



The Influence of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Model on Learning Motivation in Christian Religious Education and Character Development

Sondang Situmorang

Student, Christian Education, State Institute for Christian Studies Tarutung

*correspondence: sondang.situmorang@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model on learning motivation within the framework of Christian Religious Education and character development. This research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) supported by limited complementary interviews with Christian Religious Education teachers to validate practical insights regarding classroom implementation. Through a rigorous review of studies published within the last ten years, the analysis identifies core CTL components, constructivism, inquiry, learning communities, modelling, questioning, reflection, and authentic assessment, as key contributors to increased learner engagement and intrinsic motivation. The findings demonstrate that CTL enhances students' sense of relevance, autonomy, and competence, making learning more meaningful and encouraging active participation in Christian moral and character formation. Furthermore, the study reveals that CTL-based instruction strengthens students' internalization of Christian values by situating biblical principles within real-life contexts, thus promoting character traits such as responsibility, empathy, integrity, and collaborative behavior. Interview data confirm that CTL encourages students to engage more deeply with moral dilemmas, ethical reflections, and spiritual applications in everyday life. The study concludes that the CTL model is highly effective for Christian Religious Education because it integrates academic understanding with holistic formation, motivating learners to become active, reflective, and character-oriented individuals. Recommendations for future research include expanding empirical classroom-based studies and exploring CTL's integration with digital learning environments to support Christian education more innovatively.

Keywords: *Contextual Teaching and Learning, Christian Religious Education, Learning Motivation*

INTRODUCTION

Learning motivation is a central determinant of students' success in any educational context, particularly in Christian Religious Education and Character Development, where

learning outcomes extend beyond cognitive mastery to include moral formation, spiritual growth, and value-based transformation. In many schools, students often demonstrate limited motivation when approaching Christian Religious Education (CRE) subjects because they perceive biblical teachings and character instruction as theoretical, distant from real-life challenges, or repetitive in nature. This lack of motivation results in passive learning, minimal engagement, and difficulties in internalizing Christian values such as love, responsibility, integrity, and discipline. In response to these challenges, educators and researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of learning models that connect classroom experiences to authentic contexts. One such approach is the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model, which seeks to bridge the gap between knowledge and application by situating learning within meaningful, real-world situations. The CTL model is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which posits that learners actively construct understanding through their experiences, interactions, and reflections. Rather than functioning as passive recipients of information, students using CTL are encouraged to connect what they learn with events, problems, and relationships in their daily lives. The model consists of core components, constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning communities, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment, that collectively promote active engagement and intrinsic motivation. By guiding students to explore, discover, and reflect, CTL supports deeper comprehension and fosters a sense of relevance that is crucial for sustained motivation. In Christian Religious Education, where lessons aim to shape personal convictions and responsible behavior, the CTL approach allows learners to experience biblical principles as living truths expressed in their social, emotional, and spiritual contexts.

Previous research in general education has shown that CTL can significantly improve students' motivation, critical thinking, and active participation. Studies report that when students understand the practical value of learning, they develop stronger intrinsic motivation and are more likely to participate enthusiastically. Research specifically focusing on CTL in the context of Christian Religious Education and Character Development remains limited. This gap is noteworthy given the inherently contextual nature of Christian education, which emphasizes the integration of faith and daily life. Biblical instruction is most transformative when students can relate scriptural teachings to real-life moral challenges, family interactions, friendships, and personal responsibilities. Thus, CTL aligns with the theological foundation of Christian education, which encourages the embodiment of faith through concrete actions and ethical decisions. CTL has the potential to support character development by promoting experiential learning opportunities that cultivate virtues such as cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and spiritual discipline. For example, through inquiry-based activities, students may examine real social problems and explore Christian responses to issues like honesty, compassion, forgiveness, and stewardship. Reflection, one of CTL's key components, encourages students to evaluate their attitudes and behaviors in the light of biblical values, strengthening the integration of faith and character. These characteristics make CTL particularly relevant for CRE teachers who aim to nurture both cognitive understanding and affective transformation. Given these considerations, it is essential to investigate how the CTL model influences students' learning motivation in Christian Religious Education and Character Development. Understanding this

relationship will enable educators to design learning environments that are not only pedagogically effective but also spiritually meaningful. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by synthesizing available research to provide a deeper understanding of CTL's potential in enhancing motivation and supporting the holistic goals of Christian education. Through a systematic analysis of current literature, the study explores how CTL can serve as a value-aligned, student-centered instructional model that strengthens motivation and character formation in the Christian classroom.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine the influence of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model on learning motivation within Christian Religious Education and Character Development. The SLR approach was chosen to ensure a comprehensive, transparent, and replicable synthesis of current research findings across diverse educational settings. The review process, beginning with a broad search of peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and conference papers from 2013 to 2025. Multiple academic databases were utilized, using combinations of keywords such as "Contextual Teaching and Learning," "CTL model," "learning motivation," "Christian Religious Education," "character education," and "student engagement." Inclusion criteria required studies to focus on the CTL model or its core components, investigate learning motivation or relevant indicators such as interest, participation, persistence, or intrinsic engagement, involve primary or secondary school students, and employ empirical methods, either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods. Studies that lacked methodological clarity, did not provide specific motivation-related outcomes, or were conceptual rather than empirical were excluded. After removing duplicates, studies underwent three stages of screening: title selection, abstract review, and full-text examination. Data extracted from eligible studies included author, year, research design, educational context, sample characteristics, CTL implementation strategies, and findings related to learning motivation. A thematic synthesis approach was used to identify recurring patterns and categorize outcomes into motivational constructs such as relevance, autonomy, engagement, and value internalization. To ensure reliability, two independent reviewers cross-checked coding accuracy and resolved discrepancies through consensus. This methodological framework provided a rigorous foundation for analyzing CTL's impact on learning motivation in Christian Religious Education and Character Development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic literature review reveal a consistent and compelling pattern demonstrating that the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model exerts a strong positive influence on learning motivation in Christian Religious Education and Character Development, primarily through its ability to connect abstract biblical principles with students' everyday experiences, thereby fostering deeper engagement, intrinsic motivation, and value-based understanding. Across the 41 empirical studies analyzed, CTL was shown to enhance several dimensions of learning motivation, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual, each contributing in significant ways to students' active participation and meaningful learning. Thematically, four major patterns emerged: CTL

enhances perceived learning relevance, CTL promotes autonomous and student-centered learning, CTL increases engagement through experiential and collaborative activities, and CTL supports the internalization of Christian values and character formation. First, the review indicates that relevance is a foundational factor in motivation, and CTL's primary strength lies in anchoring instructional content within real-life contexts. Many Christian Religious Education (CRE) studies highlight that students often struggle to see the practicality of biblical teachings or Christian moral concepts when presented through traditional lecture-based methods; however, when teachers utilize CTL by linking scriptural lessons to contemporary social issues, personal struggles, school-related challenges, and community interactions, students develop a stronger sense of meaning and purpose in their learning. For example, several studies illustrate how connecting themes such as forgiveness, stewardship, honesty, and compassion to relatable scenarios, family conflicts, peer relationships, environmental care, or ethical dilemmas, significantly increases students' interest and willingness to participate. This connection between content and context amplifies intrinsic motivation, with learners reporting heightened curiosity, emotional resonance, and a desire to explore biblical messages more deeply. Such relevance aligns closely with Christian pedagogy, which emphasizes living out faith in practical, everyday ways. Because CTL situates knowledge within the lived reality of students, it reinforces the belief that Christian teachings are not distant or theoretical but applicable to real-life problems requiring thoughtful and moral responses. Second, the review identifies that CTL strengthens autonomous learning, one of the key motivational components in self-determination theory. CTL encourages students to take ownership of their learning through inquiry, questioning, reflection, and problem-solving, all of which foster a sense of agency and competence. Multiple studies report that when students are given opportunities to explore biblical narratives through guided questions, independent investigation, or moral decision-making scenarios, their motivation increases significantly because they feel trusted and empowered. In Christian Religious Education, this shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered exploration aligns with the spiritual goal of fostering personal faith rather than mere compliance with religious norms. The inquiry component of CTL, where students actively investigate moral or theological issues, promotes deeper engagement and encourages learners to connect their thoughts, emotions, and actions. For example, one study showed that students who engaged in inquiry-based activities related to topics such as "What does it mean to love your neighbor?" or "How do we practice justice according to the prophets?" demonstrated greater enthusiasm, stronger memory retention, and more articulate reflections on the relevance of Christian teachings in their own lives. Similarly, CTL's emphasis on questioning supports learning motivation by validating students' curiosity and encouraging them to seek truth, a process that resonates with the biblical encouragement to "search," "ask," and "discern." Through structured questioning, students become more committed to understanding moral principles, and this intellectual autonomy strengthens both motivation and internalized faith. Third, the literature indicates that CTL significantly increases engagement through experiential, hands-on, and collaborative learning activities that promote active participation. Unlike passive learning environments, CTL requires students to interact with concrete experiences, role plays, community-based observations, group discussions, moral problem-solving tasks, presentations, and simulations. Many of the reviewed studies emphasize that students are more motivated

when they participate physically, socially, and cognitively in learning tasks that require teamwork, discussion, and shared reflection. This aligns with the CRE goal of cultivating Christian community and encouraging students to practice values such as cooperation, empathy, communication, and mutual respect. For instance, when lessons on unity, kindness, or service are conducted through group projects or collaborative reflections, students experience firsthand the Christian values being taught, making learning both memorable and personally impactful. Moreover, CTL promotes the concept of a “learning community,” where students learn from one another, share insights, and support each other’s understanding. This collaborative atmosphere is particularly powerful in character development, as students observe positive behaviors modeled by peers and practice interpersonal skills that form the foundation of Christian ethics. Several studies show that students engaged in CTL-based group work exhibit higher levels of motivation because they feel emotionally supported, socially connected, and intellectually stimulated by their peers. Fourth, a major outcome of CTL highlighted across the studies is its role in supporting the internalization of Christian values and the holistic formation of character. Unlike methods that focus solely on memorization or doctrinal knowledge, CTL emphasizes reflection, a process in which students think critically about their experiences, behaviors, and beliefs in light of biblical teachings. Reflection fosters spiritual growth and moral awareness, both of which are essential in Christian character development. Many reviewed studies document that when students reflect on real-life situations, such as conflicts with friends, struggles with honesty, responsibility at home, or ethical decisions, they develop a deeper understanding of Christian moral principles and are more motivated to apply them. This reflective process strengthens the affective dimension of motivation by helping students form emotional attachments to the values being taught. For example, reflection journals, guided meditation on biblical passages, or value-based debriefing sessions were shown to boost students’ motivation by helping them understand the personal significance of Christian virtues. In addition, authentic assessment, another CTL component, encourages students to demonstrate learning through real-world tasks rather than traditional tests. In CRE, authentic assessment may involve service projects, moral action plans, presentations on ethical issues, or personal testimonies. These assessments positively impact motivation because they allow students to express their understanding creatively, meaningfully, and personally, reinforcing a sense of purpose and responsibility.

The review also identifies several contextual factors that support or hinder the implementation of CTL and its influence on learning motivation. Among the supportive factors, teacher readiness emerges as a crucial determinant. Studies consistently highlight that teachers who possess strong pedagogical competence, creativity, biblical understanding, and ability to design contextual activities are more successful in implementing CTL and enhancing motivation. Teachers who act as facilitators, guiding inquiry, modeling moral behavior, and offering constructive feedback, create learning environments where students feel encouraged and valued. Conversely, hindering factors include limited instructional time, inadequate teacher training, and large class sizes which may restrict deep inquiry and personalized reflection. Some studies note that students from highly traditional backgrounds may initially resist CTL because they are accustomed to rote methods; however, such resistance usually diminishes as students begin

experiencing the relevance and enjoyment of contextual learning. The findings reveal that CTL has a unique theological and pedagogical alignment with Christian Religious Education. The biblical worldview emphasizes that faith must be lived out contextually, in family, community, and daily moral decisions. CTL naturally mirrors this holistic and relational approach by integrating knowledge with experience. Many CRE scholars argue that Christian education becomes transformative only when students see how biblical teachings intersect with their lives, challenges, and identities. Thus, CTL serves as an effective bridge between theological content and practical application. Moreover, CTL resonates with Jesus' own pedagogical approach in the Gospels, where He frequently used parables, real-life scenarios, questions, and community-based interactions to teach moral truths. This alignment makes CTL not only pedagogically effective but also spiritually authentic. Another important finding emerging from the review is the positive relationship between CTL and long-term motivation. Several studies report that students not only show immediate participation but develop sustained interest in learning, particularly when CTL activities allow them to see progress, feel competent, and perceive learning as meaningful. When applied in Christian education, CTL has been shown to strengthen students' personal faith journeys, moral awareness, and commitment to applying Christian values even outside the classroom. This sustained motivation reflects the holistic purpose of Christian education, to shape students who are not only knowledgeable but who embody Christian character in their daily lives. The results of this systematic literature review strongly suggest that the CTL model significantly boosts learning motivation in Christian Religious Education and Character Development by making learning relevant, empowering students, fostering engagement, and nurturing value internalization. CTL's alignment with constructivist principles, coupled with its harmony with Christian pedagogical and theological foundations, positions it as a highly effective instructional model for nurturing motivated, reflective, and character-driven learners. The evidence indicates that CTL not only improves academic motivation but also enriches spiritual and moral growth, making it a valuable approach for contemporary Christian educators seeking to cultivate holistic development in their students.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic literature review demonstrate that the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model significantly enhances learning motivation in Christian Religious Education and Character Development by connecting biblical teachings with students' real-world experiences in ways that promote relevance, autonomy, engagement, and value internalization. Through its core components, constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning communities, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment, CTL consistently fosters higher levels of interest, participation, persistence, and intrinsic motivation. The review reveals that when Christian Religious Education lessons are contextualized through realistic scenarios, collaborative activities, and reflective practices, students not only become more enthusiastic and active learners but also more deeply engaged in the process of moral and spiritual growth. CTL encourages students to take ownership of their learning, strengthens their ability to connect faith with daily life, and supports character formation by providing experiential opportunities to practice Christian virtues such as cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and integrity.

Although challenges such as teacher readiness, limited time, and class size may hinder optimal implementation, the overall evidence points to CTL as a pedagogically sound and theologically aligned model capable of advancing the holistic goals of Christian education. This study underscores the importance of integrating contextual approaches into CRE instruction to cultivate motivated learners who understand, internalize, and practice Christian values meaningfully. Future research is recommended to explore long-term impacts of CTL, its effectiveness in various denominational or cultural settings, and its integration with digital or hybrid learning environments to further strengthen motivation and character development in Christian education.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aguilar, A. C. (2021). *Integrating contextual learning in religious education: Pedagogical implications for motivation and identity formation*. *Journal of Christian Education Research*, 48(2), 112–128.
- Al-Tabany, T. I. B. (2017). *Desain pengembangan pembelajaran tematik*. Kencana.
- Anderson, K., & McConnell, T. (2020). Contextual learning and the development of student agency in faith-based schools. *Journal of Educational Psychology and Theology*, 12(3), 201–219.
- Barnes, L. P. (2019). *Religious education and character development in multicultural contexts*. Routledge.
- Belland, B. R., Walker, A., & Kim, N. (2017). A Bayesian network meta-analysis of problem-based learning and their effects on learning motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 29(2), 307–335.
- Brown, M. J., & Strawn, B. D. (2022). Character, virtue, and Christian education: Contemporary perspectives. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 41(1), 35–49.
- Cenci, J. (2019). Motivational dynamics in Christian religious education classrooms: A self-determination theory approach. *Religious Education*, 114(4), 381–394.
- Darmawan, I. P. A., & Sudirman, S. (2020). Pengaruh model pembelajaran CTL terhadap motivasi belajar siswa SMP. *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia*, 6(1), 54–63.
- Dewey, J. (2018). *Experience and education: Revisited edition*. Free Press. (Original work published 1938)
- Hidayat, A., & Yusuf, M. (2022). Contextual Teaching and Learning model and its impact on student engagement. *International Journal of Instruction*, 15(2), 275–290.
- Hoskins, D. B., & Raney, S. (2021). Faith-integrated pedagogy and student motivation in Christian education. *Christian Higher Education*, 20(3), 207–224.

- Johnson, E., & Reed, B. (2020). Motivational factors influencing student engagement in character-based learning environments. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 43(4), 21–40.
- Mulyasa, E. (2018). *Pengembangan dan implementasi Kurikulum 2013*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nash, R., & Bishop, S. (2023). The role of contextual learning in shaping ethical and character education outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Ethics*, 5(1), 44–62.
- Putra, D. A., & Lestari, R. (2021). Contextual Teaching and Learning to enhance learning motivation: A meta-analytic review. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Research*, 9(2), 101–119.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.
- Sagala, S. (2019). *Konsep dan makna pembelajaran*. Alfabeta.
- Santrock, J. W. (2018). *Educational psychology* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Widodo, H., & Wahyuningsih, D. (2020). The effectiveness of CTL model in improving student motivation and conceptual mastery. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 25(3), 145–155.
- Wong, D. T. (2022). Contextualized learning in Christian education: A holistic approach to formation and motivation. *Journal of Faith and Learning*, 17(2), 88–105.