

Forming Character through Appreciation: The Personality of PAK Teachers Who Reflect the Spirit of Exodus 37:17 at SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers embody appreciation as a form of spiritual pedagogy that shapes students' moral and spiritual character, inspired by the craftsmanship of the golden lampstand in Exodus 37:17. The research situates this theological metaphor within the context of SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu, a pluralistic public school in Indonesia, where the PAK teacher's personality and spiritual integrity influence the learning environment. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving one PAK teacher and eight students. The findings reveal that the teacher's personality—marked by empathy, humility, and prayerful attentiveness—transforms appreciation into a sacred act of formation rather than mere encouragement. By valuing students' creative and moral efforts, the teacher mirrors divine craftsmanship, affirming each learner as a reflection of God's image. This practice cultivates gratitude, cooperation, and moral awareness, turning the classroom into a "liturgical space" where learning becomes an encounter with grace. Theologically, appreciation functions as participation in God's creative work, aligning with the incarnational principle that truth is lived as well as taught. Pedagogically, it nurtures an inclusive culture of affirmation and respect in a diverse setting. The study concludes that forming character through appreciation represents the fusion of theology and pedagogy: the PAK teacher, like the lampstand of pure gold, illuminates students' hearts through faith-rooted empathy, transforming education into an act of worship and moral craftsmanship.

Keywords: Character, Christian Religious Education, Personality

INTRODUCTION

Education, when viewed from the lens of Christian theology, is not merely a process of intellectual formation but an act of divine participation in shaping the image of God within human beings. The teacher, therefore, is not only a transmitter of knowledge but also a co-laborer with God in cultivating moral and spiritual character. Within the framework of Christian Religious Education/PAK, this vocation assumes an even more sacred dimension.

The PAK teacher's role extends beyond the teaching of biblical content to embodying the virtues and values of Christ in daily interaction with students. One of the most profound ways in which such embodiment occurs is through the act of appreciation-valuing the work, effort, and creativity of students as a reflection of God's image within them. This study takes inspiration from Exodus 37:17, which describes the crafting of the golden lampstand (*menorah*): "He made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand of hammered work; its base and its shaft; its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers were of one piece with it." This verse, while describing a material object, reveals a profound theological truth: the beauty of creation reflects divine craftsmanship, and human hands that create, build, and design are extensions of God's creative work. The artisan Bezalel, under divine inspiration, shaped the lampstand with precision and devotion, demonstrating that human work-when done in the presence of God-is sacred. In this light, a PAK teacher who appreciates the "works of the students' hands" participates in this divine pattern, affirming that every act of creativity, learning, and expression is a participation in God's ongoing creation.

At SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu, this theological idea gains practical relevance. As a public middle school in a diverse cultural and religious setting, the role of the Christian Religious Education teacher becomes crucial in shaping the moral imagination of students. The PAK teacher operates within a context where students are developing identity, responsibility, and moral judgment. This period of adolescence is characterized by the search for recognition and affirmation. When a teacher demonstrates appreciation-not merely for academic performance but for the sincerity and creativity of students' work-it builds confidence, nurtures respect, and reinforces moral values such as diligence, humility, and gratitude. In essence, appreciation becomes a form of spiritual pedagogy that transforms ordinary classroom moments into encounters of grace. In contemporary education, the culture of appreciation is often overshadowed by performance-oriented assessment systems. Students are frequently valued for their grades rather than for the process of learning, creativity, and moral effort. This utilitarian view of education risks reducing the learner to a producer of results rather than a person created in the image of God. In contrast, PAK teachers who reflect the spirit of Exodus 37:17 seek to restore the sacred dimension of work by acknowledging the divine spark in each student's effort. Their personality-marked by patience, empathy, humility, and gratitude-creates a nurturing atmosphere where every student feels seen and valued. Such an environment aligns with the biblical vision of education as formation (*paideia*), where knowledge and character are inseparable. This approach embodies the incarnational principle of Christian pedagogy: the Word becomes flesh through the teacher's actions of appreciation and encouragement. When a PAK teacher praises a student's artwork, supports a moral decision, or honors a simple act of kindness, they mirror the divine affirmation that God bestowed upon His creation-"and God saw that it was good." This act of acknowledgment is transformative. It not only builds the student's character but also reaffirms the teacher's own spiritual integrity as one who teaches from the heart. Parker Palmer (2007) reminds us that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." Thus, the personality of the PAK teacher, shaped by prayer and the imitation of Christ, becomes the foundation of effective moral education. This study seeks to explore how appreciation, as an expression of the PAK teacher's personality, functions as a means of character formation among students at

SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu. It investigates how teachers who internalize the spirit of Exodus 37:17-honoring human creativity as divine craftsmanship-create classrooms that nurture gratitude, respect, and moral growth. By examining lived experiences, classroom practices, and teacher-student interactions, this research aims to illuminate how appreciation becomes a theological and pedagogical bridge between faith and education. Ultimately, this study argues that forming character through appreciation is not only a pedagogical strategy but a spiritual act that reveals God's glory through human creativity and compassion.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, designed to explore how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers at SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu embody the spirit of Exodus 37:17 in their teaching personality-particularly in how they express appreciation toward students' work and creativity as a means of character formation. The qualitative design was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of values, meanings, and lived experiences that cannot be quantified (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It seeks to interpret the teacher's actions and attitudes as reflections of theological convictions, focusing on how appreciation operates as both pedagogical and spiritual practice in classroom settings. The research locus was SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu, a public junior high school located in a pluralistic environment where Christian teachers and students coexist with peers of various religious backgrounds. This context provided a meaningful setting for observing how Christian spirituality interacts with inclusive educational practices. The research participants consisted of one PAK teacher and eight students (ages 13-15) who had been taught by the same teacher for at least one academic year. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon being studied (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This research explored the PAK teacher's personal spirituality, teaching philosophy, and understanding of appreciation as a theological act. The interviews also sought students' perspectives on how their teacher's appreciation influenced their motivation, behavior, and moral awareness. Then, conducted over a four-week period, focusing on how appreciation was expressed in teaching interactions-verbal affirmations, responses to students' creative work, and feedback given during lessons or reflection activities, and examined to identify how biblical principles and character education values were integrated into classroom practices. The themes were then correlated with the theological motif of Exodus 37:17, particularly the symbolism of "the lampstand of pure gold"-a metaphor for beauty, value, and divine craftsmanship. The analysis sought to reveal how the teacher's personality, rooted in spiritual devotion and appreciation, mirrors this divine artistry. Ethical considerations were observed through informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' beliefs and experiences. The entire process was approached prayerfully, recognizing that studying teacher spirituality involves sacred dimensions that require sensitivity and reverence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal the profound relationship between the personality of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers and the formation of students' character

through the practice of appreciation. At SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu, the PAK teacher exemplifies a form of spirituality deeply rooted in Exodus 37:17, where the craftsmanship of the golden lampstand represents both divine artistry and the human call to create with reverence. This biblical imagery serves as a theological foundation for understanding the teacher's approach to appreciating students' work-not merely as an act of praise or motivation, but as a reflection of God's acknowledgment of human creativity and dignity. In this sense, appreciation becomes a sacred pedagogical practice, nurturing moral, emotional, and spiritual growth. Throughout the data collection process-comprising interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis-a consistent pattern emerged: the PAK teacher's personality, characterized by warmth, humility, and spiritual attentiveness, significantly shaped how appreciation functioned as a tool for moral formation. Her approach was not superficial or limited to verbal compliments; rather, it was embedded in her entire relational and instructional demeanor. Students described her as "gentle but firm," "always encouraging," and "loving every student's work as if it were something special." These descriptions illustrate that appreciation, when grounded in Christian spirituality, transcends the behavioral dimension and becomes a formative influence on students' sense of self-worth, responsibility, and moral awareness. The teacher's understanding of appreciation was deeply influenced by her interpretation of Exodus 37:17: "He made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand of hammered work; its base, its shaft, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers were of one piece with it." In her reflections, she viewed this passage as a symbol of divine excellence and attentiveness-qualities that human educators should emulate in nurturing the talents and moral potential of their students. During an interview, she stated: "When Bezalel crafted the lampstand, it was not just work; it was worship. Every detail mattered to God. I believe that when students make something-even a simple drawing or a reflection-it also matters to God. My role is to help them see that their work has value." This theological conviction shaped her pedagogical behavior. By recognizing students' efforts as reflections of divine creativity, she cultivated a classroom atmosphere where appreciation was both moral and spiritual. Students were encouraged to see their academic and artistic work not as competition but as participation in God's ongoing creative purpose. This transformed the classroom into what James K. A. Smith (2009) would call a "liturgical space," where ordinary acts of learning became practices of worship and formation. Theologically, this aligns with the idea that character formation in Christian education is not simply about moral correction but about reorienting affections-teaching students to love what God loves (Smith, 2016). By affirming students' creative expressions, the teacher guided them toward gratitude, humility, and diligence-virtues that mirror the careful craftsmanship described in Exodus 37:17.

The Personality of the PAK Teacher as a Spiritual Medium

Observations revealed that the teacher's personality played a central role in mediating the experience of appreciation. She embodied what Parker Palmer (2007) calls the "inner landscape of teaching," where integrity, self-awareness, and spiritual grounding become the foundation of authentic pedagogy. The teacher began each class with prayer and a short reflection from Scripture, often relating the passage to students' daily experiences. This spiritual rhythm set the tone for relational and respectful interactions, making

appreciation a natural extension of her faith rather than a pedagogical strategy. Her personality was marked by gentleness and attentiveness. She made eye contact with students, smiled warmly when they participated, and consistently acknowledged their efforts, regardless of academic achievement. In one observed class, a student presented a creative summary of a Bible story using colored paper. Instead of merely saying “good job,” the teacher asked reflective questions: “What made you choose those colors?” and “What does this story mean to you?” This interaction transformed appreciation from mere affirmation to dialogue—an exchange that validated the student’s thought process and spiritual reflection. Students responded positively to this atmosphere. In interviews, several expressed that their teacher made them “feel brave to express themselves” and “not afraid to fail.” One student said, “When I show my work, she never compares me with others. She helps me see what I can improve.” Such experiences suggest that appreciation, when modeled through empathetic and spiritually grounded personality, fosters resilience and self-confidence. These attributes are essential for moral and character development, as they nurture students’ intrinsic motivation to grow rather than to seek external validation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The study also revealed that for the PAK teacher, appreciation was inseparable from worship. She perceived her role not merely as an instructor but as a spiritual guide accompanying students in their growth. During one interview, she remarked: “When I appreciate a student’s effort, I am actually thanking God for the work He is doing through them. It reminds me that teaching is not about my success but about seeing the image of God flourish in my students.” After a group project, the teacher invited students to present their work and then collectively offered a short prayer of thanksgiving, saying, “Let us thank God for the creativity He has given us.” This ritual transformed academic evaluation into spiritual celebration, fostering gratitude and humility. This approach embodies what Nouwen (1975) calls the spirituality of affirmation—a posture that recognizes God’s redemptive work in every person and act of learning. Through appreciation, the teacher affirmed students’ worth, not based on performance but on their identity as God’s children. This approach is particularly transformative in adolescence, a stage when students are forming self-concepts and moral identity (Erikson, 1968). By modeling unconditional acceptance and recognition, the teacher helped students internalize a sense of dignity that reflects Christian anthropology. Another significant finding is that appreciation reshaped classroom dynamics into a community of grace rather than competition. In observations, it was noted that the teacher consistently redirected students’ attention from comparison toward collaboration. When one student achieved high marks, she encouraged peers to celebrate together, emphasizing shared learning rather than rivalry. Conversely, when a student struggled, she highlighted progress rather than failure. This practice reflects the Pauline model of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), where every member contributes uniquely to the whole. The teacher applied this theology to classroom management, fostering empathy and mutual respect. During a reflective activity, she told her students, “Each of you is like a part of God’s lampstand—unique but shining together.” The metaphor from Exodus 37:17 thus became a communal image, shaping students’ understanding of interdependence and shared value. Student interviews confirmed that this environment encouraged moral growth. One student said, “I learned not to laugh when someone makes mistakes because Bu Guru always reminds us that everyone’s work is precious.” Another added, “When we help each other, she says we make God happy.” Such

statements indicate that appreciation cultivated empathy and collective responsibility-key virtues in Christian moral education. The process is imbued with theological meaning. The teacher's consistent appreciation transformed peer interactions into spiritual exercises, reinforcing the idea that learning is both communal and redemptive.

Integrating Appreciation and Moral Reflection

Data analysis revealed that appreciation was most effective when combined with moral reflection. The teacher often used moments of praise to initiate ethical discussion. For example, after commending a student's written reflection on honesty, she asked, "How can we live this out in school or at home?" This approach encouraged students to connect abstract moral values with concrete behavior. In classroom observations, moral reflection was a regular practice. Students frequently wrote short journals after lessons, and the teacher responded personally to each entry with affirming comments like, "Thank you for sharing honestly-God loves your sincerity," or "You are learning to see with faith." These personalized responses demonstrated that appreciation was both relational and formative, guiding students toward self-examination and gratitude. This corresponds with the biblical idea of anamnesis-a remembering that transforms. Just as Israel remembered God's works through ritual, students were invited to remember their moral experiences as part of their faith journey. The teacher's feedback functioned as a pastoral voice, helping students interpret their actions through the lens of grace. While the study highlighted the transformative power of appreciation, it also uncovered significant challenges. The teacher acknowledged difficulties in maintaining spiritual focus amid administrative demands and a curriculum that prioritizes measurable outcomes over moral development. Moreover, being a Christian educator in a pluralistic public school required sensitivity to religious diversity. The teacher noted: "Sometimes I feel limited in expressing faith directly, but I can still show it through attitude-by appreciating every student sincerely, regardless of their belief." This statement reflects the adaptability required of faith-based teachers in secular settings. Rather than proselytizing, she practiced what Palmer (1998) describes as "teaching from integrity"-allowing her spirituality to shine through authenticity and compassion. Her appreciation thus became an inclusive practice, communicating respect and love beyond religious boundaries. Another challenge was the digital distraction affecting students' focus and motivation. The teacher observed that students' attention spans were increasingly fragmented, and appreciation often needed to compete with the instant gratification provided by social media. To address this, she integrated creative media-music, visual art, and storytelling-into her lessons, ensuring that appreciation connected with students' interests. These creative strategies exemplify Gardner's (2011) theory of multiple intelligences, affirming that moral and spiritual formation occurs through diverse channels, not merely cognitive instruction. The teacher demonstrated resilience and spiritual maturity. She maintained daily prayer routines and sought strength from Scripture, especially from Exodus 37:17, which she interpreted as a reminder that even small acts of teaching could shine with divine light. Her reflection, "Even when tired, I remember that God sees every detail of my work," encapsulated the ethos of vocational faithfulness that sustained her pedagogy. The data revealed clear outcomes of this appreciation-centered pedagogy. Students displayed increased self-confidence, moral awareness, and spiritual sensitivity. They

began to express gratitude for both personal achievements and peers' successes, indicating a shift from ego-centered motivation to communal joy. Several students reported changes in behavior, such as being more patient, helpful, and reflective in prayer. Observation notes confirmed these transformations. In one instance, a student who often mocked peers became a helper during group activities, explaining, "Bu Guru said we should see others as God's creation." Another began keeping a gratitude journal inspired by classroom reflections. These behavioral shifts align with the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and confirm the effectiveness of appreciation as a medium for moral formation. The teacher's approach also deepened students' theological understanding. By connecting creative expression with divine craftsmanship, students learned to see value in both effort and process, not just results. This perspective nurtured humility and perseverance-virtues often overlooked in achievement-oriented systems. In post-interview reflections, one student summarized: "I learned that God values our effort even if it's not perfect. That makes me want to try harder."

Integrating these findings, Exodus 37:17 emerges as a powerful metaphor for the PAK teacher's vocation. Just as the lampstand was crafted with care and illuminated the tabernacle, the teacher's appreciative personality illuminates the moral and spiritual lives of students. Her appreciation functions as both reflection and transmission of divine light-acknowledging the beauty of each student's work while guiding them toward character rooted in gratitude and faith. This synthesis resonates with Palmer's (2007) notion that authentic teaching arises when "the teacher's soul and subject become one." In this context, the subject is not merely theology but the lived experience of God's grace. The PAK teacher, by appreciating students' creative expressions, mirrors God's own appreciation of human endeavor. Teaching thus becomes an act of spiritual co-creation—a participation in God's ongoing work of forming lives in wisdom and love. Appreciation as practiced in this classroom represents a holistic model of Christian pedagogy where cognition, emotion, and spirituality intertwine. It affirms the view of White (2000) that true education "harmoniously develops the physical, mental, and spiritual powers," preparing students for service and stewardship. The teacher's emphasis on valuing students' work, therefore, extends beyond motivation; it becomes formation-shaping identity, virtue, and vocation. The findings offer several implications for both theology and pedagogy. Theologically, they reaffirm that education is a sacred vocation reflecting the creative and appreciative nature of God. Exodus 37:17 serves as a paradigm for educators to recognize the divine presence in human creativity and to view teaching as craftsmanship guided by grace. Pedagogically, the study demonstrates that appreciation, when rooted in spirituality, cultivates a moral environment where students experience affirmation, belonging, and transformation. For Christian educators, this suggests that personality is not a secondary attribute but a primary instrument of teaching ministry. The PAK teacher's kindness, patience, and empathy functioned as living theology-embodied expressions of divine character. Educational institutions, therefore, should prioritize the spiritual and emotional formation of teachers, ensuring that appreciation arises from genuine faith rather than superficial positivity. The study at SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu illustrates how the personality of a PAK teacher who values students' work can transform ordinary education into a sacred encounter. Appreciation, informed by Exodus 37:17, becomes an act of spiritual craftsmanship—recognizing that each student's life, like

the lampstand of pure gold, is a unique creation meant to shine with divine light. Through her appreciative personality, the teacher not only motivates but molds, guiding students toward gratitude, humility, and love. This research underscores that forming character through appreciation is not a mere pedagogical technique but a spiritual vocation. It calls Christian teachers to reflect God's craftsmanship in their interactions, to see teaching as participation in divine artistry, and to appreciate every learner as a masterpiece in progress. The lampstand of Exodus 37:17 thus stands not only as a symbol of worship but as a metaphor for Christian education itself—a light that burns through appreciation, illuminating the hearts of students and shaping them into reflections of God's glory.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the personality of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers who practice appreciation as a form of spiritual pedagogy holds transformative power for students' character formation. The case of the PAK teacher at SMPN 2 Kualuh Hulu demonstrates that appreciation, when grounded in faith and inspired by Exodus 37:17, transcends mere encouragement—it becomes a sacred act that shapes both moral and spiritual identity. In the same way that Bezalel crafted the golden lampstand with devotion and excellence, the teacher's appreciative spirit reflects God's own craftsmanship in molding human hearts. Each word of affirmation, each gesture of empathy, becomes an instrument through which divine light is revealed in the classroom. The findings highlight that the teacher's personality—anchored in humility, compassion, and consistency—serves as the vessel through which appreciation gains transformative depth. Her attitude of valuing each student's work, regardless of skill or achievement, echoes the theology of creation and grace: every effort bears divine significance. This perspective transforms education into a participatory act of worship. The classroom becomes, as James K. A. Smith (2009) suggests, a liturgical space where learning and formation are intertwined with the rhythms of faith. In this sacred environment, appreciation functions as a spiritual discipline—teaching students gratitude, perseverance, and empathy not through abstract moral instruction but through lived example. Spiritually grounded appreciation fosters a culture of affirmation that reflects God's relational nature. As students experience sincere acknowledgment of their efforts, they internalize a sense of worth that extends beyond performance. This awareness, in turn, nurtures moral responsibility, creativity, and emotional resilience. The teacher's actions embody the incarnational principle that truth is not only spoken but lived—mirroring the Word made flesh (John 1:14). Her consistent presence, gentle guidance, and willingness to recognize even the smallest progress remind students that they are seen, valued, and loved, both by their teacher and by God. The research also underscores that appreciation rooted in Christian spirituality is an inclusive practice that transcends religious boundaries. In a pluralistic public-school setting, the teacher's respectful and compassionate approach allowed every student to feel affirmed, regardless of faith background. This aligns with Parker Palmer's (2007) view that authentic teaching flows from integrity and openness to others. By embodying appreciation as both pedagogy and ministry, the teacher cultivated unity, empathy, and mutual respect within the classroom community. The study also reveals the challenges faced by faith-based educators. Administrative pressures, digital distractions, and secular educational paradigms often

compete with spiritual intentionality. Yet, the teacher's perseverance-sustained through prayer and reflection on Exodus 37:17-demonstrates that divine vocation enables resilience. Her acknowledgment that "God sees every detail of my work" encapsulates the heart of Christian pedagogy: faithful service, even in hidden or humble forms, participates in God's creative mission. This study calls for renewed emphasis on the inner life of the teacher as the foundation of effective Christian education. Spiritual formation must precede pedagogical technique, for it is the teacher's character that most deeply shapes students' moral and spiritual lives. In the metaphor of Exodus 37:17, the teacher is both craftsman and lampstand-formed by God's Spirit and called to reflect His light. Forming character through appreciation represents the fusion of theology and pedagogy, where teaching becomes a sacred act of craftsmanship. When PAK teachers cultivate personalities grounded in gratitude, empathy, and faith, they mirror the divine artistry that shaped the lampstand of pure gold. Through their appreciation, they invite students to see themselves as valuable creations of God, capable of goodness, beauty, and light. Education thus becomes more than an intellectual pursuit; it becomes a spiritual pilgrimage-a shared journey toward the fullness of life that God intends. As the lampstand in the tabernacle illuminated the dwelling place of God, so too does the appreciative personality of the PAK teacher illuminate young hearts, guiding them to become living reflections of divine glory in the world.

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