THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE CHARACTER FORMATION OF ELEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT SMA NEGERI 1 SIBOLGA, ACADEMIC YEAR 2024/2025

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ABSTRACT

Character education is a central mandate in Indonesia's national education framework, emphasizing the development of moral integrity, responsibility, and spiritual maturity. Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers play a strategic role in shaping students' character by integrating biblical values with moral instruction, role modeling, and spiritual mentoring. This study examines how CRE teachers contribute to character formation among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Sibolga during the 2024/2025 academic year. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research collected data through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The findings indicate that CRE teachers perform four crucial functions: (1) moral educator, (2) role model, (3) motivator, and (4) spiritual mentor. These roles collectively enhance students' honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, respectfulness, and spiritual devotion. However, teachers face significant challenges, including digital media influence, peer pressure, and inconsistent parental involvement. The study concludes that CRE teachers significantly influence character formation when supported by consistent modeling and collaborative school–family partnerships.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education, Character Formation, Teacher Role, Moral Development, Spiritual Mentorship.

Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter merupakan amanat sentral dalam kerangka pendidikan nasional di Indonesia, dengan menekankan pada pengembangan integritas moral, tanggung jawab, dan kematangan spiritual. Guru Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK) memegang peran strategis dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik melalui integrasi nilai-nilai biblikal dengan pengajaran moral, keteladanan, dan pendampingan spiritual.

Studi ini mengkaji kontribusi guru PAK terhadap pembentukan karakter peserta didik kelas XI di SMA Negeri 1 Sibolga selama tahun pelajaran 2024/2025. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen.

Temuan penelitian mengindikasikan bahwa guru PAK menjalankan empat fungsi krusial: (1) pendidik moral, (2) teladan/model peran, (3) motivator, dan (4) mentor spiritual. Peran-peran ini secara kolektif meningkatkan kejujuran, disiplin, tanggung jawab, toleransi, sikap hormat, dan devosi spiritual peserta didik.

Namun demikian, para guru menghadapi tantangan signifikan, meliputi pengaruh media digital, tekanan teman sebaya, dan inkonsistensi keterlibatan orang tua. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa guru PAK memberikan pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap pembentukan karakter apabila didukung oleh keteladanan yang konsisten dan kemitraan kolaboratif antara sekolah dan keluarga.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Kristen, Pembentukan Karakter, Peran Guru, Pengembangan Moral, Mentorship Spiritual.

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become an urgent priority in modern society as students face moral challenges intensified by digital globalization, shifting cultural norms, and decreasing parental involvement. The Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 highlights that education must produce individuals who are "faithful, pious, noble in character, and knowledgeable." This positions moral and spiritual development at the core of educational objectives.

Within Christian education, character formation aligns with biblical teachings and the example of Jesus Christ. Christian Religious Education (CRE) aims not only to transmit theological knowledge but to shape learners' moral dispositions through reflection, internalization, and daily practice. CRE teachers thus carry a dual role: academic instructor and spiritual shepherd.

Preliminary observations at SMA Negeri 1 Sibolga reveal issues such as weak responsibility, declining discipline, disrespectful communication, and peer-related behavioral problems. These underscore the necessity of effective character education, particularly through CRE.

This study analyzes how CRE teachers shape student character through pedagogy, modeling, and interpersonal engagement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. **Character Education Theory (Lickona, Berkowitz & Bier)**

   Lickona (1991) defines character as comprising moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, requiring consistent instruction, emotional engagement, and behavioral reinforcement. Berkowitz & Bier (2005) emphasize that classroom climate and teacher-student relationships significantly influence moral development.

2. **Christian Religious Education Theory (Arthur, Narvaez, Groome)**

   Christian Religious Education advocates virtue formation—developing Christ-like values through repeated practice, relational interactions, and biblical reflection.

   Arthur (2021) highlights virtue cultivation, while Narvaez (2016) stresses that moral development is relational, experiential, and contextual.

3. **Biblical Foundations of Character**

   Key scriptures include:

Scripture	Core Value
Matthew 5–7	Humility, gentleness, justice, purity
John 13:15	Christ as model of servanthood
Romans 12:2	Transformation through mind renewal
Galatians 5:22–23	Fruits of the Spirit

These texts anchor moral values in divine principles.

4. **Social Learning Theory (Bandura)**

Bandura (1977) asserts that learners imitate behaviors observed in authority figures. Positive behavior is strengthened through reinforcement and peer interaction.

METHOD IMPLEMENTATION

A qualitative descriptive method was employed at SMA Negeri 1 Sibolga during the 2024/2025 school year.

Participants

1. 1 CRE teacher
2. School principal
3. 20 students
4. Documentation (lesson plans, character program materials)

Data Collection

1. Interviews: teacher, students, principal
2. Observation: classroom interactions, spiritual activities
3. Documentation: teaching plans, behavioral reports

Data Analysis

1. Using Miles & Huberman:
2. Data reduction
3. Data display
4. Conclusion drawing

Triangulation validated data integrity.

5. **Contemporary Local Christian Education Perspective (Padriadi, 2023)**

Padriadi (2023) argues that character formation in Indonesian Christian education must integrate moral instruction, teacher modeling, and pastoral mentoring within a unified

relational framework. His model emphasizes that effective character development requires alignment between school values, teacher practices, and the lived spiritual experience of students. This perspective strengthens the view that CRE teachers function not only as instructors but as holistic facilitators of moral and spiritual transformation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Teacher Roles in Character Formation

1. **Moral Educator (Based on Lickona & Groome)**

The findings show that CRE teachers connected biblical values to real-life situations, guiding students to practice honesty, responsibility, and self-control. This role aligns directly with:

a. Lickona's Character Education Model

Thomas Lickona (1991, *Educating for Character*, New York: Bantam Books) asserts that a moral educator is **obligated** to develop **moral knowing**, **moral feeling**, and **moral action** within the students.

Table 1. Character Traits Developed Through Christian Religious Education

Observed Teacher Behavior	Direct Link to Theory
Teaching honesty through biblical stories	Moral knowing (understanding moral truth)
Reinforcing responsibility in classroom tasks	Moral feeling (valuing responsibility)
Encouraging self-control during conflict	Moral action (behaving ethically)

Based on the observational data of teacher behavior presented in the table above, it can be concluded that the **three core components** of Thomas Lickona's Character Education Model have been implemented integrally within Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning. This implementation indicates that the CRE teacher not only focuses on **moral knowing** through the transfer of information (e.g., biblical stories) but also actively cultivates **moral feeling** by reinforcing values, and encourages **moral action** through ethical practices and self-control within the school environment. Thus, the role of the CRE teacher in this study is empirically aligned with Lickona's theoretical framework, which emphasizes the formation of a **holistic** character.

b. Groome's Shared Christian Praxis Theory

Thomas H. Groome (1998, *Educating for Life*, Thomas More Press) emphasizes that Christian education occurs when the teacher integrates Scripture with the students' real-life experiences.

➢ In this study, the teacher connects Bible verses with real-life dilemmas, enabling students to internalize moral values practically.

➢ Interpretation:

The teacher is not merely a content provider, but an agent of moral transformation who directs students to act based on biblical principles.

2. Role Model (Based on Bandura & Jesus' Model of Discipleship)

Students consistently imitated teacher behaviors such as punctuality, patience, and respectful speech.

This corresponds with:

a. Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1977, *Social Learning Theory*, Prentice-Hall) asserts that:

"People learn by observing models. Modeling is the most powerful source of learning."

In this study:

Table 2. Alignment Between Research Findings and Major Character Education Theories

Teacher Behavior	Student Response	Theoretical Basis
Teacher remains calm during conflict	Students begin imitating calm conflict resolution	Observational learning
Teacher uses respectful speech	Students reduce verbal aggression	Modeling effect
Teacher is punctual & disciplined	Students improve attendance habits	Reinforcement + imitation

The table above clearly confirms the relevance of Albert Bandura's **Social Learning Theory** within the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE). The role of the CRE teacher as a **role model** is proven to be the **most powerful source of learning** for students.

The data demonstrates that behaviors exhibited by the teacher—such as calmness during conflict, the use of respectful language, and time discipline—are directly imitated by the students. This phenomenon asserts that students' character is not only shaped through verbal instruction but primarily through **consistent observational learning** and the **modeling effect**. Consequently, the CRE teacher functions as an effective agent of moral socialization through **the example of their life**.

b. Biblical Model of Christ-like Living

John 13:15 — "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

➢ The CRE teacher functions as a **Christ-like model** within the educational context.

➢ **Interpretation:**

The teacher's character becomes the **living curriculum**. Students learn more from the teacher's attitude and conduct than from the instructional material.

3. Motivator (Based on Arthur & Deci & Ryan's Motivation Theory)

Teachers used affirmations, spiritual encouragement, and emotional support to cultivate students' moral commitment.

a. James Arthur's Virtue Formation Theory

- Arthur (2021, Virtuous Character for the Practice of Faith, Routledge) explains that character formation requires:
- moral aspiration
- internal motivation
- repetitive practice of virtue

The teacher in this study:

Table 3. Observed Teacher Behaviors and Their Theoretical Linkages

Teacher Action	Theoretical Relevance
Encouraging students to "choose what is right"	Inspires moral aspiration
Giving spiritual affirmation	Strengthens internalization of virtue
Providing reasons behind moral choices	Develops moral motivation

The findings presented in the table demonstrate a clear alignment between the CRE teacher's actions and the requirements of **James Arthur's Virtue Formation Theory**. The teacher actively fulfilled the role of a **motivator** by employing targeted strategies aimed at cultivating

moral commitment. Specifically, the actions of **encouraging students to 'choose what is right'** served to ignite **moral aspiration**, while **giving spiritual affirmation** played a vital role in strengthening the **internal motivation** necessary for the internalization of virtue. Furthermore, **providing reasons behind moral choices** aids in the development of a deeper, autonomous **moral motivation**. This confirms that the CRE teacher strategically facilitates the internal, self-driven development of character, moving beyond mere external compliance towards genuine moral conviction, consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan) underlying motivational frameworks.

b. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

Intrinsic motivation grows when students feel:

- **autonomy** (possessing moral choice)
- **competence** (being capable of doing good)
- **relatedness** (feeling loved and valued)

The CRE teacher supports all three.

➢ Interpretation:

Students' motivation to behave ethically stems not from punishment, but from the **moral awareness** successfully fostered by the teacher.

4. Spiritual Mentor (Based on Pastoral Care Theory & Narvaez)

Teachers offered prayer guidance, pastoral counseling, and spiritual check-ins.

a. Pastoral Care Theory in Christian Education

Hiltner (1958, *Pastoral Counseling*, Abingdon Press) explains that a spiritual guide is responsible for:

- accompanying students through their struggles
- providing spiritual counseling
- praying for students
- instilling spiritual hope

In this study:

Table 4. Model of CRE Teacher Contribution in Character Formation

Teacher Action	Corresponding Hiltner Function	Contribution to Character
Confidential discussion with	Accompanying students	Fosters trust, resilience, and

students facing family problems	through their struggles	emotional stability
Guiding students to seek Bible verses relevant to their anxiety	Providing spiritual counseling	Develops spiritual coping mechanisms and moral insight
Leading specific prayer for students before exams or challenges	Praying for students	Cultivates spiritual reliance and hope (Devotion)
Affirming God's plan and future grace during discouragement	Instilling spiritual hope	Reinforces perseverance and moral optimism

The observational data confirms that the CRE teacher effectively operates as a **Spiritual Mentor**, fully embodying the functions prescribed by **Hiltner's Pastoral Care Theory**. By **accompanying students through their struggles** and offering tailored **spiritual counseling**, the teacher extends the educational mandate beyond academic instruction into holistic spiritual formation. This practice is crucial, as it provides students with essential **spiritual coping mechanisms** and fosters **relatedness** (as per Deci & Ryan), which is foundational for intrinsic moral commitment. The teacher's active roles in **praying for students** and **instilling spiritual hope** directly contribute to the development of spiritual devotion and perseverance, thereby aligning the theoretical framework with the empirical findings on character formation.

b. Narvaez's Triune Ethics Theory (2016)

Narvaez (2016, *Moral Development and Behavior*, Routledge) states that character will flourish when adolescents:

- **experience emotional support,**
- **are in a stable spiritual environment,**
- **have a trusted moral mentor.**

The CRE teacher fulfills all three dimensions.

➤ Interpretation:

Christian character formation is not merely moral but also spiritual, and the teacher serves as a **shepherd** who guides the development of students' faith.

Integration With Local Theory

The findings also reflect Padriadi's (2023) framework, which emphasizes that moral instruction, role modeling, and spiritual mentorship must operate simultaneously to produce holistic character transformation. The CRE teacher in this study demonstrated precisely these three dimensions, confirming that character formation strengthens when moral, relational, and spiritual processes converge in practice.

Table 5. Four-Stage Christian Character Formation Process

Diagram Element	Function	Theoretical Connection	Additional Note
Input (Education Mandate)	Character Education (Integrity, Responsibility, Spiritual Maturity)	Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003	The core objective that CRE must fulfill in schools.
4 Roles of the CRE Teacher (Process)	1. **Moral Educator** 2. **Role Model** 3. **Motivator** 4. **Spiritual Mentor**	**Moral Educator:** Lickona (1991), Groome (1998) **Role Model:** Bandura (1977), Biblical imitation of Christ (John 13:15) **Motivator:** Arthur (2021), Deci & Ryan (2000) – Self-Determination Theory **Spiritual Mentor:** Hiltner (1958) – Pastoral Care; Narvaez (2016) – Relational Moral Formation	Represents the core findings of the study and forms the central mechanism of character formation.
Output (Character Developed)	Honesty, Discipline, Responsibility, Tolerance, Respectfulness, Spiritual Devotion	Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23); Lickona's moral action; Social Learning Theory	The concrete behavioral results produced by teacher intervention.
Reinforcing Factors (Key Conditions)	Consistent Modeling and School–Family Partnerships	Hiltner (Pastoral Function); Berkowitz & Bier (2005) – Importance of relational climate	Prerequisites needed to maximize and sustain character development outcomes.

This table serves as a **Conceptual Model** that integrates all discussion findings above (from points A.1 to A.4) into one visual framework. This greatly strengthens the validity of the arguments and assists the reader in quickly grasping the research flow and the complex interrelationships between the teacher's roles and the resulting character outcomes.

B. Challenges in Character Formation

Despite the significant influence of the CRE teacher, the study identified several obstacles hindering optimal character formation among eleventh-grade students. These challenges require collaborative solutions to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the teacher's efforts.

1. Digital Media Influence

The pervasive influence of digital media presents values and lifestyles often contradictory to biblical teachings. This environment makes the consistent cultivation of moral action (Lickona) difficult, as students are frequently exposed to immediate gratification and low accountability, contrasting with the principles of self-control and discipline taught in CRE. The teacher's moral instruction competes directly with the strong and often unmoderated cultural input received via digital platforms.

2. Peer Pressure

Peer pressure acts as a powerful deterrent to the practice of virtue. While the CRE teacher successfully ignites internal motivation (Arthur) and fosters relatedness within the classroom, students often compromise their newly formed moral commitments when faced with the desire for social acceptance outside of it. This tension undermines the necessary repetitive practice of virtue (Arthur) required for character growth.

3. Inconsistent Parental Involvement

The most critical challenge identified is the inconsistent parental involvement. Character formation demands consistent modeling and reinforcement across all spheres of a student's life. When parents fail to align with the school's character goals—by not reinforcing discipline, responsibility, or respectful speech at home—the teacher's efforts in modeling (Bandura) and pastoral care (Hiltner) are frequently neutralized. A disconnect between school values and home practice creates moral confusion for the adolescent.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers play a decisive and multidimensional role in shaping students' character at SMA Negeri 1 Sibolga. Through four interconnected functions—Moral Educator, Role Model, Motivator, and Spiritual Mentor—teachers guide learners toward the development of Christian virtues such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, respectfulness, and spiritual devotion. These findings align with major theoretical frameworks, including Lickona's moral education, Bandura's modeling, Groome's

praxis approach, Arthur's virtue formation, Deci & Ryan's motivation theory, and the pastoral-spiritual models of Hiltner and Narvaez, demonstrating that character formation is both moral and relational.

The overall model revealed in this research shows that character formation follows a structured flow: educational mandate → teacher roles → character outcomes, reinforced by consistent modeling and strong school–family partnerships. Although challenges such as digital distractions, peer influence, and inconsistent parental support persist, CRE teachers remain influential agents of moral and spiritual transformation. Their work affirms that character education is most effective when teaching, modeling, and spiritual guidance are integrated within a supportive school environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends strengthening Christian Religious Education (CRE) by enhancing the integration of biblical values with real-life contexts, reinforcing consistent teacher modeling, and expanding motivational and pastoral-care practices that support students' intrinsic moral and spiritual growth. At the institutional level, schools are encouraged to formalize character formation initiatives through structured spiritual programs, professional development in moral pedagogy and counseling, and a unified value-driven school culture. Sustained collaboration with families is essential to reinforce discipline, provide faith-centered communication at home, and guide students' digital engagement. Future research should explore broader comparative contexts, assess long-term impacts of CRE interventions, and employ mixed-method or quantitative designs to deepen understanding of how CRE teacher practices influence character formation.

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