, CRE teachers who intentionally embodied pastoral qualities - such as patience, empathy, and integrity - were more effective in guiding students toward character transformation. This finding underscores the exegetical insight that leadership in the church, and by extension in the classroom, is fundamentally relational and service-oriented. Second, the study highlights that character formation must be both biblically grounded and contextually relevant. The exegesis of Ephesians 4:13-16 emphasizes unity, maturity, and growth into Christ, while the field data reveal that students in Medan's pluralistic setting benefit from classroom practices that foster cooperation, dialogue, and mutual respect. By integrating biblical virtues such as love, responsibility, and forgiveness into lesson design, teachers were able to cultivate behaviors that extended beyond the classroom into daily life. This suggests that CRE has the potential to serve as a bridge between theological ideals and the lived realities of students navigating Indonesia's religiously diverse society. Third, while the study documents encouraging outcomes in terms of improved cooperation and respect among students, it also reveals persistent challenges. Teachers face the tension of balancing national academic demands with the spiritual and moral goals of CRE. The strong emphasis on cognitive achievement in Indonesia's curriculum can inadvertently marginalize character-focused practices. Furthermore, the limited resources available for CRE instruction at the primary level constrain teachers' ability to fully implement creative and context-sensitive pedagogical strategies. These challenges echo the warning in Ephesians 4:14 about instability and vulnerability when believers lack sufficient grounding. Without adequate support, CRE risks becoming superficial rather than transformative. The research also identifies significant opportunities. The integration of Christian character education with Indonesia's national curriculum, which promotes Pancasila values, opens space for synergy between civic responsibility and biblical virtues. Moreover, the pluralistic environment of Medan provides authentic contexts for practicing tolerance, empathy, and love, thereby reinforcing the theological call for mutual edification and growth in Christ. Teachers and students alike recognized these opportunities, demonstrating that CRE can meaningfully contribute to both individual development and social harmony. Taken together, the findings of this study contribute to the field of Christian pedagogy in several ways. First, they affirm the value of exegetical theology as a foundation for educational practice, showing that biblical texts such as Ephesians 4:11-16 can provide practical guidance for contemporary classroom contexts. Second, they demonstrate the importance of integrating character formation with academic instruction, thereby resisting the reduction of education to mere cognitive achievement. Third, they highlight the necessity of contextual sensitivity in CRE,

particularly in pluralistic urban settings where both Christian identity and interreligious respect must be cultivated. Future research could build on these findings by exploring comparative studies in other primary schools across Indonesia, examining how different socio-religious contexts influence the implementation of exegetically informed pedagogy. Longitudinal studies could also trace the long-term impact of CRE on student character development, offering insights into how early educational interventions shape faith and values in adolescence and beyond. Additionally, further theological inquiry into other Pauline texts could enrich the repertoire of biblical foundations for CRE. This study has demonstrated that the exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-16 holds significant pedagogical relevance for CRE in Indonesia. By equipping teachers to serve as shepherds, integrating biblical values into curriculum design, and fostering collaborative classroom practices, CRE can play a transformative role in shaping the character of students. While challenges remain, the opportunities for integrating Christian theology with national educational goals are promising. For UPT SDN 060891 Medan, and potentially for other schools across Indonesia, the integration of exegesis and pedagogy offers a pathway toward nurturing a generation of students who are not only academically competent but also spiritually mature, ethically grounded, and socially responsible.

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