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## The Balance of Knowledge and Character in Christian Pedagogy: A Case Study Based on Matthew 12:35 at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the integration and balance of knowledge and character in Christian pedagogy based on Gospel of Matthew 12:35 at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai. Conducted in a public elementary school context, the study involved 32 Christian students guided by three Christian teachers. A qualitative case study design was employed to obtain an in-depth understanding. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and selected students, and document analysis of lesson plans, learning materials, and assessment instruments. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to pedagogical integration, teacher modeling, and character development. The findings reveal that Christian pedagogy at the research site intentionally integrates biblical knowledge with character formation through reflective teaching, interactive learning strategies, and consistent moral application. Matthew 12:35 functions as a theological foundation that emphasizes the heart as the source of both knowledge expression and moral behavior. Teachers apply this principle by connecting biblical understanding with real-life moral challenges faced by students. Character values such as honesty, responsibility, compassion, discipline, and respect are consistently embedded in cognitive learning activities. Teacher modeling emerges as a significant factor in reinforcing character formation, as students learn not only from instruction but also from example. The study concludes that the balance of knowledge and character is a central pillar of holistic Christian pedagogy in public-school settings. When intentionally implemented, this balance strengthens students' spiritual identity, moral integrity, academic motivation, and social responsibility within a pluralistic educational environment.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Christian Religious Education, Character

### INTRODUCTION

Education in the twenty-first century is increasingly challenged to balance the pursuit of academic knowledge with the formation of moral character. While modern educational systems tend to emphasize cognitive achievement, growing social problems among

students—such as dishonesty, lack of discipline, weak empathy, and moral confusion—indicate that intellectual advancement alone is insufficient to shape holistic human beings. In this context, Christian pedagogy offers a distinctive educational vision that integrates knowledge with character formation as inseparable dimensions of human development. Christian education does not merely aim at transferring information but seeks to transform learners from the inside out, shaping both the mind and the heart in accordance with biblical values. The biblical foundation for this educational balance is clearly articulated in Gospel of Matthew 12:35, where Jesus states that *“the good person brings out of the good treasure what is good, and the evil person brings out of the evil treasure what is evil.”* This teaching emphasizes that outward actions and intellectual expressions are rooted in the inner moral and spiritual condition of the heart. Knowledge, therefore, cannot be separated from character, because true wisdom flows from a transformed inner life. In Christian pedagogy, this principle becomes a theological and pedagogical mandate: education must cultivate both intellectual understanding and moral integrity as a unified process. Christian pedagogy is thus inherently holistic. It views learners as integrated beings who think, feel, believe, and act within a moral and spiritual framework. Knowledge without character risks producing intellectually capable but morally fragile individuals, while character without knowledge may result in sincerity without discernment. The balance between these two dimensions is therefore essential for forming students who are not only academically competent but also ethically responsible and spiritually grounded. This balance becomes especially significant in public-school contexts where Christian education operates as part of a pluralistic educational system with diverse religious, cultural, and moral backgrounds.

In Indonesia, Christian Religious Education (CRE) in public schools carries a unique mission. On the one hand, it must comply with national educational standards that emphasize cognitive competencies, measurable learning outcomes, and curriculum achievement. On the other hand, it bears the theological responsibility of nurturing students’ faith, character, and moral identity in accordance with Christian teachings. This dual responsibility often creates tension in classroom practice, where limited instructional time, large class sizes, and standardized assessment systems tend to prioritize academic knowledge over character formation. As a result, the integration of knowledge and character remains an ongoing pedagogical challenge for Christian teachers. This challenge is also evident at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai, where this study is conducted. The school accommodates 32 Christian students guided by three Christian teachers within a broader non-Christian school environment. In such a setting, Christian pedagogy must function not only as a formal academic subject but also as a formative process that shapes students’ moral identity amid social and religious diversity. The presence of multiple Christian teachers provides both an opportunity for collaborative character formation and a challenge in maintaining consistent pedagogical integration between knowledge and character across teaching practices. Preliminary observations at the research site indicate that while students demonstrate satisfactory cognitive understanding of biblical lessons, the translation of this knowledge into consistent character behavior varies among learners. Some students show strong moral sensitivity, honesty, and responsibility, while others struggle to embody the character values they learn in class. This situation raises critical questions about how Christian pedagogy is implemented in practice and to what

extent the balance between knowledge and character is intentionally cultivated in teaching strategies, learning interactions, and assessment processes.

The integration of knowledge and character aligns with broader discussions on holistic education and character education. Educational theorists increasingly argue that intellectual development must be accompanied by moral and character formation to prepare learners for responsible citizenship and ethical leadership. Within Christian education, this integration is not merely a pedagogical preference but a theological necessity rooted in the biblical understanding of the human person as created in the image of God yet in need of moral and spiritual transformation. Matthew 12:35 provides a profound anthropological and pedagogical insight: the quality of one's knowledge and actions ultimately reflects the condition of one's heart. Empirical studies that specifically examine the balance of knowledge and character within Christian pedagogy in Indonesian public elementary schools remain limited. Most existing studies focus either on cognitive learning outcomes or on character education as a separate program, without sufficiently exploring how both dimensions are integrated in daily classroom practice through biblical foundations. This research gap highlights the need for contextual, practice-based studies that analyze how Christian teachers interpret and implement biblical principles of holistic education in real classroom settings. This study aims to analyze how the balance of knowledge and character in Christian pedagogy is understood and implemented based on Matthew 12:35 at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai. By employing a qualitative case study approach, this research seeks to explore teaching strategies, learning interactions, and formative practices that reflect the integration of cognitive learning and character formation. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Christian pedagogical frameworks and practically to the improvement of Christian teaching practices in public elementary schools, particularly in pluralistic and multi-religious contexts.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the balance of knowledge and character in Christian pedagogy based on Gospel of Matthew 12:35 as implemented at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for a rich and contextual understanding of pedagogical processes, teacher practices, and student formative experiences within a real educational setting. The case study design was chosen to capture the unique dynamics of Christian pedagogy in a public elementary school where Christian students form a minority group. The participants in this study consisted of 32 Christian students and three Christian teachers who were directly involved in the teaching and learning process of Christian Religious Education and character formation activities. Data were collected through three main techniques: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted across several instructional sessions to examine how cognitive learning and character formation were integrated in daily teaching practices. The observations focused on instructional strategies, teacher–student interaction, the use of biblical material, classroom climate, and student behavioral responses. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three Christian teachers as the primary

participants to explore their pedagogical understanding of Matthew 12:35, their instructional planning, strategies for integrating knowledge and character, challenges in implementation, and their reflections on students' learning and character development. In addition, informal interviews with selected students were carried out to gain insight into students' perceptions of the learning process and their experiences in applying Christian values in everyday school life. All data from observations, interviews, and documents were transcribed and systematically coded to identify meaningful units related to the integration of knowledge and character. The codes were grouped into broader themes such as cognitive learning orientation, character formation strategies, biblical integration, pedagogical interaction, assessment practices, and contextual adaptation. These themes were interpreted in light of Christian pedagogical theory and the exegetical meaning of Matthew 12:35, particularly its emphasis on the relationship between the heart, knowledge, and behavior. Data triangulation across methods and sources was applied to enhance the credibility of the findings. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the school context, participants, and instructional practices. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through transparent documentation of research procedures and reflective field notes to minimize researcher bias. Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to provide a reliable and meaningful analysis of how knowledge and character are balanced within Christian pedagogy in a public elementary school context.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study indicate that the balance of knowledge and character in Christian pedagogy at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai is shaped by the dynamic interaction between biblical understanding, pedagogical strategies, teacher modeling, and the social context of a public-school environment. With 32 Christian students guided by three Christian teachers, the implementation of Christian pedagogy reflects both collaborative efforts and individual pedagogical styles. The central biblical foundation of Gospel of Matthew 12:35 "out of the good treasure of the heart the mouth speaks what is good"-serves as a theological lens through which teachers frame the relationship between cognitive learning and moral formation. The findings show that knowledge and character are not treated as separate educational goals but as interdependent dimensions that must develop simultaneously. From the perspective of instructional content, classroom observations reveal that Christian teachers intentionally integrate cognitive biblical knowledge with explicit character values. Lessons on Christian doctrine, biblical narratives, and Christian ethics are consistently connected to concrete moral applications such as honesty, responsibility, self-control, compassion, and respect. For example, when teaching biblical stories, teachers do not limit instruction to narrative comprehension or historical facts but emphasize the moral and spiritual meaning behind the text. Students are guided to identify what the story teaches about God, about human character, and about their own attitudes and behavior. This indicates that cognitive knowledge is presented not as an end in itself but as a means for shaping students' moral and spiritual identity.

The exegetical application of Matthew 12:35 plays a significant role in shaping instructional orientation. Teachers interpret this text as a theological affirmation that knowledge and behavior originate from the condition of the heart. In classroom practice, this interpretation leads to an emphasis on inner formation rather than mere external compliance. Teachers repeatedly stress that good behavior must flow from a good heart, and that academic excellence must be grounded in moral integrity. This theological framing shapes how students understand learning: learning is not merely about achieving high scores but about becoming good persons before God and others. Such an understanding contributes to a holistic learning atmosphere in which intellectual effort is morally and spiritually motivated. In terms of pedagogical strategies, the three Christian teachers employ a variety of interactive and reflective methods to integrate knowledge and character. These include guided discussions, collaborative group work, role-playing, storytelling, moral dilemmas, and personal reflection activities. Observations show that students are given opportunities to express their understanding of biblical teachings and reflect on how these teachings relate to their daily experiences. After learning about Christian ethical principles, students are asked to share situations in which they struggled to tell the truth, forgive others, or show patience. These reflective practices allow students to connect cognitive understanding with personal moral awareness, thereby reinforcing the balance between knowledge and character. Teacher modeling emerges as a crucial factor in students' character formation. The three teachers consistently demonstrate attitudes of patience, humility, discipline, and care in their interactions with students. Their behavior serves as a living curriculum through which students learn character values not only through instruction but also through observation. Students interviewed in this study frequently referred to their teachers as examples of how a Christian should speak and act. This finding supports the theological implication of Matthew 12:35 that what is stored in the heart will naturally manifest in actions and speech. Teachers' internalized values thus become a powerful pedagogical instrument for shaping students' character. Assessment practices at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai also reflect an effort to balance knowledge and character. Cognitive assessment is conducted through written tests, quizzes, and assignments that measure students' comprehension of biblical texts and Christian doctrines. At the same time, teachers employ formative assessment techniques such as observation of behavior, reflective journals, and peer evaluation to monitor students' character development. Teachers evaluate not only what students know but also how they behave in class, how they treat their peers, and how responsibly they complete their tasks. This dual assessment system indicates a pedagogical awareness that character formation requires continuous observation and guidance rather than one-time measurement. From the students' perspective, the integration of knowledge and character is generally well understood, though its practical implementation varies among individuals. Interview data show that most students can articulate the meaning of Christian values such as honesty, love, responsibility, and obedience. They can also explain how these values relate to the biblical lessons they learn. However, when asked about practical application, students' responses reveal different levels of consistency. Some students demonstrate strong internalization of character values, as seen in their willingness to help classmates, admit mistakes, and fulfill responsibilities. Others admit that they still struggle to practice these values, especially in situations involving peer pressure or emotional conflict. This variation highlights that

character formation is a gradual and ongoing process that requires sustained pedagogical reinforcement.

The pluralistic public-school context significantly influences the implementation of Christian pedagogy. As a minority group within a multi-religious environment, Christian students are constantly interacting with peers of different faiths and cultural backgrounds. Teachers intentionally emphasize that Christian character values should be expressed through respect, tolerance, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. The balance between knowledge and character thus extends beyond personal spirituality to include social and civic responsibility. Students are encouraged to live out their Christian identity in ways that promote harmony rather than division. This contextual emphasis reflects a contextualized interpretation of Matthew 12:35, where the “good treasure of the heart” is expressed not only in private morality but also in social relationships. The collaboration among the three Christian teachers contributes significantly to the consistency of pedagogical practice. Joint lesson planning, shared reflection, and mutual discussion enable teachers to align their instructional goals and character formation strategies. This collaborative culture strengthens the overall coherence of Christian pedagogy at the school. Each teacher brings a distinct pedagogical style, yet they share a common theological vision regarding the inseparability of knowledge and character. This unity in diversity enhances the effectiveness of Christian education and minimizes contradictions in students’ learning experiences. The application of Matthew 12:35 provides a strong anthropological and pedagogical framework. The text emphasizes that human behavior is the outward expression of inner moral and spiritual condition. In Christian pedagogy, this implies that teaching must address not only external behavior but also inner transformation. The teachers’ focus on heart formation through prayer, reflection, and personal counseling demonstrates an awareness of this theological principle. Teachers occasionally provide spiritual mentoring for students who face moral or emotional difficulties, thus extending pedagogy beyond classroom instruction to personal discipleship. The findings align with holistic education theory, which argues that true education must integrate cognitive, affective, moral, and spiritual dimensions. The practice of Christian pedagogy at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai reflects this holistic orientation. Knowledge and character are treated as mutually reinforcing elements of human development. Cognitive understanding provides the framework for moral reasoning, while character formation gives ethical direction and meaning to knowledge. This reciprocal relationship confirms that the integration of knowledge and character is not merely an ideal but an achievable pedagogical practice when supported by intentional teaching strategies and theological commitment. The study also identifies several challenges in maintaining this balance. Limited instructional time for Christian Religious Education restricts opportunities for deeper character formation. Academic pressures from other subjects sometimes prioritize cognitive achievement over moral reflection. Additionally, students’ family backgrounds and social environments outside school occasionally present values that conflict with Christian teachings, making character formation more complex. Teachers respond to these challenges by emphasizing consistency, patience, and ongoing guidance. They view character formation not as a short-term outcome but as a long-term educational journey. Technology and media exposure also influence students’ character development. Teachers report that students

are increasingly shaped by digital content that may not align with Christian values. This reality adds another layer of challenge in balancing knowledge and character. In response, teachers use biblical discussions to critically engage students with contemporary issues such as honesty in online communication, respectful use of social media, and self-control in digital consumption. This contextual engagement demonstrates adaptive Christian pedagogy that seeks to remain relevant in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. An important outcome of balancing knowledge and character is the formation of students' moral identity. The data show that students gradually develop a self-understanding as individuals who are called to reflect Christian values in both thought and action. This identity formation is evident in students' language when they speak about themselves not merely as learners but as persons responsible before God and others. Such identity formation reflects the deeper pedagogical impact of integrating Matthew 12:35 into daily teaching practice. Knowledge becomes a tool for self-understanding, and character becomes the expression of that understanding in daily life. The results also indicate that students' academic motivation is positively influenced by character formation. When students understand learning as part of their moral responsibility to honor God and serve others, they demonstrate greater diligence and perseverance. Several teachers report that students who show growth in character also tend to show improvement in academic engagement. This finding supports the theological and educational assumption that knowledge and character mutually reinforce one another rather than compete with each other.

In discussion with existing literature on Christian pedagogy and character education, the findings of this study affirm that effective Christian education is inherently integrative. It does not separate intellectual formation from moral and spiritual development. Instead, it views the learner as a whole person whose cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions are interrelated. The practical application of Matthew 12:35 at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai demonstrates that this integrative vision can be implemented even within the structural limitations of a public-school system. The presence of three Christian teachers also provides a relational support system for students. Students experience a sense of being guided not by a single authority figure but by a community of educators who share common values and commitments. This relational environment contributes to a stronger internalization of character values, as students encounter consistent messages and examples across different learning settings. The teachers' cooperation reflects the communal dimension of Christian education, where character is formed not only through individual reflection but also through shared practices and relationships. The study further demonstrates that the balance of knowledge and character is not achieved through a fixed pedagogical formula but through continuous reflective practice. Teachers regularly evaluate their teaching strategies, observe students' responses, and adjust their methods accordingly. This reflective attitude enables them to respond dynamically to students' cognitive and moral needs. Such reflective practice is a key indicator of professional and spiritual maturity in Christian pedagogy. The results and discussion reveal that the balance of knowledge and character at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai is realized through intentional biblical integration, varied pedagogical strategies, teacher modeling, collaborative teaching culture, contextual adaptation, and holistic assessment. Matthew 12:35 provides a robust theological foundation that shapes the understanding

of learning as an inward-outward formative process. Although challenges related to time constraints, social influences, and digital culture persist, the commitment of the three Christian teachers to holistic Christian pedagogy allows knowledge and character to function as complementary dimensions of student formation. The findings affirm that Christian pedagogy, when grounded in sound biblical theology and implemented through reflective and contextualized teaching, can effectively nurture students who are intellectually competent and morally grounded. This balance is essential not only for personal faith development but also for responsible participation in a pluralistic society. Thus, the integration of knowledge and character based on Matthew 12:35 at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai stands as a concrete example of holistic Christian education in practice.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the balance of knowledge and character in Christian pedagogy based on Gospel of Matthew 12:35 is meaningfully and intentionally implemented at SDN 137958 Tanjung Balai through integrative teaching practices carried out by three Christian teachers serving 32 Christian students. The findings demonstrate that Christian pedagogy in this context does not treat cognitive learning and character formation as separate or competing goals, but as two inseparable dimensions of holistic education that must grow together. Knowledge is understood as the foundation for moral reasoning, while character is viewed as the outward expression of inner understanding shaped by the heart, as affirmed by Matthew 12:35. The Christian teachers play a central role in sustaining this balance through their intentional integration of biblical content, reflective pedagogy, moral application, and personal modeling. Instructional practices are designed not only to ensure students' comprehension of biblical knowledge but also to nurture moral sensitivity, spiritual awareness, and ethical responsibility. Through dialogical learning, reflection, collaborative activities, and contextual moral discussions, students are guided to connect what they know with how they live. These findings confirm that effective Christian pedagogy must move beyond the transmission of religious information to the formation of transformed persons. This study also highlights that teacher modeling is one of the most influential instruments in character formation. The consistent demonstration of Christian virtues such as patience, integrity, discipline, and care by the teachers provides a living example through which students internalize character values. The alignment between what is taught and what is lived strengthens the credibility of Christian pedagogy and reinforces students' moral learning. In this sense, character education is not only curricular but also relational and experiential.

The public-school and pluralistic context of the research site shapes the practical expression of Christian pedagogy. The balance of knowledge and character is extended beyond personal faith development to include social responsibility, tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence. Christian character is presented not as a separating identity but as a moral resource for contributing positively to the wider school community. This confirms that Christian pedagogy, when properly implemented, supports not only spiritual growth but also civic and social harmony.

This study also identifies ongoing challenges, including limited instructional time, external social influences, digital culture, and diverse family backgrounds that affect students' character formation. These challenges indicate that the balance of knowledge and character is not a static achievement but a continuous educational process that requires patience, creativity, and sustained commitment from teachers. Nevertheless, the reflective and collaborative teaching culture observed among the three Christian teachers enables them to respond adaptively to these challenges. This study affirms that the integration of knowledge and character based on Matthew 12:35 is not only a theological ideal but a practical pedagogical reality when supported by intentional teaching, reflective practice, and authentic teacher modeling. The findings contribute to the theoretical development of holistic Christian pedagogy and provide practical insights for Christian educators working in public-school settings. Future research is recommended to explore longitudinal impacts of knowledge–character integration and comparative studies across different educational contexts to further strengthen the empirical foundation of Christian pedagogical theory.

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