



The Exemplary Model of Biblical Figures as a Stimulus for Children's Character Formation in Christian Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the exemplary model of biblical figures as a pedagogical stimulus for children's character formation in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Amid growing concerns about moral decline and value fragmentation in contemporary educational contexts, CRE faces the challenge of cultivating Christ-centered character in ways that are both theologically faithful and educationally relevant. This research aims to explore how biblical exemplarity, understood as the presentation of faith-driven lives within Scripture, can function as an effective framework for shaping children's moral and spiritual development. Using a qualitative library research design, this study employs thematic analysis of selected biblical narratives alongside contemporary theories of character education and social learning. Key figures such as Joseph, Daniel, David, and Jesus are examined to identify core virtues including forgiveness, integrity, courage, obedience, and humility. These virtues are analyzed in light of theological principles, particularly the doctrine of imago Dei and redemptive formation, as well as psychological insights from social learning theory. The findings indicate that biblical narratives provide a coherent theological foundation for character formation, emphasizing transformation through relationship with God rather than moralism. Furthermore, the narrative-applicative pedagogical model, consisting of narrative immersion, reflective dialogue, and behavioral application, demonstrates strong alignment with children's developmental processes. When biblical figures are presented as grace-empowered and relatable models, they stimulate moral imagination, internalization of values, and practical behavioral change. This study concludes that the intentional integration of biblical exemplarity within CRE classrooms contributes significantly to holistic character development. Future research is recommended to empirically evaluate measurable outcomes of this model across diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Worship Holiness

INTRODUCTION

Character formation has become one of the most urgent concerns in contemporary education, particularly in the context of rapid globalization, digital transformation, and shifting moral paradigms. Children today are exposed to diverse value systems through social media, popular culture, and peer interaction, often without sufficient moral filtering. Educational institutions are therefore challenged not merely to transmit cognitive knowledge but to cultivate ethical integrity, empathy, responsibility, and spiritual maturity. Within the Indonesian educational framework, Christian Religious Education (CRE) holds a strategic role in nurturing faith-based character development among students. National educational policy emphasizes the integration of spiritual and moral values into learning processes to form holistic individuals (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2016). In this regard, CRE is not limited to doctrinal instruction but is tasked with shaping students' character in accordance with biblical values. Biblical theology presents character formation as rooted in the doctrine of *imago Dei*, the belief that humanity is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This theological foundation implies that education is fundamentally restorative, seeking to cultivate virtues that reflect God's character in human life. Proverbs 22:6 underscores the formative significance of early moral education, stating that instruction given in youth shapes lifelong orientation. The apostle Paul further highlights the pedagogical power of example in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ," emphasizing that moral character is transmitted through visible modeling rather than abstract instruction alone. These biblical principles affirm that exemplarity is intrinsic to Christian pedagogy.

Educational psychology likewise supports the formative role of modeling in children's moral development. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory argues that children learn behaviors, attitudes, and values through observation and imitation of role models (Bandura, 1977). Moral internalization occurs when learners identify with admired figures and replicate their actions in relevant contexts. Thomas Lickona (1991) similarly contends that character education requires moral modeling, moral knowing, and moral action to function effectively. Without authentic exemplars, moral teaching risks becoming merely cognitive and disconnected from lived experience. In Christian education, biblical figures provide archetypal models through whom theological virtues are embodied in narrative form. The Bible contains a rich gallery of exemplary figures whose lives demonstrate faith, courage, integrity, obedience, repentance, and perseverance. Figures such as Joseph illustrate forgiveness and resilience amid injustice; Samuel exemplifies obedience and spiritual attentiveness; David demonstrates courage rooted in trust in God; Daniel portrays steadfast commitment under social pressure; and the childhood narrative of Jesus (Luke 2:51–52) reflects obedience and growth in wisdom. These narratives offer children concrete moral prototypes that transcend abstract moral instruction. As Michael J. Anthony (2001) argues, Christian education must connect biblical truth with life application, ensuring that Scripture functions as transformative narrative rather than static information. Classroom practice often reduces Bible stories to memorization exercises detached from character transformation. When biblical narratives are presented solely as historical accounts to be recalled in examinations, the affective and behavioral dimensions of learning remain underdeveloped. Robert B. Zuck (2011)

emphasizes that effective biblical teaching follows the pattern of Jesus, who employed narrative, parable, and lived example to engage both heart and action. Therefore, CRE teachers must intentionally design instructional strategies that enable children to internalize biblical virtues through reflective engagement, discussion of moral dilemmas, and contextual application. Christ-centered character formation prevents moralism by emphasizing that biblical figures were shaped by divine grace rather than inherent superiority. As Christopher J. H. Wright (2004) explains, Old Testament narratives consistently reveal God's covenantal faithfulness working through imperfect individuals. Teaching biblical exemplarity within this theological framework fosters humility and dependence on God rather than self-righteous comparison. Children learn that moral growth arises from relationship with God, not mere personal effort. This article aims to reconstruct the exemplary model of biblical figures as a pedagogical stimulus for children's character formation within Christian Religious Education. By integrating biblical foundations, educational theory, and practical application, the study seeks to demonstrate that narrative-based exemplarity constitutes an effective and theologically grounded approach to moral development. Through an IMRaD structure, the article will analyze how biblical characters function as moral prototypes, how teachers can implement narrative-applicative strategies, and how such approaches contribute to transformative character formation in children. Ultimately, it argues that when biblical narratives are taught as living models of faith, they become powerful catalysts for shaping resilient, empathetic, and Christ-centered character in the next generation.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive research design using a literature-based and conceptual-analytical approach was implemented in this research. The purpose of the research was to reconstruct and systematize the exemplary model of biblical figures as a stimulus for children's character formation within Christian Religious Education (CRE). A qualitative design was selected because the study sought to interpret theological texts, educational theories, and pedagogical practices rather than to test statistical hypotheses. The approach emphasizes textual interpretation, thematic analysis, and integrative synthesis between biblical foundations and contemporary educational theory. The research utilized library research (*studi pustaka*) combined with theological-exegetical reflection and pedagogical analysis. Primary sources included the biblical text, particularly narratives concerning exemplary figures such as Joseph (Genesis 37-50), Samuel (1 Samuel 3), David (1 Samuel 17), Daniel (Daniel 1-6), and the childhood narrative of Jesus (Luke 2:41-52). These texts were examined using narrative analysis to identify core character virtues embedded within each story. The analysis focused on identifying recurring moral themes such as obedience, courage, integrity, forgiveness, perseverance, and faithfulness. Secondary sources consisted of scholarly works in biblical studies, Christian education, and character education theory. Foundational texts included works on Christian pedagogy (Anthony, 2001), biblical ethics (Wright, 2004), and character education theory (Lickona, 1991; Bandura, 1977). Peer-reviewed journal articles on character formation in Christian education were also reviewed to contextualize the discussion within contemporary scholarship. These sources provided theoretical grounding for understanding how narrative exemplarity functions in moral development. Data were collected through

systematic document analysis. The process involved three stages: identification of relevant biblical passages and educational literature; extraction of thematic elements related to character virtues; and categorization of pedagogical strategies that facilitate value internalization. Biblical texts were analyzed to determine theological foundations for character formation, while educational literature was examined to identify mechanisms of moral modeling and imitation. Biblical narratives were coded according to explicit and implicit character traits demonstrated by the figures studied. For example, Joseph was coded under "integrity," "forgiveness," and "resilience," while Daniel was coded under "faithfulness under pressure" and "moral steadfastness." These virtues were cross-referenced with character education frameworks to establish conceptual alignment between theological virtues and psychological models of moral development. The study synthesized findings into an instructional model termed the "narrative-applicative exemplarity model." This model integrates narrative engagement (storytelling and contextualization), reflective internalization (discussion and moral dilemma exploration), and behavioral application (role-play, journaling, and weekly action commitments). The model was evaluated conceptually by examining its coherence with both biblical theology and established educational theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative literature-based study demonstrate that the exemplary model of biblical figures, when intentionally structured through a narrative-applicative pedagogical framework, functions as a powerful stimulus for children's character formation in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Through thematic analysis of selected biblical narratives and integration with character education theory, the study identifies three major dimensions of effectiveness: theological coherence of exemplarity, psychological alignment with child development, and pedagogical applicability within CRE classrooms. The discussion below elaborates these dimensions systematically while synthesizing biblical foundations and educational scholarship. The analysis of biblical texts confirms that character formation in Scripture is consistently mediated through lived examples rather than abstract moral codes. From Genesis to the Gospels, moral transformation occurs within narrative frameworks where individuals encounter God and respond in obedience, failure, repentance, and growth. The doctrine of *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27) provides the anthropological basis for character formation: humanity reflects God's character and is called to live in covenantal alignment with divine purposes. However, Scripture also acknowledges human fallibility, thereby preventing the interpretation of biblical figures as flawless heroes. For instance, Joseph's narrative (Genesis 37-50) presents integrity, forgiveness, and resilience amid betrayal and injustice. Joseph's refusal to retaliate against his brothers demonstrates moral transcendence rooted in theological conviction ("You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good," Genesis 50:20). This reveals that biblical exemplarity is fundamentally God-centered rather than self-centered. As Wright (2004) argues, Old Testament ethics consistently emphasize covenantal faithfulness shaped by God's redemptive purposes. When children encounter Joseph's story within a Christ-centered interpretive framework, they are not merely encouraged to imitate bravery but to recognize God's sovereignty working through adversity. Similarly, Daniel's steadfastness under Babylonian pressure (Daniel 1-

6) illustrates moral courage within pluralistic society. Daniel's refusal to compromise dietary or worship practices models principled resistance without hostility. This balance is particularly relevant for children navigating peer pressure in contemporary educational environments. The theological coherence of Daniel's narrative lies in its affirmation that faithfulness to God is sustainable even in minority contexts. When applied pedagogically, this narrative strengthens children's understanding that character integrity is possible within social complexity.

The childhood narrative of Jesus (Luke 2:41-52) further deepens theological coherence by presenting growth in wisdom and obedience within family context. Jesus' submission to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:51) models relational obedience, while verse 52 emphasizes holistic development, "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." This fourfold growth paradigm provides a comprehensive model of spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social maturity. Zuck (2011) notes that Jesus' teaching method integrated narrative and lived example, reinforcing the pedagogical power of incarnational modeling. Thus, the theological findings indicate that biblical exemplarity functions within a redemptive framework: virtues are cultivated through relationship with God rather than mere behavioral compliance. This prevents moralism and fosters grace-centered character formation.

Psychological Alignment: Social Learning and Moral Internalization

The next finding concerns psychological alignment between biblical exemplarity and child development theory. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) posits that children learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and identification with role models. Moral internalization occurs when learners perceive models as credible, admirable, and relevant. Biblical figures, when contextualized appropriately, fulfill these criteria by presenting vivid narratives that stimulate emotional engagement and imaginative participation. Children aged 6-12, according to developmental psychology, are particularly responsive to narrative learning and role-play. Stories stimulate cognitive empathy, enabling children to imagine themselves within moral dilemmas. When teachers present Joseph's betrayal or David's confrontation with Goliath as experiential narratives rather than static history, children are invited into moral reflection. Lickona (1991) emphasizes that character education must integrate moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Narrative exemplarity satisfies these dimensions simultaneously: cognitive understanding of virtue, emotional resonance with the protagonist, and motivation for behavioral imitation. The results of thematic analysis show that virtues such as forgiveness (Joseph), obedience (Samuel), courage (David), steadfastness (Daniel), and humility (Jesus) align closely with universal character education categories such as responsibility, respect, fairness, and compassion. This alignment demonstrates conceptual compatibility between biblical theology and contemporary moral development frameworks. Rather than functioning as isolated religious ideals, biblical virtues correspond with empirically supported constructs of character education. The narrative-applicative model enhances moral internalization by encouraging reflective application. When children are invited to write or draw weekly commitments inspired by biblical figures, they move from passive listening to active moral rehearsal. Bandura

(1977) highlights that behavioral enactment strengthens internalization through reinforcement and self-regulation. Therefore, pedagogical strategies such as role-play and journaling are not supplementary activities but essential mechanisms of value consolidation. Another psychological dimension concerns identification. Children are more likely to internalize virtues when they perceive biblical figures as relatable rather than mythic. Presenting David as a young shepherd rather than a distant king increases identification among elementary learners. Anthony (2001) argues that Christian education must contextualize biblical truth in developmentally appropriate ways. This means emphasizing emotions, struggles, and relational dynamics that mirror children's lived experiences. Through such contextualization, biblical exemplarity becomes psychologically accessible and transformative.

Pedagogical Applicability: Narrative-Applicative Strategy in CRE

The other finding concerns pedagogical applicability. The reconstructed narrative-applicative model consists of three interconnected stages: narrative immersion, reflective dialogue, and behavioral application. Narrative immersion involves interactive storytelling that invites children to enter the emotional and moral landscape of biblical events. Rather than reading passages mechanically, teachers employ voice modulation, visual aids, and open-ended questions ("What would you feel if you were Joseph?"). This approach aligns with Palmer's (1998) assertion that effective teaching emerges from authentic engagement rather than technical delivery alone. Narrative immersion fosters attentiveness and empathy. Reflective dialogue follows storytelling and encourages moral reasoning. Children discuss dilemmas faced by biblical figures and compare them to personal experiences. For example, after learning about Daniel's refusal to compromise, students might discuss peer pressure scenarios at school. This dialogical method stimulates critical thinking and contextualization. Lickona (1991) stresses that moral reflection strengthens ethical reasoning by linking principle with practice. Behavioral application completes the model through concrete commitments. Students may role-play conflict resolution inspired by Joseph's forgiveness or practice respectful obedience modeled by Jesus. Weekly reflection journals allow children to record real-life applications of virtues learned. This stage operationalizes moral knowledge into lived practice, bridging classroom instruction and daily life. The pedagogical analysis also reveals that Christ-centered framing is essential. Teachers must clarify that biblical figures were empowered by God's grace rather than personal superiority. Wright (2004) warns against isolating moral actions from theological grounding. By emphasizing divine empowerment, teachers nurture humility and dependence on God, preventing self-righteous moralism.

The study concludes that biblical exemplarity possesses transformative capacity when implemented intentionally. The narrative-applicative model addresses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of character formation simultaneously. Children are not merely instructed about honesty; they witness honesty embodied in Joseph. They are not merely told to be courageous; they see David confronting fear. They are not merely commanded to obey; they observe Jesus growing in submission and wisdom. Transformation occurs gradually through repeated exposure and reinforcement.

Character is formed through habitual imitation, reflection, and practice. Bandura's theory affirms that consistent modeling and reinforcement produce stable behavioral patterns. When biblical narratives become recurring reference points within CRE curriculum, children internalize virtues as normative rather than exceptional. The study also identifies contextual relevance. In contemporary societies marked by moral ambiguity, children require stable moral anchors. Biblical exemplarity provides transcendent reference points that transcend cultural fluctuation. At the same time, narrative contextualization ensures cultural relevance without compromising theological integrity. Curriculum design should prioritize narrative engagement over rote memorization. Teacher training programs should equip educators with storytelling and reflective facilitation skills. Evaluation of CRE outcomes should include behavioral observation and reflective assessment rather than solely written examinations. Collaboration between school and family contexts can reinforce biblical exemplarity through consistent modeling at home. Ultimately, the exemplary model of biblical figures demonstrates pedagogical robustness grounded in both Scripture and educational theory. It affirms that children learn best through visible examples integrated with reflective application. By synthesizing theological conviction with psychological insight and pedagogical strategy, CRE can fulfill its mission of cultivating Christ-centered character in children. The discussion confirms that biblical exemplarity, structured through a narrative-applicative model, offers a coherent, psychologically aligned, and pedagogically effective stimulus for children's character formation. Rooted in the doctrine of *imago Dei* and reinforced by social learning theory, this model bridges ancient Scripture and contemporary education. When biblical figures are presented as grace-empowered models rather than distant legends, they function as living mentors who shape children's moral imagination and daily conduct.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the exemplary model of biblical figures can function as a stimulus for children's character formation within Christian Religious Education (CRE). Through qualitative library research and thematic analysis, the findings confirm that biblical exemplarity possesses theological depth, psychological relevance, and pedagogical applicability when implemented through a structured narrative-applicative framework. The study demonstrates that biblical figures are not presented in Scripture as flawless moral icons, but as participants in God's redemptive narrative. Their virtues, such as Joseph's forgiveness, Daniel's integrity, David's courage, and Jesus' obedience, emerge within relational dependence upon God. This redemptive orientation prevents moralism and anchors character formation in divine grace rather than human achievement. Character education in CRE, therefore, must remain Christ-centered, emphasizing transformation through relationship with God instead of behavioral conformity alone. The research affirms that biblical narratives align strongly with social learning theory. Children learn through observation, identification, imitation, and reinforcement. When biblical figures are presented as relatable and contextually meaningful, they become credible role models that stimulate moral internalization. Narrative immersion, dialogical reflection, and behavioral rehearsal support the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Consequently, character formation becomes experiential and

holistic rather than purely cognitive. The narrative-applicative model offers a practical strategy for CRE classrooms. By integrating storytelling, reflective dialogue, and concrete application, teachers facilitate active engagement and long-term moral development. This model bridges biblical theology and contemporary educational practice, ensuring that Scripture remains both faithful to its original message and relevant to children's lived realities. Importantly, the study underscores the central role of teachers as living models whose authenticity reinforces the credibility of biblical instruction. The exemplary model of biblical figures serves as an effective and transformative stimulus for character formation when implemented intentionally and theologically grounded. Future empirical research is recommended to test this model quantitatively across diverse educational contexts to measure measurable behavioral outcomes. Strengthening collaboration between school and family environments will also enhance the sustainability of character development. Ultimately, CRE that integrates biblical exemplarity with reflective pedagogy contributes meaningfully to nurturing children who embody Christlike character in both faith and daily life.

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