

Strategies Of Christian Religious Education Teachers For Developing Students' Christian Character Through A Pastoral Counseling Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the strategies employed by Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers to develop students' Christian character through a pastoral counseling approach. It employs a descriptive qualitative method. The findings indicate that CRE teachers play strategic roles as faith educators, role models, and pastoral mentors who support students' holistic moral, spiritual, psychological, and social development. The strategies include relational approaches, personal mentoring, the integration of biblical values into the learning process, and collaboration with families and churches. The implementation of pastoral counseling contributes to the formation of Christian identity, increased learning motivation, emotional well-being, and improved social relationships among students. These findings affirm that strengthening teacher strategies grounded in pastoral counseling is essential for developing contextual and transformative CRE practices amid contemporary educational challenges.

Keywords: Christian character; CRE teachers; Pastoral counseling; Christian education.

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character holistically, encompassing not only cognitive aspects but also moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. In the contemporary educational context, which is shaped by technological developments and social change, CRE is expected to provide learning that fosters Christian character while remaining relevant to current needs. Research indicates that CRE makes an

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important contribution to character formation, digital ethics, and the creation of inclusive and holistic learning environments for students (Loes et al., 2025).

From a Christian perspective, character formation is inseparable from a process of moral transformation involving reflection on values, habituation to virtues, and the development of personal integrity. Christian character education is understood as a process of self-transformation toward a life aligned with Gospel values and social responsibility. Therefore, psychological and spiritual approaches within CRE are important for supporting the holistic development of students' character (Panjaitan, 2024).

At the same time, the realities of contemporary adolescent life present serious challenges, including identity crises, social media pressure, and insufficient personal spiritual guidance. These conditions create a gap between the Christian values being taught and students' actual behavior. A pastoral educational approach that integrates teaching and counseling is viewed as a way to help adolescents understand their identity and develop an authentic life of faith (Mumu, 2025).

Pastoral counseling also plays an important role in supporting adolescents' mental health and spiritual well-being. Through a process of accompaniment, counselors can help students address psychological struggles while finding spiritual hope. Qualitative research indicates that pastoral counseling methods and stages are effective in assisting adolescents experiencing mental health problems (Lalumba, 2024).

In the school context, CRE teachers have the potential to perform pastoral counseling functions as part of their educational ministry. Several studies have found that pastoral counseling models implemented by teachers can increase students' learning motivation and support the development of positive attitudes (Simanjuntak & Siregar, 2023). This indicates that integrating CRE instruction with pastoral counseling has tangible effects on students' lives. In addition, the implementation of pastoral counseling has also been shown to help prevent deviant behavior among adolescents through spirituality-based approaches and personal guidance. Purposeful accompaniment enables students to understand Christian moral values more deeply and actualize them in everyday life (Sihombing et al., 2025).

Although various studies have discussed character education, pastoral counseling, and the role of CRE separately, a gap remains in studies that specifically integrate CRE teachers' strategies for developing students' Christian character through a pastoral counseling approach. Some studies focus on curriculum-based character education or religious practices, while others emphasize pastoral counseling in the contexts of mental health or learning motivation. The integration of these two domains within a framework of teachers' pedagogical strategies has not yet been examined in depth, particularly through a descriptive qualitative approach in school settings.

Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in the conceptual and practical integration of Christian character education and pastoral counseling carried out directly by CRE teachers in the educational process. This approach is considered capable of providing character formation that is more personal, contextual, and transformative than a purely cognitive approach to learning. Accordingly, this study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of scholarship in CRE and a practical contribution to educational ministry and community engagement programs.

This study aims to describe in depth the strategies employed by CRE teachers to develop students' Christian character through a pastoral counseling approach, identify forms of implementation in schools, and analyze their effects on students' character development and spiritual lives. The findings are expected to provide a basis for developing a pastoral-counseling-based model of character formation that is relevant to contemporary Christian education.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design (Soesana et al., 2025). The qualitative approach is understood as a research method that seeks to interpret social phenomena in depth within their natural context, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument, so that the findings emphasize meaning rather than statistical figures (Malahati et al., 2023). In descriptive qualitative research, the data obtained are presented in the form of words, sentences, or descriptions of events in order to understand social situations comprehensively and identify patterns relevant to the reality under study (Septia et al., 2022). This approach was selected because it can provide a factual account of educational dynamics, students' character, and learning practices without manipulating variables, making it appropriate for examining CRE teachers' strategies for developing students' Christian character through a pastoral counseling approach.

The research procedures were conducted systematically through data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Putri & Murhayati, 2025). The data were then analyzed through a reduction stage to select and focus important information, presented in narrative form to facilitate understanding, and finally used to draw conclusions that reflect the meaning of the overall findings. This analytical procedure was carried out continuously and reflectively to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and provide an in-depth account of the pastoral counseling strategies applied by teachers in developing students' Christian character.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Nature of the CRE Teacher's Role in Developing Students' Christian Character

The role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in students' character formation is a fundamental aspect of faith education in schools. CRE teachers function not only as conveyors of instructional content but also as mentors who guide students toward lives that reflect Christian values (Lase, 2025). Research indicates that teachers have a strategic responsibility to shape students' character so that their attitudes and actions align with God's will and reflect moral integrity in everyday life (Dewanto et al., 2022). Thus, the nature of the CRE teacher's role is transformative because it addresses students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions holistically.

Christian character formation through education cannot be separated from the teacher's example in life. CRE teachers are viewed as figures entrusted by God to carry out education and instruction responsibly, making personal example a primary means of instilling moral values in students (Yesninopy, 2021). When teachers demonstrate lives consistent with the teachings of Christ, the internalization of values among students occurs more effectively and sustainably.

In addition to role modeling, character education in CRE also emphasizes the application of faith values in real life. Values such as love, honesty, faithfulness, humility, and forgiveness are understood as important elements in shaping students' personalities. This demonstrates that character formation does not end with theological knowledge but must be embodied in concrete actions that reflect Christian faith. The role of CRE teachers also includes guiding students' moral and spiritual development holistically. Christian Religious Education is not oriented solely toward the cognitive domain but also addresses affective and psychomotor domains through everyday practices (Liber, 2024). Therefore, CRE teachers are expected to provide learning that integrates faith, values, and action.

Amid globalization and the development of digital technology, the challenges of character formation are becoming increasingly complex (Kusuma et al., 2022; Sugianto et al., 2023). Changes in young people's patterns of social interaction and the influence of digital media may weaken respect for moral values and authority. This situation underscores the growing importance of CRE teachers as spiritual mentors who help students navigate contemporary dynamics without losing their Christian identity.

Furthermore, CRE teachers are understood as mentors who are relationally present in students' lives. The relationships they build are not merely academic; they are mentoring relationships that cultivate character through loving and caring interactions. Research emphasizes that teachers function as friends, companions, and even spiritual parental figures in the process of character education. Such relationships strengthen character formation because students encounter Christian values concretely in interpersonal relationships.

From the perspective of Christian character education, successful character formation is evident in changes in students' attitudes toward life. Religious character, discipline, responsibility, peaceableness, and social concern are important indicators that emerge through the active role of CRE teachers as role models and mentors (Lase, 2025). Thus, the teacher's role influences not only academic achievement but also the moral and spiritual quality of students' lives.

The pastoral approach further highlights the depth of the CRE teacher's role in character formation. Pastoral counseling has been shown to help young people face psychological and spiritual challenges while guiding them to remain grounded in faith values in the digital era (Sutarman Laia, 2025). This integration of pedagogical and pastoral functions demonstrates that CRE teachers serve as both educators and spiritual caregivers.

Pastoral counseling also contributes to supporting adolescent mental health through structured accompaniment grounded in Christian values. This approach helps students address personal struggles while cultivating positive life habits consistent with their faith. Therefore, Christian character formation cannot be separated from holistic pastoral accompaniment.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the role of CRE teachers in developing Christian character is comprehensive, encompassing exemplary living, the teaching of faith values, relational accompaniment, and pastoral care. Together, these dimensions demonstrate that CRE teachers are key actors in forming a generation that reflects the character of Christ and is able to face contemporary challenges with faith and moral integrity.

Concepts and Principles of Pastoral Counseling in Educational Contexts

Pastoral counseling in educational contexts is understood as a process of accompaniment that integrates theological, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions to support students' holistic development (Lase & Gulo, 2025). This approach is oriented not only

toward resolving behavioral problems but also toward developing meaning in life, spirituality, and relationships with God and others. Research indicates that pastoral counseling in Christian schools functions as a means of moral and spiritual formation integrated into the educational process, thereby helping students understand faith values in everyday life (Da Costa et al., 2025). Thus, pastoral counseling occupies a strategic position within an educational system that emphasizes students' holistic development.

Conceptually, pastoral counseling is rooted in the church's ministry tradition, which emphasizes restoration, healing, guidance, and reconciliation (Sutarman Laia, 2025). These principles are then adapted to educational contexts, where teachers serve as spiritual companions as well as facilitators of students' psychological development. Recent studies emphasize that integrating theological and psychological approaches in pastoral counseling allows accompaniment to respond more contextually to the needs of contemporary adolescents (Sihombing et al., 2025). Therefore, pastoral counseling in schools is inseparable both from the foundations of Christian theology and from scientific approaches in education and psychology.

In educational practice, pastoral counseling emphasizes a personal, empathetic, and dialogical relationship between teachers and students. This relationship provides a safe space for students to express emotional, social, and spiritual struggles. Research on adolescent mental health indicates that pastoral accompaniment can provide significant psychological support, particularly for students aged 10-18 who are undergoing identity development (Lalumba, 2024). This underscores that pastoral counseling is not merely a religious approach but also makes a tangible contribution to students' psychological well-being.

Another important principle of pastoral counseling in education is a contextual approach to spirituality. Spirituality is not understood narrowly as religious practice but as a relational awareness of God that influences students' attitudes, decisions, and behavior. Research in secondary schools indicates that spirituality-oriented approaches in pastoral counseling are effective in developing students' self-control and moral awareness in relation to various challenges in adolescent peer life (Sihombing et al., 2025). Thus, spirituality is a key element in the formation of Christian character through the counseling process.

In addition, pastoral counseling in education emphasizes preventive and formative principles, rather than being solely curative. In other words, accompaniment begins early to prevent the emergence of deviant behavior and to cultivate spiritually and socially healthy patterns of life. Studies of adolescent identity crises in the digital era indicate that an educational pastoral approach can help adolescents develop a strong sense of identity amid the influence of digital culture (Mumu, 2025). This demonstrates the relevance of pastoral counseling to the challenges of contemporary life.

Collaboration is another important characteristic of pastoral counseling in education. Teachers do not work alone but involve the school community, families, and churches as an ecosystem of support. This collaborative approach has been shown to strengthen the effectiveness of character formation and students' mental health because support is provided comprehensively (Da Costa et al., 2025). Therefore, pastoral counseling should be understood as a communal ministry that extends beyond the individual relationship between teacher and student.

At the same time, implementing pastoral counseling in schools faces a range of structural challenges, including limited teacher time, administrative workloads, and professional boundaries in relationships with students. Field research indicates that these

factors may hinder the optimization of pastoral accompaniment even though the approach is conceptually associated with positive effects on students' moral formation (Sihombing et al., 2025). These conditions require the development of more systematic strategies so that pastoral counseling can operate effectively within formal educational settings.

Based on these concepts and principles, pastoral counseling in education can be understood as a holistic approach that integrates spirituality, psychology, and pedagogy to form students' Christian character. This approach is relevant to the needs of contemporary adolescents while also presenting implementation challenges that must be addressed strategically. Accordingly, strengthening the concepts and principles of pastoral counseling provides an important foundation for developing CRE teacher strategies for sustaining students' character formation.

The changing educational context of the digital era requires Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers to serve not only as instructors of subject matter but also as spiritual and moral mentors for students. Modern educational transformation emphasizes the importance of forming character that is adaptive, critical, and marked by integrity in response to technological developments and digital culture. Therefore, character formation strategies cannot be separated from approaches that address students' psychological and spiritual dimensions holistically.

CRE Teacher Strategies for Developing Christian Character through a Pastoral Counseling Approach

The formation of students' Christian character is a primary goal of Christian Religious Education (CRE), which focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on moral, spiritual, and everyday behavioral development (Ones, 2026a). Research indicates that religious education, pastoral ministry, and counseling have positive and significant effects on the moral development of Christian youth, both independently and simultaneously (Tambunan & Iskandar, 2024). Therefore, CRE teacher strategies need to be designed integratively so that faith education genuinely contributes to character formation rather than merely transferring theological knowledge.

One primary strategy is to position CRE teachers as spiritual mentors who are personally present for students. The teacher's role as a mentor has been shown to contribute to character formation through guidance in values, exemplary living, and healthy interpersonal relationships (Warouw & Kasingku, 2025). This relational approach positions pastoral counseling as a means of helping students understand themselves, address inner conflicts, and grow concretely in faith.

Another strategy is to implement a pastoral counseling model that is contextualized to students' needs. Qualitative research indicates that pastoral counseling models implemented by CRE teachers can increase students' learning motivation, particularly among those experiencing personal or academic difficulties (Simanjuntak & Siregar, 2023). This confirms that pastoral counseling affects not only the spiritual dimension but also students' engagement in learning and psychological development.

In addition, pastoral counseling functions as a means of spiritual restoration and the strengthening of faith when students face life crises. Pastoral studies indicate that faith-based accompaniment helps individuals rediscover meaning in life, receive spiritual comfort, and restore their inner well-being (Gunarto et al., 2024). Therefore, CRE teachers need to integrate the dimension of spiritual healing into character formation strategies at school (Gunarto et al., 2024).

Another important strategy is the use of a biblical counseling approach that guides students toward positive character growth. Research emphasizes that Bible-based pastoral counseling services are effective in strengthening adolescents' understanding of moral values and encouraging healthy character formation within the faith community (Herman, 2023). Thus, a theological foundation is a key element in the practice of pastoral counseling in educational settings.

Continued pastoral accompaniment has also been shown to be relevant for addressing a range of contemporary adolescent problems. A study of counseling accompaniment for school dropouts indicates that client-centered approaches and rational-emotive behavior therapy can increase self-confidence and support psychosocial recovery (Waruwu & Marbun, 2025). This finding implies that CRE teacher strategies need to be adaptive to students' actual problems rather than merely normative and doctrinal.

In church and Christian educational contexts, pastoral ministry integrated with the spiritual character formation of congregations also contributes significantly to communal faith development. The implementation of pastoral ministry based on Christian education has been shown to foster more mature spiritual character oriented toward Christian values (Lake et al., 2024). This strengthens the argument that CRE teacher strategies should be holistic, connecting school, church, and students' personal lives.

Optimizing pastoral counseling strategies also requires engaging families and communities as settings for character formation (Widiyaningtyas & Prasetyo, 2023). Research on family pastoral counseling indicates that a descriptive qualitative approach can explore pastoral realities in depth and generate more contextualized accompaniment strategies for congregations (Kaensige et al., 2025). Therefore, CRE teachers cannot work alone but need to develop collaboration with families and churches.

Ultimately, CRE teachers' strategies for developing Christian character through pastoral counseling should be understood as an ongoing process of transformation. The integration of faith education, pastoral accompaniment, personal relationships, and spiritual restoration forms a comprehensive framework for character development. The overall findings of the study indicate that pastoral counseling is not merely an additional method but a central component of Christian character formation that is relevant to contemporary generations.

Implications of Christian Character Formation for Students' Lives and the Development of CRE Practice

Christian character formation in education is oriented not only toward cognitive aspects but also toward students' moral, spiritual, and social dimensions (Ones, 2026b). Christian Religious Education is understood as a process of faith formation that guides students toward lives aligned with Gospel values, so that the resulting character reflects integrity, love, and responsibility in everyday life (Tauho et al., 2026). This underscores that Christian character education has direct implications for the quality of students' behavior both at school and in society.

The first implication is evident in students' moral and ethical growth. The values of God's Word serve as a guide for life, shaping honesty, responsibility, and respect for others (Warouw & Kasingku, 2025). When biblical values are consistently internalized through education and accompaniment, students demonstrate more positive behavioral changes and a greater capacity to make ethical decisions in various life situations.

Beyond the moral dimension, Christian character formation also affects students' spiritual and psychological well-being. Pastoral counseling accompaniment has been shown to support recovery, strengthen faith, and help resolve personal problems faced by students. The functions of counseling as accompaniment, restoration, problem solving, and monitoring demonstrate that a pastoral approach makes a tangible contribution to students' holistic well-being (Simangunsong & Manurung, 2024).

Another implication concerns students' learning motivation and engagement in the educational process. Pastoral counseling models implemented by Christian Religious Education teachers can increase learning motivation, particularly among students experiencing difficulties or personal problems. A warm and empathetic relational approach helps students feel cared for and thereby encourages active participation in learning activities (Simanjuntak & Siregar, 2023).

Christian character formation also affects students' social relationships. Education that emphasizes love, empathy, and social concern helps students build healthy relationships with peers and the wider community. The role of CRE teachers as models of character values strengthens this internalization process because exemplary conduct is an effective educational means of shaping students' attitudes and behavior (Wanga et al., 2025).

In the context of contemporary developments, particularly the digital era and Society 5.0, Christian character formation has strategic implications for helping young people face technological challenges and social change (Herman & Hermanto, 2023). Pastoral accompaniment that is relevant to the context of the digital generation helps students maintain their faith and Christian identity amid rapidly changing cultural currents.

Another implication concerns the practice of CRE in schools. Character education cannot be separated from the teacher's role as a spiritual mentor who integrates instruction, role modeling, and pastoral counseling in the learning process (Pakpahan et al., 2023). Thus, CRE practice develops from the mere delivery of subject matter into a process of holistic accompaniment that continuously nurtures students' faith and character.

Furthermore, the implementation of pastoral counseling in education creates opportunities for collaboration among schools, families, and churches. Christian family counseling and community-based pastoral approaches indicate that character formation is more effective when it is integrated across the various environments of students' lives (Kaensige et al., 2025). This synergy strengthens the continuity of faith formation and students' emotional stability.

Finally, all of these implications affirm that Christian character formation is an important foundation for students' lives and for the future development of CRE. Education that integrates biblical values, pastoral counseling, and teacher role modeling produces behavioral transformation, maturity of faith, and readiness to face contemporary challenges. Thus, Christian character formation affects not only individual students but also contributes to the renewal of Christian educational practice as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the strategies of Christian Religious Education teachers for developing Christian character through a pastoral counseling approach play a highly important role in students' moral, spiritual, psychological, and social

development. CRE teachers function not only as instructors of religious content but also as spiritual mentors, role models, and personal companions who help students understand and embody faith values in everyday life. The integration of character education, exemplary conduct, empathetic relationships, and pastoral counseling services has been shown to foster attitudinal transformation and the development of a mature Christian identity among students.

The implications of Christian character formation extend beyond individual student behavior and also contribute to the development of CRE practice that is more holistic, contextual, and transformative. A pastoral counseling approach creates opportunities for collaboration among schools, families, and churches, enabling faith formation to continue across contexts. Therefore, strengthening CRE teacher strategies based on pastoral counseling is an important need in responding to contemporary educational challenges and provides a foundation for developing models of Christian education that are relevant to future generations.

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