

Christian Religious Education Strategies for Early Childhood in Fostering Knowledge of God in Schools

Ruthnawaty Setiawan,¹ Dunant Frederick Saukotta,² Margreth Luciyanna Risakotta,³ Yusak Tanasyah⁴

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia¹²³

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang, Indonesia⁴

Email: ruth_setiawan@yahoo.com¹

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze Christian religious education strategies that are effective in fostering knowledge of God in early childhood. Early childhood is a critical phase of development in which the foundations of character and moral values are formed. Christian religious education at this stage is considered an important factor in shaping a child's understanding of the existence of God. This study explores effective strategies of Christian religious education targeted at early childhood, with an emphasis on instilling a deep understanding of God. The aim is to provide practical insights and guidance for educators and stakeholders investing in the spiritual development of young learners. This research uses a qualitative approach with literature research methods. Recognizing the formative nature of early experiences, the focus is on creating an environment that encourages spiritual growth, instills Christian values, and fosters a personal relationship with God. This exploration advocates the integration of age-appropriate methods, engaging activities, and supportive communities to build a strong foundation for the development of a child's understanding of God in the school environment.

Keywords: Christian education strategies; Early childhood; School; Fostering knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Many parents consider that early childhood children do not understand anything, and it is not too important to provide spiritual education in this case Christian Religious Education to their young children (toddlers or early childhood) because they do not understand what the teachers or educators say. The toddlers only knew how to cry and play. So, it is not very important to teach about Christian education, the important thing is that they know there is a God Jesus who created. We may be seen by some as expressing a secular viewpoint, leading them to assume that we are against religious people and that we are trying to force our own, competing, teaching upon them.

It is certain that individuals whose religious beliefs forbid the state from lawfully defending and advancing children's autonomy or mandating that children receive an education that cultivates a culture of tolerance and respect for one another would

oppose the laws we support. However, institutions that do not push students toward any certain religion are not anti-religious, and our attitudes are unaffected by our dislike of religion. We argue that schools that try to instill religious beliefs in their students or teach them to be atheists face the same criticisms as those that teach their students to be religious.¹

Education is a cognitive process that starts from the intrinsic nature of children to have curiosity and discover the world. Value education is a program designed to facilitate students' concept of their true nature as God's gift embedded in humans at the time of creation. Through value education and the learning process, a person transforms, gaining an understanding and appreciation of the world. Thus, an individual's ability to understand, store, and apply information begins in infancy and develops over time.²

Pre-school education according to Government Regulation No.27 of 1990 concerning Pre-School Education, the program of early childhood learning activities includes the following aspects: morals, religious values, discipline, language skills, thinking, creativity, emotions, social community skills, skills, and physical. According to Law Number 20 of 2003, article 1 point 14 concerning Early Childhood Education states that early childhood education is a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to the age of six years which is carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to help physical and spiritual growth and development so that children have readiness to enter further education.³

Studies show that good social-emotional development plays an important role in preschoolers' growth and development and will help shape their lives in the future. It is important for teachers, especially early childhood educators, to understand parental involvement and realize its positive impact on teaching and learning. Education is very important in the growth and development of a person as an individual because education is the basis for an individual to socialize and socialize, especially in terms of building the nation and state. Human education begins in the mother's womb, and throughout human life is learning. At this time, especially in the era of globalization

¹ Matthew Clayton et al., "How to Regulate Faith Schools," *Impact* 2018, no. 25 (October 9, 2018): 1–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/2048-416X.2018.12005.x>.

² Li Jia, "Christian Values Education And Holistic Child Development From The Parent Perspective In Santiago City, Philippines," *Southeast Asia Early Childhood Journal* 10, no. 1 (2021): 86–100, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol10.1.8.2021>.

³ PAUD, *Investasi Masa Depan Bangsa* (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Luar Sekolah, 2006), 3.

where humans are preoccupied with their respective worlds, life is increasingly sophisticated. In a busy family life. Parents who are busy with work and forget to pay attention to the growth and development of children, in terms of association and education, especially spiritual education in this case Christian religious education.

Christian religious education is very important from an early age so that it will shape the character and nature as taught by God's Word through the example given by Jesus Christ. Therefore, parents, adults, and teachers need to prioritize teaching Christian education to children. The impact of the teaching we teach is that if it is true then they will become responsible adult humans and have good character, otherwise when this Christian education is ignored then they will grow into people who disobey God and His Word.⁴

In the management and implementation of CRE in Early Childhood, ECCE standards become a reference in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum. In addition, the Child Development Achievement Level Standard (CDALS) is a reference for developing standards for content, processes, assessments, educators and education personnel, facilities and infrastructure, management, and financing. CDALS is also a reference in the development of the ECCE curriculum which contains criteria for the abilities achieved by children in all aspects of development and growth. It includes aspects of religious and moral values, physical, motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional, and art. These aspects become part of the Basic Competencies to be achieved, which are formulated in the learning objectives.⁵

Through character education, educational institutions become a focal point for molding pupils into better versions of themselves. The goal of character education is to develop pupils into morally upright individuals who possess sound judgment, sound physical health, a strong sense of spirituality, and a human heart. Students' values are shaped through character education as they learn about, demonstrate, and live virtue.⁶ During the teaching and learning process, a teacher implements character education by having students actively develop questions, locate educational resources, gather data,

⁴ Kalis Stevanus and Dwiati Yulianingsih, "Strategi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Kristen Pada Anak Usia Dini," *Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen* 2, no. 1 (2021): 15–30, <http://peada.iakn-toraja.ac.id>.

⁵ Dirjend PAUD-Dikmas, *Kurikulum Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Apa, Mengapa Dan Bagaimana*. (Jakarta: Dirjen PAUD-Dikmas, 2015), 2.

⁶ Ester A. Tandana, Esti Koku Yowa, and Novida Dwici Yuanri Manik, "Character Education In Forming Student Behavior," *Didache: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 3, no. 2 (July 3, 2022): 161–76, <https://doi.org/10.55076/didache.v4i1.48>.

rebuild facts, and report the outcomes of their reconstruction or improvement. Teaching staff members need to create, carry out, and assess character education programs. Christian religious education teachers are required to be able to mentor and set a positive example for their pupils, helping them to mimic and inadvertently influence the character of youngsters, in addition to imparting knowledge and information to their students.⁷

RESEARCH METHODS

My topic is academic research libraries and the researchers that use them as the primary storage for their research materials. I'll refer to these individuals as library researchers, and you should be aware that I'll be using the term "library researcher" to refer to them exclusively. They are knowledgeable academics with backgrounds in disciplines like theology, psychology, and education. Libraries are used by natural scientists. However, libraries aren't their research facilities. The research library is the only laboratory available to humanists and humanistic social scientists.⁸ In writing this research, the author uses descriptive qualitative using *library research* methods. The author collects and examines materials taken from books and online journals of strategies related to learning Christian religious education for Early Childhood.

DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Early Childhood

Children's behavior is not only influenced by internal impulses. Such development is determined also by the complexity of external factors. Interaction with people or groups around him is one of the external factors that influence the process of behavior formation. This interaction has even become one of the basic human needs considering that a child cannot live alone without others. John Bowlby also explained that dependence on others has been felt by a person since infancy as the earliest social adjustment behavior through attachment to parents. Social adjustment will continue until adulthood which is formed through the process of learning from others.⁹

⁷ Tandana, Yowa, and Manik.

⁸ Andrew Abbott, "Library Research and Its Infrastructure in the Twentieth Century," *University of Chicago* (Chicago, n.d.), <https://home.uchicago.edu/aabbott/Papers/illinois.pdf>.

⁹ Yeni Krismawati, "Teori Psikologi Perkembangan Erik H. Erikson Dan Manfaatnya Bagi Tugas Pendidikan Kristen Dewasa Ini," *Kurios* 2, no. 1 (February 11, 2018): 46, <https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v2i1.20>.

Early childhood is defined as children aged 0 to 5 years, while the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that children up to 8 years of age are still considered early childhood. Early childhood differs in its behavioral expression. Early childhood has impulsive, egocentric, enthusiastic, and exploratory characteristics, has a strong curiosity, and is courageous.

Early infancy is usually referred to as the "golden era" because all potential can be realized quickly, with an increase in brain capacity of up to 80% during this period. Young people are good imitators rather than excellent pickers, which means that many children can imitate the words and deeds of their parents but cannot choose which words and actions are better and appropriate for them to use.

Piaget emphasized that children are much more than little grownups with a smaller knowledge base at their disposal. distinct developmental phases correspond to distinct ways that children view and think about the world. Piaget studied the systematic processes kids go through while they form concepts. Globally, children reach similar developmental stages and even make similar mistakes at the same age. For instance, students learning English begin to make mistakes they have never made before when they learn the '-ed' rule for the past tense. A three-year-old child who had been heard saying "I rode my bike" on a frequent basis abruptly switched to saying, "I rode," erroneously applying a recently learned rule to irregular verbs.¹⁰

When it comes to early childhood, there are several periods that directly or indirectly affect how you should deal with early childhood.¹¹

1. Sensitivity is a time when children can distinguish which adults are sincere to them from those who are not very receptive to them. So, with the sensitivity they have, children at this age are quickly traumatized by a situation. Example: If any adult hurts them, then he will not repeat approaching her.
2. Egocentric period, at an early age child only focus on themselves, they are very difficult to share with others. This is influenced by the environment, especially within the family. Usually, at an early age, parents will continue to focus on their children. Everything is just for their child. This makes the child feel that everything is just for them and makes them selfish people.

¹⁰ K. Sylva, "Critical Periods in Childhood Learning," *British Medical Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 1997): 185–97, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bmb.a011599>.

¹¹ Sylva.

3. Imitation period, at this age children like to imitate the style of others who are role models for them. Suppose parents or their favorite artist.
4. The group period is a time when children like to play with their group. And it's a bit difficult to get into a community that's new to them.
5. During the period of exploration, this time children prefer to learn new things to get to know new things.
6. The period of defiance is the time when children care more about themselves, and with high curiosity, make them do things with their desires and do not want to be limited by adults.

Basic on Christian Religious Education Bible for Early Childhood

In the Old Testament God revealed His dominion through His creation. The book of Genesis explains that God created the heavens and the earth including the rest of the world. His last masterpiece in the image and likeness of God is man Himself. He was introduced as God and creator of all creation so that God's relationship with man is that between the Creator and His Creation. From the very beginning of creation, God wanted His human beings to be special beings, possessing creativity and knowledge centered solely on God Himself and His rules. This is evidenced when God placed man in the Garden of Eden, God wanted man to work it out and maintain it. God also taught the rules that man must obey (Gen. 2:16-17).

According to Werner C. Graendorf, Christian Religious Education (CRE) is a process of teaching and teaching that is based on the Bible, Christ-centered, and dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides each person at all levels of growth, teaches today toward the imposition and acknowledgment of the plan and will of the God to occupy Christ in every aspect of life, and to enable them for effective service, centered on Christ the Great Teacher and the command that matures disciples.¹²

The teaching of Christian religious education is delivered not only specifically for adults, adolescents, youth, and children. But in this discussion, the author more specifically discusses the importance of Christian Education starting from Early Childhood. Children, especially young children, are golden years and need to be

¹² Debora Nugrahenny Christimoty and Dixon Nixon Siathen, "Karakteristik Pendidikan Agama Kristen Dalam Keluarga Bagi Pembentukan Karakter Anak Di Era Disrupsi 4.0," *PROSIDING STT ERIKSON-TRITT* 1, no. 1 (August 11, 2021): 10–18, <https://doi.org/10.53827/pros.v1i1.38>.

educated in the principles of the truth of God's Word. His innocence and purity must be filled with the character of Christ and His liberating truth. It is at this age that they are so easy to imitate what they see and hear that they need the right example as their guide. They have a strong enough memory and recording power so in this case Christian education needs to be instilled in them so that the character is formed as God wants.⁴

As in Deuteronomy Moses told the Israelites to teach their children over and over again (Deuteronomy 6:7). Educating children is not limited to time and place. But at every opportunity in life, it can be used to teach them about Christian education. Children often have high curiosity, asking, amazed, surprised, and even afraid of something. At this time it is a good opportunity for parents and teachers to correctly convey the right message according to the situation they are facing. For example, walking time with children often asks adults about what they see, even when doing something wrong that affects them is also a great opportunity for parents and teachers to deliver teaching about Christian education and introduce God properly to them.⁵

In Matthew 8:1-6 and Mark 10:13-16, the Lord Jesus stated that children matter so much that Jesus used children to be parables in the Bible for adults. Likewise, the apostle Paul, as the great evangelist of New Testament times, also affirmed how important it is to raise children (2 Timothy 3:15) The apostle Paul said, "Remember also that from childhood you have known the scriptures that can give you wisdom and lead you to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." Therefore, from an early age, children need to be educated so that from an early age children can know God's love so that when they enter adulthood, they will become God-fearing people and can maintain their faith in Jesus Christ until old age and in old age they will not waver in facing every challenge.

The Importance of Christian Religious Education in Schools

Early childhood is when the child's future is shaped significantly, social and moral values are transferred, and the most essential knowledge and skills are acquired. Considering the meaning of the proverb "The tree bends when it is young", it is seen that the preschool period is vital for the child's education. A considerable part of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that prepare children for their future life is learned

during childhood, and these are very influential in forming their character structure and shaping their beliefs and value judgments.¹³

Keep in mind that CRE in school does not mean just meeting the curriculum requirements given. Through CRE, students are expected to grow, continue to understand God, and help them live as disciples of Christ at an early age.¹⁴ The concept of God is more personal than accurate. They are based on experience. Therefore, education to help children chart their path to a happy self-concept and a healthy concept of God should allow children to name their current concepts and see what religious texts reveal, without embarrassing the child, criticizing already existing concepts, or setting the child up for failure by letting the child speak and then showing how wrong they are or by focusing on what they missed.¹⁵

The CRE curriculum can support the teaching and learning process in an inclusive classroom. By fostering and celebrating individual contributions, teachers can provide a variety of opportunities for students to engage in discussions about assumptions, stereotypes, labels, and perceptions. Inclusive classrooms respect the social and ethno-cultural backgrounds of all students while creating opportunities for community building. Diverse family customs, histories, traditions, values, beliefs, and unique ways of seeing and understanding the world are important contexts for enriched learning through religious education. Early childhood literature offers a comprehensive understanding of the distinct characteristics of this age group and their learning style. Over time, research has revealed three critical components of early childhood education: learner-centered pedagogy, learning scaffolding, and learners who are actively involved in their learning. All three must be included in the early childhood setting's pedagogical framework.¹⁶

CRE activities can provide opportunities in a safe and caring environment for students to express feelings, think critically about problem-solving, or simply reflect on current problems. All students need to see their lives and experiences reflected in their

¹³ Ahmet Koç, "Curiosity of Preschool Children (4–6 Years of Age) about Religious and Moral Issues," *Religions* 14, no. 2 (February 15, 2023): 260, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020260>.

¹⁴ Artika Ratu et al., "Strategi Pendidikan Agama Kristen Dalam Masyarakat Majemuk Di Sekolah," *Indonesia Journal of Religious* 5, no. 2 (August 30, 2023): 127–39, <https://doi.org/10.46362/ijr.v5i2.30>.

¹⁵ Joyce E. Bellous, "Spiritual Care as the Foundation for a Child's Religious Education," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (November 2, 2021): 954, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110954>.

¹⁶ Kerrin Huth, Raymond Brown, and Wayne Usher, "The Use of Story to Teach Religious Education in the Early Years of Primary School: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Journal of Religious Education* 69, no. 2 (July 16, 2021): 253–72, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-021-00140-y>.

school community. All students need the opportunity to share their own culture and that of others by examining local, regional, and global belief systems. Increased attitudes build respect for each other, create positive interdependence, and allow for different perspectives.¹⁷

Strategies for Teaching Christian Religious Education in Schools

According to Hutabarat, the CRE learning strategy in general is a strategic pattern that contains procedural steps in designing CRE learning programs according to curriculum demands to obtain student learning outcomes. The CRE curriculum contains affective and psychomotor domains greater than cognitive so that through CRE learning, students are expected to experience the development of faith and morals in addition to the development of knowledge and psychomotor. The wholeness of the development of affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains is based on Christian values.¹⁸

In introducing Christian religious education to children, especially in early childhood, there is no need to be too formal. We introduce them to God in this case Christian religious education by entering the world of their growth and development like children, which is a world full of games. In this case, teachers and parents are required to always think creatively and innovatively in teaching children. Childhood (early age) is a time when children are selfish and like to imitate new things, and groups, and explore. From these characteristics, the author wants to invite parents and teachers to teach children about Christian education correctly to them with an approach through the world of play.

Concept Early childhood learning is child-centered. The learning approach used is a scientific approach that includes a series of processes of observing, questioning, collecting information, reasoning, and communicating. The entire process is carried out using all senses as well as various learning resources and media.¹⁹ Engagement of learners As children engage in opportunities for play, exploration, and experimentation they begin to make sense of themselves and the world around them, develop confidence

¹⁷ Newfoundland, *Religious Education Kindergarten* (The Department of Education for Newfoundland, 2016), 6, https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/files/k12_curriculum_guides_religion_2016_k_re.pdf.

¹⁸ Oditha R. Hutabarat and Janse Belandina Non-Serrano, *Pedoman Untuk Guru PAK* (Bandung: Bina Media Informas, 2006).

¹⁹ PAUD-PAK, *Petunjuk Teknis Penyelenggaraan Paud Pelayanan Anak Agama Kristen* (Jakarta: Direktorat Pembinaan Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 2015), <https://repositori.kemdikbud.go.id/11882/1/6.-Juknis-PAK.pdf>.

and engagement with learning, and through the social environment engage with multiple perspectives.²⁰

Seeing - Visual

The use of visual learning strategies in teaching, however, is not entirely new. Over the years, educators have often used different visuals to illustrate specific learning concepts for their learners. They first used colored chalk with blackboards, and then colored markers with blackboards and *flipcharts*. They also use crayons and construction paper for children. Still, images, posters, *storyboards*, charts, etc. are also among the visuals used in early teaching. Later, *transparency slides* and presentations were also used. But with today's advanced technology, digital visuals are used as a viable learning enhancer due to their ability to convey desired instructional messages instantly and universally.²¹

Hearing - Auditory

Hearing (auditory) is by making children become listeners, and children are invited to participate in this activity, namely in the form of songs or songs. Usually teaching with this method has a higher success rate, because basically, humans are happy with art (singing). Moreover, their children are very happy to learn something through the songs they listen to and sing. Because of that fun, parents and teachers should use this method to introduce what Christian Education is to early childhood in simple and easily digestible language. The trick is to sing songs with the theme of stories in the Bible. Example: the song "Sunday School Child"

"Sunday school children listen, follow parents especially God, that's the sign of a sweet child. Later go to heaven, accept the reward". It is a song that is simple, easy to digest, and easy for children to understand. This song teaches children to be children who listen to their parents and God. Without being realized by children through this song there are values instilled in children when singing this song. It could be argued that there is a double advantage in teaching this method; Children are taught to be more

²⁰ Caroline Cohrssen et al., "The Self-Reported Academic Self-Concept of Four-Year-Old Children: Global and Fixed, or Nuanced and Changing in the Year before School?," *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 41, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 4–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911604100302>.

²¹ Yusak Tanasyah et al., "Dampak Strategi Pembelajaran Lewat Visualisasi Dalam Pendidikan Agama Kristen Di Era Masyarakat 5.0," *VISIO DEI: JURNAL TEOLOGI KRISTEN* 3, no. 2 (December 13, 2021): 281–303, <https://doi.org/10.35909/visiodei.v3i2.226>.

characterful (from the child's personality) as taught by God, the value of art in it, and do not make the child depressed with the education instilled. Everything is formed naturally in the child's person.

Touching – Tactual

Touching or *tactual* means introducing Christian Education to children by giving children direct activities in doing their tasks to teach children to be more responsible with the tasks given to them and can develop children's creativity through these activities. An example is by giving spiritual images to children to color themselves according to their creativity. With puzzles connecting pieces of pictures of biblical figures, children will be interested in learning. Children under the age of 6 are at playtime. Providing educational stimulation in an appropriate way through play can provide meaningful learning in children.²²

Moving – Kinesthetic

Moving (Kinesthetic) is a learning style that requires children to touch something that provides certain information so that they can remember it. This method is also very effective in teaching children about Christian religious education. In this method, children are invited directly to come into direct contact with the object to be studied, so that everything that will be taught about Christian education will be truly embedded and continue to be remembered by children. One of the traits possessed by early childhood has been explained in front; Early childhood is a child who likes to imitate something.

Activities that can be done are directly practicing the characters/stories in the Bible in plays or teaching demonstrations. Practice in style for specific verses. For example, when learning about the blind man who was healed by the Lord Jesus, children were invited to practice what it was like to be a blind person until God came to heal. Through this lesson, it can teach children to help others in need and to be able to respect others no matter what the circumstances.

Teaching Christian education to children, especially in early childhood we can do it in simple ways, and ordinary languages. Teaching children we just need to know what their world is like and apply the good teachings taught in Christian Education.

²² paud-Pak, *Petunjuk Teknis Penyelenggaraan Paud Pelayanan Anak Agama Kristen*.

Everything has been patterned, it's just a matter of how we collaborate between Christian Education and the child's world and its need to shape them into generations as God wants.

Children learn interactively through the use of educational strategies in Christian religious education. While offering opportunities for self-directed learning, teachers must support students in maintaining their interest and engagement with the material. Additionally, highlighting the personal relevance of Christian religious education aids in students' comprehension of the applicability of the faith's ideas and principles to their own life. Students are encouraged to apply what they have learnt in their own life and to have a deeper respect for the subject matter as a result.²³

Teachers should foster a courteous and safe environment for debate by encouraging students to voice their opinions and questions about the subject matter. Students benefit from feeling at ease and involved in the learning process as a result. These techniques can help educators successfully incorporate Christian religious education into a deeper understanding of the faith. Early childhood religious education is shaped by the teacher's responsibility in helping young children build a solid foundation in their faith and assisting them in growing spiritually. Teachers can assist students in creating a solid foundation for their religion and a personal relationship with God by utilizing effective teaching tactics and creating a supportive learning atmosphere that encourages spiritual growth.

CONCLUSION

Teaching Christian education to children, especially starting in early childhood is the most important thing in a child's life. Christian religious education is the basis or foundation for building the character and personality of children as capital in the future for the child. The Lord Jesus was very concerned about the education of children. God emphasizes the importance of teaching Christian education to children since they are young and innocent. This education is considered a foundation for building children's understanding and knowledge of the concept of God from an early age. Creative and interactive teaching strategies, such as stories, hymns, and activities involving children's

²³ Bangun Munthe et al., "The Role of the Teacher in Implementing Christian Religion Education in Growing Christian Faith for Early Age Children," *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* 7, no. 3 (May 15, 2023): 2641–49, <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i3.4484>.

active participation, have proven effective in fostering knowledge of God. Teachers and the school environment play an important role in shaping children's perception of God. The teacher's teaching style and school atmosphere can influence the formation of religious character.

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