



## Christian Religious Education Teachers as Role Models of Personality Competence in Preventing Flexing Behavior: Evidence from UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong

Nurmayanti Hasugian<sup>1\*</sup>, Eben H. Telaumbanua<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [nurmayantihhasugian@gmail.com](mailto:nurmayantihhasugian@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of flexing - the excessive display of wealth and social status - has become increasingly prevalent among Indonesian students, exacerbated by social media platforms that normalize materialism as a marker of success. This study examines how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, through personality competence, can counteract flexing behavior by serving as role models of humility, gratitude, and simplicity. Conducted at UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong, Humbang Hasundutan, North Sumatra, the research employed a qualitative case study approach. One CRE teacher and 24 grade VIII students participated, with data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Findings indicate that the teacher's consistent modeling of Christian virtues, supported by scriptural teachings and authentic learning tasks such as reflective journaling and community service, reshaped students' perceptions of success from wealth-centered to value-centered orientations. Students reported greater awareness of humility and gratitude, and some reduced tendencies toward flexing both in school and online. However, challenges persisted, particularly peer pressure and the influence of social media, which continued to promote consumerist behaviors. The study underscores the importance of institutional support for character education, cross-curricular integration of values, and the inclusion of digital literacy to address the cultural pressures fueling flexing. The results affirm theories of character education and social learning, emphasizing that teacher role modeling remains central to moral formation. Ultimately, the research highlights that personality competence in CRE teachers is a practical and effective approach to nurturing character and resisting materialism in contemporary educational contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Christian Religious Education, Role Models, Personality Competence*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the phenomenon of flexing - the excessive display of wealth, possessions, or social status - has become increasingly visible among students in Indonesia, particularly within the junior and senior high school context. This behavior, amplified by the pervasive influence of social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, has normalized the act of showcasing material goods as a measure of self-worth and popularity. Scholars have argued that this trend contributes to a distorted sense of identity among adolescents, as material possessions are often equated with personal success and social acceptance (Santrock, 2018). Such tendencies not only disrupt the learning environment but also cultivate attitudes of arrogance, envy, and competition, eroding fundamental values such as humility, gratitude, and solidarity that are essential to students' moral and spiritual growth (Lickona, 2019). Within the framework of Christian Religious Education (CRE), flexing behavior thus emerges as a critical moral and ethical issue that demands a holistic educational response, one that integrates spiritual formation with character education. Christian Religious Education teachers hold a particularly strategic role in addressing this issue. In the Indonesian educational system, CRE teachers are not only knowledge transmitters but also moral exemplars tasked with shaping students' spiritual maturity and ethical identity (Tilaar, 2012). Their responsibilities extend beyond the classroom into the realm of modeling values through personal conduct, consistent discipline, and authentic witness. This responsibility aligns with the concept of personality competence, a dimension of teacher professionalism emphasized in Indonesia's National Education Standards. Personality competence entails the embodiment of integrity, responsibility, discipline, and exemplary conduct that inspire respect and imitation from students (Permendiknas No. 16/2007). When CRE teachers demonstrate these qualities consistently, they provide students with tangible illustrations of how Christian virtues - such as humility, contentment, and service - can be lived out in daily life. Such modeling resonates with Bandura's (1997) social learning theory, which posits that individuals, especially adolescents, learn behaviors not only through direct instruction but also by observing and imitating role models. Flexing behavior presents a direct contradiction to the Christian values taught in CRE classes. For instance, biblical principles emphasize modesty, stewardship, and gratitude rather than self-indulgence and pride (Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Timothy 6:6-10). Teachers who embody these principles showing that self-worth is not determined by possessions but by one's character and relationship with God (Palmer, 2007). In the context of SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong, a school located in Humbang Hasundutan, North Sumatra, CRE teachers face the dual challenge of countering the flexing culture while simultaneously nurturing a character education approach that resonates with students' rural socio-cultural environment. Unlike urban settings, where material wealth is often more visible, rural communities face unique pressures from digital exposure, making the role of teachers even more vital in guiding students to resist unhealthy external influences. It seeks to explore how CRE teachers at UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong exercise their personality competence as role models in preventing flexing behavior among students. Specifically, it examines the practical strategies used by teachers - such as emphasizing simplicity in lifestyle, integrating biblical teachings on humility into lessons, and fostering reflective practices like journaling and group discussions on gratitude. The research also

seeks to capture students' responses to such role modeling, whether in terms of changes in attitude, reduced tendencies to engage in flexing, or heightened awareness of Christian virtues. In doing so, the study aims to shed light on the broader implications for character education in rural schools, where the intersection of tradition, religion, and modern digital influences creates both opportunities and challenges for moral formation. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the discourse on faith-based character education in Indonesia. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of aligning teaching practices with real-life applications to ensure that values are not only taught but also practiced (Groome, 2011; Lickona, 2019). However, little empirical attention has been given to the specific phenomenon of flexing and its moral implications within the Indonesian school context. By situating the study at SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong, this research provides insight into how CRE teachers can practically address contemporary social challenges through personality competence and role modeling. Ultimately, this approach underscores the idea that combating materialism in schools cannot rely solely on punitive measures or cognitive instruction but must be rooted in lived examples of faith, humility, and responsibility demonstrated by educators themselves.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to capture the lived experiences of teachers and students in their natural educational setting. A qualitative design was considered the most appropriate because it allows researchers to explore complex social phenomena in depth, focusing on meanings, interpretations, and processes rather than numerical measurements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By adopting a case study method, the research aimed to examine authentic practices of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in addressing flexing behavior among students, highlighting the contextual dynamics within a specific school environment. The locus of the study was UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong, a state junior high school located in Humbang Hasundutan, North Sumatra. The school was selected because it represents a rural educational context where students are increasingly exposed to modern challenges such as social media-driven flexing, yet where local traditions and religious education remain influential in shaping students' character. Such a setting provides a unique perspective on how CRE teachers navigate between traditional values and contemporary behavioral issues (Stake, 1995). Participants in the study included one Christian Religious Education teacher and 24 students from grade VIII. The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling strategy, which is commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who possess specific knowledge and experience relevant to the study's objectives (Patton, 2015). The teacher was chosen as the primary informant due to his or her direct responsibility in implementing CRE instruction and role modeling personality competence. Meanwhile, the 24 students were selected to provide diverse insights into how teacher role modeling influenced their perceptions and behaviors regarding flexing. Classroom observations were conducted during three CRE sessions to examine teacher–student interactions, the modeling of Christian values, and students' behavioral responses. Field notes were taken to document the teacher's actions, communication patterns, and student engagement. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with both the teacher and selected students. The interview with the teacher sought to uncover

intentions, strategies, and challenges in addressing flexing behavior, while student interviews explored perceptions of the teacher's personality competence and its influence on their attitudes. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility, allowing researchers to probe deeper into participants' experiences while maintaining a consistent structure across respondents (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Document analysis was conducted to review lesson plans, project assignments, and student reflections. These documents provided supplementary evidence of how authentic assessments and role modeling strategies were integrated into the teaching process. Document analysis was particularly useful for identifying the alignment between teacher intentions and actual classroom practices (Bowen, 2009). Data triangulation was applied by comparing evidence from classroom observations, interview responses, and document analysis.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that the personality competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a decisive role in curbing flexing behavior among students at UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong. Personality competence, as outlined in Indonesia's National Education Standards, refers to a teacher's integrity, responsibility, discipline, and exemplary character (Kemendikbud, 2020). In this case, the CRE teacher consistently modeled values of simplicity, humility, and gratitude, which directly counteracted the culture of flaunting wealth or status. Classroom observations revealed that during both formal instruction and informal interactions, the teacher deliberately avoided emphasizing material possessions. Instead, biblical principles of stewardship and contentment were highlighted, particularly drawing upon scriptural references such as Philippians 4:11–13, which speaks of learning to be content in all circumstances. This biblical grounding provided students with a moral and spiritual framework through which they could reinterpret the notion of success, not as the accumulation of wealth, but as living faithfully and responsibly (Groome, 2011). Students repeatedly noted that the teacher's personal lifestyle was a significant influence on their perceptions. In interviews, many explained that their concept of success shifted from associating achievement with wealth and luxury to valuing honesty, kindness, humility, and responsibility. For example, one student observed that the teacher's refusal to display expensive possessions - even when capable of doing so - demonstrated humility in stark contrast to the dominant flexing culture on social media. This deliberate choice functioned as a counter-narrative, showing students that respect and admiration can be earned not through wealth but through character. Such consistency between words and deeds aligns with Lickona's (2019) argument that character education must be grounded in role modeling, since young people learn more effectively by observing behavior than by receiving abstract moral instructions.

### ***Student Responses to Teacher Role Modeling***

The impact of role modeling extended beyond intellectual recognition. Students expressed that the teacher's example invited them to reflect on their own attitudes and daily practices. For instance, in classroom discussions about materialism and gratitude,

students shared experiences of resisting peer pressure to boast about branded clothing or electronic gadgets. Several students explained that they felt encouraged to adopt a more modest lifestyle after observing the teacher's consistency in practicing humility and gratitude. These reflections echo Bandura's (1997) social learning theory, which emphasizes that behavior is often acquired through observation and imitation of role models. By witnessing their teacher embody Christian virtues, students were not only receiving theoretical lessons but also internalizing concrete behavioral patterns. The CRE teacher strategically integrated authentic learning tasks to reinforce values. Students were assigned reflective journals focusing on gratitude, which encouraged them to document daily blessings and resist the temptation to compare themselves with wealthier peers. Group projects involving community service were also implemented, allowing students to experience firsthand the joy of giving rather than flaunting. These activities served as pedagogical strategies that merged biblical values with real-life application, reinforcing Groome's (2011) shared praxis approach where faith and life intersect in lived experiences. Authentic tasks also validated Wiggins' (1998) concept of meaningful assessment, since students were not merely tested on knowledge but were evaluated on their ability to live out Christian values in context.

One of the strongest dimensions of the teacher's strategy was the use of scripture as both a moral compass and an alternative worldview to consumerism. By teaching biblical passages such as Philippians 4:11–13 and Matthew 6:19–21, which warns against storing treasures on earth, the teacher redirected students' focus from materialistic pursuits to eternal values. These scriptures not only provided authority but also encouraged critical reflection on dominant cultural narratives. Students who previously believed that prestige and popularity were signs of success began to question the sustainability and moral implications of such lifestyles. Instead, they began to view gratitude, humility, and service as more enduring sources of worth. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges persisted. Several students admitted struggling to fully abandon flexing behavior, particularly when confronted with peer influence or social media content that glamorized materialism. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were frequently cited as spaces where students felt pressure to conform to trends showcasing luxury items, vacations, or branded goods. This highlights a broader cultural tension where classroom values collide with societal norms. Research has shown that social media fosters comparison and materialism, particularly among adolescents who are seeking identity and belonging (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). For some students, the pull of online validation through likes and comments outweighed the slower, less visible rewards of humility and gratitude. The teacher also acknowledged limitations in addressing these challenges alone. While the CRE curriculum emphasizes moral and spiritual formation, the teacher noted that greater institutional support was needed to integrate character education across all subjects. For instance, while mathematics or science classes might not directly discuss humility or contentment, cross-curricular reinforcement could normalize values across the educational environment. This concern mirrors Lickona's (2019) call for comprehensive character education, where schools cultivate an "ethical learning community" that permeates all aspects of learning rather than isolating moral development to one subject. The lack of systemic support presented another challenge. The teacher suggested that consistent training for educators on addressing emerging

cultural issues such as flexing would be invaluable. Many teachers outside CRE may lack the framework or confidence to engage with such moral topics, leading to a fragmented approach. Institutional policies that promote character education across subjects, alongside school-wide campaigns on humility, gratitude, and responsible social media use, could enhance the teacher's efforts. According to Darling-Hammond and Adamson (2014), whole-school reforms are more effective in cultivating ethical behavior than isolated classroom interventions. Thus, while the teacher's personality competence was influential, broader institutional collaboration remains essential for sustainable transformation. The results of this study affirm the theoretical foundations laid out in character education literature. Lickona's (2019) framework emphasizes three key components of character education: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The teacher at UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong addressed all three dimensions by teaching biblical truths (moral knowing), modeling humility and gratitude (moral feeling), and creating opportunities for practice through authentic tasks such as community service (moral action). This holistic approach enabled students not only to understand values intellectually but also to embody them in practice. Similarly, Groome's (2011) shared praxis approach was evident in the classroom strategies. Students were invited to reflect critically on their experiences, confront cultural pressures such as social media flexing, and reinterpret these experiences through the lens of faith. This integration of life and faith empowered students to reconstruct their understanding of success and identity in light of Christian teachings. The findings also resonate with Noddings' (2013) ethic of care, as the teacher's consistent demonstration of humility and attentiveness to students fostered a relational environment where values could be nurtured organically.

### ***Student Transformation and Shifting Attitudes***

An important theme emerging from interviews and reflections was students' gradual shift in attitudes toward success and self-worth. Several students explained that after engaging in reflective journals on gratitude, they became more aware of the blessings in their lives, such as supportive families, friendships, and health. This practice countered the tendency to focus exclusively on material possessions. Others noted that participating in community service projects, such as helping clean the schoolyard or assisting elderly neighbors, instilled a sense of fulfillment that surpassed the temporary thrill of flexing online. These experiences reinforced Eisner's (2013) assertion that education should not be limited to cognitive achievement but should also capture expressive, moral, and relational dimensions of human growth. Students who initially resisted the lessons - believing flexing was harmless or even aspirational - eventually acknowledged that the practice could foster jealousy, exclusion, and division among peers. As they reflected on their experiences, some admitted to deleting or avoiding posts that showcased wealth in order to cultivate a more authentic online presence. This indicates a partial but significant cultural shift within the classroom community, where students began holding each other accountable for living out the values promoted by their teacher. The rural context of UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong provided unique insights into the dynamics of flexing behavior. While rural students may have less access to luxury goods than urban counterparts, the influence of social media has blurred these distinctions, making flexing a relevant challenge across contexts. However, the rural setting also provided

opportunities: strong community ties and cultural traditions of solidarity supported the teacher's emphasis on humility and gratitude. Students often cited family values and church teachings as reinforcement of the messages they received in CRE class. This suggests that partnerships between schools, families, and local churches can enhance the effectiveness of character education initiatives, echoing Epstein's (2001) model of school–family–community collaboration. The findings from UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong can be situated within broader discussions of educational practice in Indonesia and globally. In many schools, particularly in urban settings, the phenomenon of flexing reflects the intersection between consumer culture and adolescent identity formation. Studies show that young people often equate self-worth with material possessions, largely influenced by media representations and peer comparisons (Chan, 2019). In contrast, the CRE teacher's approach in this rural school demonstrates how strong role modeling can counteract these trends. By presenting an alternative narrative rooted in Christian virtues, the teacher effectively disrupted the cycle of consumer-driven validation. Comparisons with other contexts also highlight the uniqueness of this approach. For instance, research in Western contexts indicates that while character education is frequently emphasized, its integration into curriculum often remains fragmented, relying on isolated programs or extracurricular activities (Arthur, Kristjánsson, & Harrison, 2017). By contrast, the CRE teacher at UPT SMP Negeri 027 integrated moral formation into everyday classroom practices, embedding it in both content and method. This aligns with Darling-Hammond and Adamson's (2014) call for education that is not compartmentalized but woven into the fabric of daily learning. Such integration ensures that values are not peripheral but central to students' lived educational experience. Another significant finding is the use of authentic learning tasks—reflective journals, group projects, and community service—as tools to embody Christian values. These assignments not only facilitated the internalization of humility and gratitude but also provided experiential alternatives to flexing. By engaging in activities that highlighted service, generosity, and reflection, students experienced the satisfaction of moral and spiritual growth. This pedagogical approach resonates with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, which emphasizes that meaningful learning arises when learners engage in concrete experience, reflect upon it, and apply new insights to future practice. Authentic learning also promoted inclusivity. Students who might not excel in conventional assessments (such as written tests) were able to contribute meaningfully through service activities or creative group presentations. This finding mirrors Eisner's (2013) argument that education should value multiple forms of intelligence and expression, recognizing that moral and spiritual development may be best demonstrated through action rather than words. In the context of flexing, these tasks offered students a healthier avenue to gain recognition—not through flaunting possessions, but through meaningful contribution to their community. One of the most notable implications of this study is the importance of reinforcing character education beyond the classroom. While the CRE teacher modeled values effectively, interviews with students suggested that family and community contexts either strengthened or undermined these efforts. Students from families that emphasized humility and gratitude found it easier to resist flexing, while those whose parents encouraged displays of status (such as showcasing new gadgets) experienced greater tension. This finding aligns with Epstein's (2001) model of school–family–community partnerships, which argues that educational outcomes are

maximized when schools collaborate with families and local institutions. In rural settings such as Pakkat Hauagong, churches play a pivotal role in reinforcing values taught in schools. Teachers noted that collaboration with church leaders, particularly in youth programs, could provide continuity between classroom lessons and spiritual formation outside of school. Integrating service projects through both school and church, for instance, could multiply the impact of character education and create a stronger counter-narrative to flexing. The study underscores the structural and cultural barriers to preventing flexing. Social media remains a powerful influence, normalizing materialistic behavior and fostering competition among peers. Research indicates that adolescents are especially vulnerable to these pressures due to developmental needs for recognition and belonging (Steinberg, 2014). For this reason, teacher modeling alone is insufficient. Broader institutional efforts, such as integrating digital literacy and critical media education into the curriculum, are needed to help students critically evaluate online content. This would equip them not only to resist flexing but also to cultivate healthier digital identities. The CRE teacher identified the challenge of limited professional development. Many teachers lack formal training in authentic assessment or in addressing contemporary cultural issues such as flexing. As Sihombing (2020) has argued, professional development in Indonesia often focuses on technical aspects of pedagogy rather than moral and ethical challenges facing youth. To address this gap, educational authorities could provide workshops and resources on integrating character education into all subjects, as well as practical strategies for engaging students in digital ethics. Personality Competence: Schools should integrate character education systematically across subjects rather than limiting it to CRE. For instance, mathematics lessons can emphasize fairness and honesty, while science classes can highlight stewardship of creation. Such cross-curricular integration normalizes values and creates a consistent moral environment (Lickona, 2019). Teachers require structured training on role modeling, authentic assessment, and addressing contemporary cultural issues like flexing. Professional communities of practice could allow teachers to share strategies and challenges, fostering collaborative problem-solving (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2014). Schools should actively involve parents and churches in reinforcing humility, gratitude, and simplicity. Parent workshops on digital parenting and materialism could strengthen home support for school initiatives. Similarly, collaboration with churches could extend character formation into extracurricular youth activities (Epstein, 2001). Given the pervasive influence of social media, schools must equip students with critical media literacy skills. Lessons on evaluating online content, managing digital identity, and resisting peer pressure online could help students navigate the digital landscape more responsibly (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Encouraging students to lead service projects or campaigns against flexing can empower them to take ownership of character education. Peer influence, when positive, can be a powerful force in countering materialistic behavior. The study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how teacher personality competence - grounded in Christian values - serves as a practical antidote to materialistic trends such as flexing. While theories of character education (Lickona, 2019; Groome, 2011) emphasize the importance of role modeling, this study provides concrete evidence from a rural Indonesian school context, highlighting both the potential and limitations of this approach. It also extends the application of Groome's shared praxis model by showing how authentic learning tasks can bridge biblical values

with modern cultural challenges. The findings underscore the relevance of Palmer's (2007) idea. The CRE teacher at UPT SMP Negeri 027 embodied humility and gratitude not only in teaching but in daily conduct, thereby offering students a living example of Christian identity. This embodiment proved more persuasive than abstract instruction, suggesting that teacher personality competence must remain central to character education efforts. In sum, the results reveal that CRE teachers' personality competence has a profound influence on shaping students' responses to flexing behavior. By consistently modeling humility, gratitude, and simplicity, the teacher at UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong provided an alternative to materialistic definitions of success. Authentic learning tasks such as reflective journals and community service reinforced these lessons, allowing students to translate values into lived practice. Challenges persist, particularly the pervasive influence of social media and the lack of systemic institutional support. Addressing these requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates character education across the curriculum, invests in teacher professional development, involves families and communities, and incorporates digital literacy education. It demonstrates that personality competence is not an abstract requirement but a tangible force in shaping students' moral and spiritual identity. When teachers embody the values they teach, they inspire students to resist cultural pressures such as flexing and to cultivate virtues that align with Christian teachings. Such efforts, though situated in a rural Indonesian context, offer insights that are relevant to broader debates on character education in the 21st century, where materialism and consumer culture challenge the moral formation of youth worldwide.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the personality competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers serves as a critical force in shaping students' moral identity and in addressing the growing challenge of flexing behavior among adolescents. The case of UPT SMP Negeri 027 Pakkat Hauagong illustrates how humility, gratitude, and simplicity - when embodied by a teacher in both instruction and daily interactions - become living examples of Christian virtues that students can internalize. The CRE teacher's refusal to embrace materialistic symbols of success, coupled with a consistent emphasis on biblical teachings such as stewardship, contentment, and modesty, created a counter-narrative to the consumerist pressures students encounter through social media and peer influence. Students' responses indicated significant transformations in attitudes: many began to equate success with honesty, kindness, and service rather than possessions, reflecting the power of teacher role modeling to influence adolescent values. The study revealed the practical potential of authentic learning tasks - such as reflective journals on gratitude and community service projects - in reinforcing these virtues through experiential learning. By engaging students in practices that connect biblical values to real-life contexts, the CRE teacher facilitated not only intellectual understanding but also the lived enactment of humility and service. These findings confirm Lickona's (2019) view that character education requires integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, as well as Groome's (2011) shared praxis, where faith intersects with life in transformative ways. Peer pressure, digital media, and consumerist cultural narratives continue to exert a strong influence on students, often undermining the counter-values

taught in the classroom. The teacher's efforts were limited by the lack of systemic institutional support and the absence of cross-curricular reinforcement of character education. Without broader collaboration involving other teachers, school administrators, parents, and church leaders, the burden of resisting flexing remains disproportionately placed on CRE instruction alone. This research affirms that CRE teachers' personality competence is not merely an abstract requirement of professional standards but a tangible and practical approach to guiding students toward moral maturity. By living as role models of integrity, responsibility, humility, and gratitude, teachers provide an effective antidote to materialism and foster character development that resonates with Christian values. Future efforts should aim to strengthen institutional support, integrate digital literacy into curricula, and enhance partnerships with families and communities to create a holistic moral environment. In doing so, schools can more effectively cultivate spiritually grounded and socially responsible students who are equipped to resist the culture of flexing and to embody virtues that transcend consumerist definitions of worth.

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