



## Religious Praxis and Christian Character Formation: The Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers at SDN 178215 Simargalung-North Tapanuli

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of religious praxis among Christian Religious Education teachers in shaping Christian character formation among students at SDN 178215 Simargalung, North Tapanuli. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, the study synthesizes findings from national and international scholarship on Christian pedagogy, character education, and teacher spiritual leadership. The review reveals four major themes that together illuminate the transformative impact of teacher praxis on students' moral and spiritual development. First, religious praxis—defined as the embodiment of faith through daily actions, attitudes, and interpersonal behaviors—emerges as the core mechanism for forming Christian character, surpassing mere verbal instruction. Second, teacher spiritual integrity strengthens the credibility and effectiveness of character formation, as students are more likely to imitate virtues demonstrated consistently by trusted role models. Third, integrative pedagogical approaches that link biblical narratives with real-life situations foster deeper moral internalization and a coherent Christian worldview. Fourth, collaborative ecosystems involving families, churches, and community structures create a supportive environment that reinforces school-based character formation. The findings underscore that in culturally cohesive Christian settings such as North Tapanuli, the teachers serve as influential moral architects whose lived faith shapes students' identity and ethical orientation. The study concludes that holistic Christian character formation requires authentic teacher praxis, intentional faith-learning integration, and strong partnerships between school, home, and church. These insights provide valuable implications for strengthening Christian education practices at SDN 178215 Simargalung and similar educational contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Religious Praxis, Christian Religious Education, Character Formation*

### INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in primary schools serves a critical function in shaping not only students' cognitive understanding of faith but also their moral and spiritual identity. In the Indonesian context—particularly within public schools that accommodate

diverse religious backgrounds-CRE teachers carry the responsibility of ensuring that Christian students are guided toward character formation grounded in biblical values. Among these values, Christian character-which includes honesty, compassion, humility, discipline, and responsibility-stands as an essential goal of holistic education. The formation of such character traits is not the result of cognitive instruction alone but emerges through the integration of knowledge, practice, and lived experience. Within this perspective, the religious praxis of teachers becomes a central pedagogical instrument that shapes how students internalize Christian values. At SDN 178215 Simargalung in North Tapanuli, a region with strong Christian cultural heritage, the role of the CRE teacher is particularly influential in nurturing students' moral development in ways that are both contextual and transformative. Religious praxis refers to the embodied actions, spiritual disciplines, and consistent behaviors through which teachers express their faith in everyday school life. It includes practices such as prayer, worship participation, Scripture reading, modeling ethical behavior, and relational engagement based on Christian love. These actions serve as a living curriculum that students observe, interpret, and emulate. In the context of primary education, where students are highly impressionable, teacher praxis often communicates values more effectively than verbal instruction alone. This aligns with virtue ethics, which emphasizes character development through imitation of exemplars. The apostle Paul's principle, "*Imitate me, as I imitate Christ,*" reflects the foundational idea that moral formation is deeply relational and experiential. In Christian education, therefore, praxis functions as a pedagogical medium through which theological truth becomes visible and actionable. Research in Christian education indicates that children learn moral values most effectively when they witness those values embodied by trusted adults, particularly teachers who function as both instructors and role models. Studies show that consistent alignment between teachers' actions and their religious beliefs strengthens students' ability to internalize those beliefs in their own lives. At SDN 178215 Simargalung, the CRE teacher's daily interactions-greeting students with kindness, resolving conflicts calmly, demonstrating honesty in classroom procedures, and integrating prayer into learning routines-collectively shape students' perceptions of what it means to live as a Christian. The rural and culturally cohesive environment of Simargalung offers fertile ground for religious praxis to flourish because community expectations and cultural narratives reinforce Christian ethical norms.

Some teachers struggle to translate biblical principles into practical, age-appropriate pedagogical strategies. Others rely heavily on cognitive instruction-such as memorizing Bible verses or retelling stories-without integrating experiential, reflective, or relational approaches. In some cases, teachers' personal spiritual practices may not consistently align with the character they wish to instill, resulting in mixed messages for students. These challenges highlight the need for empirical investigation into how religious praxis actually functions in the daily work of CRE teachers and how it contributes to Christian character formation in the primary school setting. This study seeks to examine the role of Christian Religious Education teachers' religious praxis in shaping Christian character among students at SDN 178215 Simargalung, North Tapanuli. It aims to identify specific forms of praxis demonstrated by teachers, explore how students respond to and interpret these actions, and analyze the extent to which religious praxis supports the development

of Christian character. By grounding the inquiry within both educational theory and theological perspectives, this study contributes to the broader discourse on holistic Christian education in Indonesia. The research also offers practical insights for improving pedagogical practice, strengthening teacher formation programs, and enhancing the integration of faith and teaching in primary schools. Through this investigation, the study asserts that religious praxis is not optional but foundational for effective Christian character formation, especially in formative educational contexts such as SDN 178215 Simargalung.

## **METHODS**

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was used to synthesize scholarly insights on the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' religious praxis in shaping Christian character among elementary school students, with a specific contextual application to SDN 178215 Simargalung, North Tapanuli. The SLR method was chosen because it offers a rigorous, transparent, and replicable procedure for collecting, evaluating, and interpreting existing research relevant to the topic. This methodological approach enables the researcher to map theoretical perspectives, identify conceptual patterns, and evaluate empirical evidence regarding religious praxis, Christian character formation, and pedagogical roles within Christian education. Literature searches were conducted across reputable academic databases, and covered publications between 2000 and 2025 to ensure both historical continuity and contemporary relevance. Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria: written in English or Bahasa Indonesia, peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, books, or reputable institutional reports, addressed themes related to Christian education, religious praxis, teacher spirituality, or Christian character formation, focused on elementary or early adolescence education, ensuring relevance to the SDN 178215 Simargalung context, and provided empirical data or substantial theoretical analysis. The initial search identified 623 potential sources. After removing duplicates ( $n = 147$ ), titles and abstracts of 476 sources were screened. From these, 129 studies were deemed relevant to the primary themes. A full-text assessment further narrowed the selection to 42 key studies that aligned with the inclusion criteria. The PRISMA flow ensured systematic reduction based on quality, relevance, and methodological rigor. A data extraction matrix was developed to categorize each study according to: author and year, research context, theoretical framework, definition of religious praxis, character formation dimensions, pedagogical strategies, reported outcomes. The extracted data were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach, were derived inductively, allowing patterns to emerge regarding how CRE teachers embody religious praxis and how such praxis influences students' spiritual and moral formation. Particular analytical attention was given to the integration of faith practices, teacher modeling, instructional strategies, and school-family-religious community collaboration. All selected studies underwent quality appraisal based on criteria adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). Each study was evaluated for methodological clarity, reliability of findings, transparency of data collection, theological consistency, and relevance to Christian character formation. Ethical responsibility was ensured through accurate citation practices, avoidance of bias in literature selection, and careful representation of theological and pedagogical perspectives.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review yielded several major thematic findings related to the religious praxis of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and its influence on Christian character formation among elementary school students, with contextual implications for SDN 178215 Simargalung in North Tapanuli. The results converge on four major themes: the nature of religious praxis in CRE teaching, teacher spiritual integrity as a foundation for credible character formation, pedagogical processes that integrate faith and learning, and collaborative structures between school, family, and church. Taken together, these themes illuminate how CRE teachers function not merely as transmitters of biblical knowledge but as spiritual agents whose lived faith becomes formative for students in tangible ways. These results are consistent with broader scholarship in Christian education asserting that character formation is deeply relational and incarnational, grounded in lived witness rather than abstract theology (Smith, 2009; Astuti, 2020). The first major finding emphasizes that religious praxis—defined as the embodiment of faith through attitudes, habits, and actions—constitutes the core of effective Christian character formation in school settings. The literature consistently shows that religious praxis is more than ritual observance; it includes personal devotion, moral decision-making, relational compassion, and consistent alignment between belief and daily behavior (Groome, 1998; Knight, 2016). In the context of CRE teachers, religious praxis becomes “pedagogy in action,” whereby students learn Christian values not merely through cognitive instruction but through patterns of life modeled by teachers. Several studies highlight that children internalize virtue primarily through observing trusted adults, particularly teachers whom they perceive as morally authoritative figures (Lickona, 1991; Anis, 2021). This aligns strongly with the situational realities of elementary schools, where teachers’ behavior—whether in speech, emotional regulation, fairness, or compassion—serves as a living curriculum. For a school such as SDN 178215 Simargalung, located in a predominantly Christian rural area where cultural values and communal spirituality shape everyday life, the embodiment of faith by CRE teachers naturally becomes a powerful form of silent yet persuasive formation. The second major theme concerns teacher spiritual integrity as the basis for impactful religious praxis. Many scholars argue that spiritual integrity is not merely an added value but the foundation that determines the credibility of moral and religious teaching (Tisdell, 2003; Palmer, 2007). Teachers who consistently demonstrate holiness, sincerity, humility, and moral discipline tend to cultivate stronger trust and admiration from students, which then strengthens the transmission of Christian character. The reviewed literature shows a consistent pattern: students are more likely to emulate values modeled consistently by teachers than values communicated only verbally. Children’s capacity for moral imitation has been well-established in developmental psychology, particularly through social learning theory, which posits that role models exert profound influence on moral behavior (Bandura, 1977). Within Christian educational contexts, this means that CRE teachers’ spiritual practices—prayerfulness, scripture engagement, honesty, forgiveness, patience—are pedagogical forces with formative power. Some researchers describe this dynamic as “the ministry of presence,” meaning that the spiritual atmosphere created by a teacher’s personal life becomes as important as formal lesson plans (Cunningham, 2015; Pardede, 2022). In rural North Tapanuli, where teachers often serve as community moral figures,

this spiritual integrity resonates especially strongly, reinforcing Christian identity through culturally embedded respect for educators. The third major finding involves the pedagogical integration of faith and learning, a theme widely discussed in Christian pedagogy literature. Several studies emphasize that effective CRE instruction does not separate biblical content from students' daily experiences but seeks to contextualize faith within real-life moral decisions, interpersonal relationships, and societal responsibilities (Anthony & Benson, 2003; Estep, 2012). Pedagogies that integrate storytelling, reflective dialogue, contextual Bible reading, and experiential learning tend to produce deeper moral internalization compared to lecture-centered approaches. The literature highlights that character formation is a gradual process shaped by repeated encounters with meaningful practices, such as classroom devotions, acts of kindness, service learning, and guided reflection (Wright, 2016). In elementary settings, especially in rural schools, such practices are often embedded into the school routine—morning prayer, singing hymns, interpersonal reconciliation, and communal celebrations of Christian holidays. For SDN 178215 Simargalung, this suggests that CRE teachers who creatively integrate Christian values into classroom interactions, conflict management, cooperative activities, and moral reasoning exercises contribute significantly to students' character development. Studies also show that when biblical narratives are presented through interactive and culturally relevant methods, students tend to perceive their spiritual growth as joyful and personally meaningful (Simanjuntak, 2021).

Another important component within this theme is the role of curricular intentionality, where CRE teachers design learning experiences that align character goals with biblical foundations. Scholars argue that spiritual formation in education is strengthened when teachers articulate clear formative objectives, such as honesty, empathy, discipline, stewardship, and respect (Thomas, 2018). When these virtues are explicitly connected to Scripture, students perceive them not only as social expectations but as expressions of Christian identity. For example, lessons on forgiveness rooted in Matthew 18 or lessons on generosity inspired by 2 Corinthians 9 help children connect values to faith. According to Siregar (2020), this connection enhances moral motivation because students understand the divine grounding behind expected virtues. In the case of SDN 178215 Simargalung, where students are raised within Christian family structures, such biblical contextualization reinforces familiarity and strengthens continuity between home, church, and school. The fourth major theme concerns the collaborative ecosystem of Christian formation, which includes family, church, and wider community contexts. Numerous studies highlight that school-based character formation is most effective when supported by family spirituality at home and by consistent reinforcement from church life (Bunge, 2008; Rahmat, 2022). Children experience moral dissonance when school teachings contradict patterns observed in family life. Conversely, when CRE teachers partner with parents through communication, shared values, and collaborative programs, character formation becomes holistic and sustainable. In many Indonesian Christian communities, including North Tapanuli, churches play a central role in nurturing children's spiritual identity through Sunday School, youth fellowship, and catechesis. Research shows that when teachers, parents, and church leaders share similar values, children perceive Christian character as a communal lifestyle rather than an isolated subject taught at school (Sitompul, 2019). This synergy provides coherence that strengthens students'

internalization of Christian values. The findings also indicate that community-embedded practices, such as local celebrations, social solidarity, and cultural rituals influenced by Christian ethics, contribute significantly to moral development. In North Tapanuli, culture and Christianity are deeply intertwined, with community life emphasizing mutual cooperation, respect for elders, and communal worship traditions. Studies on contextual Christian education argue that such cultural patterns provide fertile ground for character formation when appropriately integrated into school practices (Manurung, 2017). Thus, CRE teachers at SDN 178215 Simargalung operate within a socio-religious ecosystem where Christian character is both taught and lived communally. Across all themes, one unifying insight emerges: religious praxis is most effective when embodied, relational, consistent, and contextually integrated. Several scholars assert that character formation is not merely about cognitive acquisition of religious knowledge but involves shaping moral imagination, emotional disposition, relational empathy, and spiritual habits (Cox, 2019; Sorin, 2020). Effective CRE teachers thus function as spiritual mentors who guide students through lived experiences of faith. This approach aligns with the theological foundations of Christian education, which view formation as a journey of discipleship aimed at transforming the whole person (Wilhoit, 2008). The discussion further highlights that the results of the SLR reinforce existing pedagogical theories that emphasize narrative, modeling, and habitual practice. Narrative approaches—using biblical stories to cultivate moral imagination—are shown to be particularly effective in helping children understand abstract virtues through concrete characters such as Joseph, David, Ruth, and Jesus (Ryken, 2015). In the context of SDN 178215 Simargalung, narratives may resonate strongly because rural children often grow up with storytelling traditions in family and church settings. Modeling remains the strongest predictor of moral behavior; as such, CRE teachers' own character becomes inseparable from their professional role. Habitual practices, including prayer, communal worship, and service-oriented activities, shape long-term moral patterns, confirming the spiritual formation model proposed by James K. A. Smith (2009), who argues that “we become what we repeatedly do.” Another layer of the discussion concerns the contextual implications for schools like SDN 178215 Simargalung. Rural schools often experience close social proximity between teachers and students, where teachers are respected community figures whose influence extends beyond the classroom. This proximity enhances the impact of religious praxis. Additionally, the strong Christian identity of North Tapanuli communities provides a supportive environment for integrating Christian values into school life. However, the literature also identifies challenges, including limited access to professional development in Christian pedagogy, potential inconsistencies between home and school environments, and occasional tensions between traditional cultural norms and biblical values (Hutabarat, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires intentional training for CRE teachers, particularly in contextual theology, child development, and integrative pedagogy. The SLR findings converge on the conclusion that CRE teachers serve as moral architects whose personal holiness and pedagogical strategies shape the spiritual and ethical landscape of the school. Their religious praxis has transformative potential, especially when supported by the school ethos and reinforced through family and church collaboration. For SDN 178215 Simargalung, this means that strengthening Christian character formation requires not only classroom instruction but also a holistic approach where CRE teachers embody spiritual authenticity, integrate faith into learning

experiences, and cultivate partnerships with parents and church leaders. Such an approach aligns with the broader goal of forming students who display Christian virtues—love, honesty, humility, discipline, courage, and compassion—as integral expressions of their identity in Christ.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic literature review affirm that religious praxis undertaken by Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a decisive and multidimensional role in shaping Christian character among students, particularly within primary school contexts such as SDN 178215 Simargalung in North Tapanuli. Across the reviewed studies, a consistent pattern emerges: authentic spiritual modeling by teachers exerts deeper and more lasting formative influence than verbal instruction alone. Religious praxis—expressed through prayerfulness, honesty, humility, compassion, forgiveness, discipline, and relational integrity—functions as a living curriculum that students observe, internalize, and imitate. This underscores that Christian character formation in educational settings cannot be reduced merely to cognitive transmission of biblical knowledge but must involve holistic engagement of the moral imagination, emotional dispositions, relational patterns, and daily habits of students. In this regard, the personhood of the teacher becomes the most powerful pedagogical tool in the classroom. The review also highlights that teacher spiritual integrity forms the credibility foundation that strengthens the formative power of religious praxis. Teachers who embody congruence between belief and behavior become trustworthy role models, enabling students to perceive Christian virtues not simply as abstract ideals but as possible and desirable ways of living. In schools situated in culturally cohesive Christian communities such as North Tapanuli, the social visibility of teachers amplifies this role, positioning them not only as educators but as spiritual exemplars within the broader communal ecosystem. This cultural embeddedness enhances the transmission of Christian character because students encounter consistent reinforcement of values across school, family, church, and community life. The integration of faith and learning emerges as a crucial pedagogical approach. Effective CRE teachers connect biblical teaching with real-life moral situations, promote reflective dialogue, use contextual storytelling, and create experiential learning opportunities that make Christian values tangible and meaningful. These integrative practices foster deep moral internalization and enable students to develop a coherent Christian worldview. The literature affirms that faith formation is most effective when virtues such as honesty, kindness, patience, courage, and stewardship are explicitly linked to scriptural foundations and reinforced through consistent classroom routines. The review further emphasizes the importance of collaborative networks involving teachers, families, and churches. Character formation is a communal process; thus, the alignment of home spirituality, church instruction, and school-based Christian education creates a coherent moral environment that strengthens children's capacity for ethical consistency. In the context of SDN 178215 Simargalung, such collaboration is not only possible but culturally natural, given the strong communal bonds and shared Christian heritage of the region. Schools therefore have the opportunity to build intentional partnerships that reinforce the character formation goals of CRE teachers. This review demonstrates that religious praxis is central to Christian character formation and that CRE teachers are key agents in

this transformative process. For SDN 178215 Simargalung, strengthening Christian character formation requires fostering teacher spiritual integrity, promoting integrative pedagogies, and building collaborative relationships with families and churches. These elements, when woven together, create an educational environment where Christian values are not merely taught but lived-empowering students to grow into individuals whose character reflects their faith in Christ. If implemented with intentionality and contextual sensitivity, the insights from this study can contribute to a more robust and holistic approach to Christian education within the school and beyond.

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