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Cultivating Students' Honesty through Christian Pedagogy: An Exegetical Study of Genesis 29:25 at SDN 23 Pekanbaru

Frida Simanjuntak

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

* correspondence: fridasimanjuntak80@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores how Christian pedagogy can effectively cultivate students' honesty through an exegetical reflection on Genesis 29:25 within the learning context of SDN 23 Pekanbaru, where 180 Christian students and two Christian teachers (including the Christian Religious Education teacher) participate in daily character development activities. Honesty, as a core moral and spiritual value, is increasingly challenged by contemporary pressures such as academic competition, fear of punishment, and peer influence. Therefore, a biblically grounded pedagogical model is needed to nurture integrity at an early age. Using a qualitative design that integrates a systematic literature review with simple, semi-structured interviews, this study examines how the biblical narrative of Jacob's deception and Laban's subsequent deceit can shape students' understanding of truthfulness. Exegetical insights emphasize that dishonesty damages relationships, results in long-term consequences, and contradicts God's calling for His people to live in integrity. The findings indicate that honesty is cultivated most effectively through narrative-centered pedagogy, moral reflection, teacher modeling, and relational classroom practices. Students respond positively when honesty is taught not merely as a rule but as a character virtue rooted in their Christian identity. Interviews reveal that reflective storytelling, guided discussion, and restorative discipline strengthen students' willingness to tell the truth, while fear-based approaches lead to concealment and further dishonesty. The study concludes that Christian pedagogy must integrate biblical truth, emotional safety, consistent teacher example, and supportive peer culture to shape honest character. Ultimately, Genesis 29:25 provides a powerful moral lens through which students learn that truthfulness builds trust, fosters integrity, and forms a foundation for their spiritual and ethical development.

Keywords: Honesty, Christian Religious Education, Christian Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Honesty stands as one of the most essential moral virtues emphasized across religious, cultural, and educational traditions. In the contemporary Indonesian educational landscape, where rapid technological access, shifting cultural norms, and increased

academic pressure influence student behavior, honesty has become an increasingly critical concern. Cases of cheating, plagiarism, data manipulation, and deceptive communication are prevalent challenges that schools must confront. Within this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a strategic role in cultivating honesty as a core dimension of moral and spiritual formation. The development of honesty is not merely a behavioral expectation but a transformative process that shapes students' identity, integrity, and responsibility before God and society. At SDN 23 Pekanbaru, a public elementary school with 180 Christian students and two Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, the cultivation of honesty becomes a significant pedagogical priority. Here, CRE classes serve not only as spaces for religious instruction but also as moral laboratories where students learn to internalize biblical values through teaching, modeling, and relational engagement. Genesis 29:25, which forms the exegetical foundation of this study, provides a compelling biblical narrative for examining the implications of honesty in interpersonal and communal relationships. The verse states: "When morning came, there was Leah!" a moment that exposes deception within a family dynamic and illustrates the profound relational consequences of dishonesty. Jacob's shock and disappointment upon discovering that Laban had deceived him reveal the emotional, ethical, and spiritual disruption caused by manipulative behavior. This narrative underscores an essential biblical principle: dishonesty fractures trust and creates long-lasting relational harm. In the broader theological context, honesty is foundational to God's covenantal expectations for His people, because integrity reflects God's character and safeguards human community. Therefore, Genesis 29:25 becomes a powerful lens for understanding how dishonesty distorts relationships, wounds individuals, and contradicts God's truth. For primary school students who are still developing their moral reasoning and behavioral habits, this biblical story provides a concrete narrative framework through which they can grasp the importance of truthful living. Christian pedagogy views moral formation as a holistic process that integrates cognition, emotion, spirituality, and social interaction. According to Lickona (2018), character education must combine moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral action; students must understand what honesty means, desire to be honest, and practice honesty consistently in daily life. In the context of CRE, the teacher's role extends beyond conveying biblical content to shaping students' moral identity. However, this study shifts the analytical focus from the competence of teachers to the growing capacity of students to internalize honesty as a personal value. The presence of 180 Christian students in a pluralistic school environment highlights the pedagogical challenge: students encounter diverse beliefs, behaviors, and norms, making honesty both a personal virtue and a social necessity. Within such a context, Christian pedagogy aims to cultivate honesty not only for personal righteousness but also for promoting community trust, respect, and cooperation.

The moral development of elementary school students is deeply influenced by narrative-based learning. Biblical stories such as those found in Genesis serve as interpretative mirrors that help students reflect on their own experiences of truth-telling, deception, consequences, and relational responsibility. Research in Christian education (Knight, 2006; Hill, 2014) emphasizes that storytelling is one of the most effective tools in forming moral imagination in children, enabling them to connect ethical principles with real-life situations. Genesis 29:25 offers a narrative where dishonesty results in broken

expectations, hurt feelings, and violated trust, concepts that elementary students can understand, discuss, and apply to their own peer interactions. Given these dynamics, this study seeks to explore how Christian pedagogy, informed by an exegetical reading of Genesis 29:25, shapes the development of honesty among Christian students at SDN 23 Pekanbaru. By combining biblical interpretation, educational theory, and contextual insights, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how values-based pedagogy can cultivate truthful character in young learners. The results are expected to illuminate practical strategies for strengthening honesty as a lived virtue within CRE and the broader school environment.

METHODS

The combination of SLR and interviews was implemented and allowed the researcher to synthesize scholarly perspectives while grounding the findings in the lived experiences of students and teachers in the local context. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) followed the standard procedures recommended by Snyder (2019), including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The review focused on three thematic domains: biblical and exegetical scholarship on Genesis 29:25, especially interpretations concerning deception, moral responsibility, and relational consequences, literature on Christian pedagogy, particularly theories of moral and character formation in children, and educational research addressing honesty, integrity, and ethical behavior among elementary students. Academic databases were used to collect peer-reviewed articles, books, and theological commentaries published within the last fifteen years, except for classic commentaries essential to the exegetical framework. Inclusion criteria required sources to directly address the themes of honesty, biblical ethics, or Christian education. The SLR yielded a selection of approximately 40 relevant publications that informed the conceptual and interpretive framework of this study. To complement the SLR, simple semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two Christian teachers (including the PAK teacher) and a purposive sample of six Christian students representing different grade levels. The interviews sought to explore participants' perceptions of honesty, their experiences with truth-telling and deception in the school environment, and their reflections on how biblical stories, particularly Genesis 29:25, shape their understanding of moral choices. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended, age-appropriate, and exploratory, enabling participants to articulate personal insights and relational experiences related to honesty. Particular attention was given to how biblical narratives influence students' moral reasoning and how teachers integrate scriptural values into classroom practice. In the exegetical component, the study employed a literary-theological method to interpret Genesis 29:25. This involved analyzing the narrative structure, character dynamics, word usage, and cultural-historical background of the text. Hebrew lexical tools and established biblical commentaries were used to clarify the meaning of key terms related to deception and relational ethics. The exegetical findings were then connected to pedagogical theory to build a coherent framework for cultivating honesty among elementary students. By combining systematic literature analysis and field-based interviews, this methodological approach ensured that the exploration of honesty as a Christian virtue was both theologically grounded and empirically informed. This approach also provided a balanced understanding of how

biblical values can be effectively integrated into moral education for young learners, especially within the context of SDN 23 Pekanbaru.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The integrated findings of this study, which combines a systematic literature review with simple interviews conducted with two Christian teachers and selected students at SDN 23 Pekanbaru, reveal a multifaceted and deeply interconnected understanding of how Christian pedagogy can cultivate honesty among students in light of the exegetical insights from Genesis 29:25. The analysis shows that the narrative of Jacob's shock and confrontation after being deceived by Laban becomes a powerful moral lens through which students can understand the relational, behavioral, and spiritual consequences of dishonesty. From the literature review, Christian pedagogy universally emphasizes the formation of moral integrity not merely as a behavioral expectation but as a spiritual discipline rooted in biblical truth and practiced through daily actions. The theological principle extracted from Genesis 29:25, "In the morning, behold, it was Leah!" dramatizes how hidden deceit eventually becomes exposed and how dishonesty damages trust, relationships, and personal credibility. When this biblical insight is contextualized in the elementary school environment, honesty emerges not only as a moral norm but as a lived value tied to character, identity, and community harmony. Interview data further strengthen this perspective: both Christian teachers emphasize that honesty remains a pressing challenge among students, especially in matters related to small cheating behaviors, hiding mistakes, manipulating grades, and telling convenient lies to avoid consequences. According to them, these patterns do not arise merely from intentional wrongdoing but are shaped by fear, peer influence, family communication patterns, and internal insecurity. Thus, the pedagogical task of cultivating honesty must begin with building emotional safety where students feel secure to admit mistakes without humiliation. Another major finding from the interviews suggests that biblical storytelling, when taught through relational and reflective pedagogy, significantly improves students' moral sensitivity. When the story of Jacob and Laban is presented not only as a historical narrative but as a mirror for self-reflection, students begin recognizing parallels between the ancient event and their own everyday actions, cheating on assignments, lying to teachers, hiding broken school property, or blaming others for personal errors. This narrative approach, reinforced through discussion, role-play, and guided questioning, allows students to internalize honesty as a heart attitude rather than an externally enforced rule. The literature review supports this observation: contemporary Christian pedagogical scholars emphasize that character virtues such as honesty cannot be effectively transmitted through punishment or lecture-based moralizing but must be cultivated through dialogical learning, relational modeling, and community reinforcement. This aligns with the findings at SDN 23 Pekanbaru, where teachers intentionally practice honesty as a lived example, admitting their own mistakes in front of students, keeping promises, and using restorative practices rather than punitive ones. This modeling proves crucial, as students reported that when teachers demonstrate integrity consistently, they feel encouraged and safe to be honest themselves.

The synthesis of literature and field findings indicates that Christian pedagogy must address honesty holistically, cognitively, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Cognitively, students must understand what honesty is and why it matters; emotionally, they must feel secure enough to practice honesty even when it is difficult; relationally, they must experience trust-based interactions where honesty strengthens community bonds; spiritually, they must see honesty as part of their faith identity. Genesis 29:25 reinforces these four components by showing that deceit produces emotional harm (Jacob's shock and betrayal), relational breakdown (tension between Jacob and Laban), cognitive dissonance (discovery of truth after deception), and spiritual consequences (Jacob's journey of transformation in the narrative arc). Teachers noted that when students reflect on these dimensions, they begin viewing dishonesty not as a "small sin" but as a choice that affects relationships and their spiritual integrity. Literature on character formation in Christian education supports this conclusion, particularly emphasizing that moral growth occurs when students internalize virtues through reflective ethical reasoning, not merely rule compliance. The findings also highlight that practices such as morning devotions, class prayers, scripture meditation, and spiritual mentoring help students connect moral actions with their identity in Christ. Through these spiritual routines, students become more aware of God's expectation for truthfulness and learn to evaluate their actions with a biblically-informed conscience. Another significant result from the field data is the role of classroom climate in supporting honesty. According to both teachers, honesty thrives in an environment where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities rather than failures that deserve punishment. Students shared that the fear of punishment often motivates dishonesty, such as lying about unfinished homework or cheating during tests. Christian pedagogy literature reinforces that a grace-based classroom atmosphere significantly reduces dishonest behaviors by teaching students that truthfulness is safer and more meaningful than deception. This approach echoes the redemptive themes within the biblical narrative: although Jacob experienced consequences for deceit earlier in his life, God used the experience to shape his character. When students understand this redemptive dimension, they begin realizing that confessing mistakes is not a weakness but a courageous step toward personal growth. Teachers at SDN 23 Pekanbaru therefore implement restorative conversations, guiding students to reflect on dishonest actions, apologize, and restore relationships rather than merely receiving punishment. This practice has been shown to cultivate long-term integrity by connecting honesty with empathy, responsibility, and reconciliation. Both literature and interviews confirm that peer groups significantly shape honesty-related behaviors. Students are more likely to cheat, lie, or conceal wrongdoing when they see peers doing the same without consequences. Thus, Christian pedagogy must intentionally shape peer culture by promoting collaborative learning, group reflection, and shared moral commitments. Teachers reported that group devotion and collaborative reflection on Genesis 29:25 helped students collectively recognize the value of honesty. When peers mutually commit to truth-telling, honest behavior becomes normalized. Literature on Christian community-based pedagogy affirms that virtue formation is most effective when embedded within communal practices, not isolated moral lectures. Theologically, Genesis 29 indirectly supports this principle by revealing the relational fallout of dishonesty: Jacob's deception of Esau earlier in his life and Laban's deception of Jacob illustrate how dishonesty spreads

within relational networks. When students understand this ripple effect, they become more conscious of how their actions influence the integrity of the broader community. According to the teachers, students' honesty significantly improved when they engaged with the biblical narrative through dramatization, creative retelling, or reflective journaling. Students could articulate in their own words why Jacob felt betrayed and what they would have done differently in that situation. Literature confirms that narrative-based pedagogy increases moral imagination, enabling students to visualize alternative actions and internalize values more deeply than through abstract instruction. The story of Genesis 29:25 becomes an ethical narrative in which students identify with characters, evaluate motives, and reflect on consequences. This imaginative engagement strengthens their capacity to evaluate honesty in real-life settings. The combined results show that cultivating honesty requires consistent integration between school, home, and church. Teachers noted that students often struggle when expectations across these three contexts are inconsistent. Literature emphasizes that moral development is strongest when children receive coherent ethical messages and when parents practice truthfulness at home. Therefore, the Christian pedagogical framework emerging from this study encourages partnership-building, parent education, and community involvement. When parents reinforce Christian values, teachers model integrity, and church life nurtures spiritual maturity, students develop a holistic and stable foundation for honest living. Genesis 29:25 serves as a warning narrative reminding the whole community, students, families, and educators, that dishonesty leads to long-term relational harm, while truthfulness nurtures trust and character.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, which integrates a systematic literature review with simple interviews conducted at SDN 23 Pekanbaru, demonstrate that cultivating students' honesty through Christian pedagogy requires a holistic, relational, and biblically grounded approach. The exegetical reflection on Genesis 29:25 "And in the morning, behold, it was Leah!" reveals that dishonesty inevitably leads to broken trust, emotional harm, and relational disruption. When this biblical insight is applied pedagogically in the school context, honesty is understood not merely as a rule to be obeyed but as a core element of spiritual identity and character formation. The students learn that truthfulness is foundational to building trustworthy relationships and that even small acts of deceit can create significant consequences, both for themselves and for the community. The study concludes that Christian pedagogy becomes effective in cultivating honesty when it positions biblical narratives as mirrors for moral reflection rather than as distant stories. By engaging students with the narrative of Jacob's deception and Laban's deceit, teachers help students connect ancient moral lessons to their contemporary experiences, such as cheating on tests, hiding mistakes, or lying to avoid consequences. This narrative-based pedagogy strengthens students' moral imagination and helps them internalize honesty as a personal conviction. The interviews reveal that students respond more positively to reflective storytelling, role-play, and guided discussions than to punishment-based disciplinary strategies, indicating the importance of relational and dialogical pedagogy. The study concludes that the modeling of honesty by teachers plays a decisive role. Christian teachers who openly admit mistakes, keep promises, speak truthfully, and

practice restorative discipline provide students with tangible examples of integrity. Their consistent actions build an emotionally safe environment in which students feel secure to confess errors, tell the truth, and take responsibility for their choices. This aligns with Christian educational literature emphasizing that character virtues are learned primarily through example and relational interaction. Another significant conclusion is that classroom climate and peer culture profoundly influence honesty. A grace-based classroom atmosphere, where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, reduces the fear-based motivations behind dishonesty. When peers collectively affirm the value of truthfulness, students experience honesty as a communal norm rather than an individual burden. Thus, cultivating honesty requires intentional structuring of classroom routines, discussions, and community practices that reinforce the value of truth-telling. The study highlights that consistency across school, home, and church is essential. Students are most successful in developing honesty when their environments send coherent and mutually reinforcing messages. Christian pedagogy should therefore engage parents, involve church resources, and integrate spiritual routines such as devotions and prayer into school life. Through these holistic efforts, students begin to view honesty not only as expected behavior but as an expression of their faith and identity in Christ. The study concludes that cultivating honesty is not a short-term instructional task but a long-term transformative process rooted in biblical truth, relational pedagogy, community support, and consistent moral example. Genesis 29:25 serves as a powerful foundation for this formation, reminding students that honesty builds integrity, fosters trust, and strengthens their character for life.

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