

The Role of Teachers in Instilling Christian Moral Values in Early Childhood at ECE Sejahtera Sentani

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan mendeskripsikan bagaimana peran pendukung guru, melalui kegiatan bercerita, memfasilitasi internalisasi nilai-nilai Kristen di kalangan anak-anak usia dini di Pusat Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Sejahtera Sentani. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif, yang melibatkan guru dan anak-anak berusia 4-5 tahun sebagai partisipan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif yang dikembangkan oleh Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memainkan peran penting sebagai teladan dengan memanfaatkan media kreatif seperti boneka tangan saat bercerita. Nilai-nilai kasih, kejujuran, dan kerja sama tim telah berhasil diinternalisasi oleh anak-anak, sebagaimana dibuktikan oleh perubahan perilaku yang nyata dalam interaksi sehari-hari mereka. Keberhasilan ini disebabkan oleh fakta bahwa guru secara langsung membimbing emosi dan tindakan anak-anak melalui proses perhatian, retensi, dan motivasi, sejalan dengan teori belajar sosial Bandura. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa bercerita interaktif merupakan mekanisme yang efektif dan sesuai konteks untuk menumbuhkan integritas pada anak-anak di wilayah Sentani. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan peningkatan keterampilan bercerita guru serta penguatan kolaborasi antara sekolah dan orang tua.

This study aims to analyse and describe how teachers' supportive role, through storytelling, facilitates the internalisation of Christian values among young children at the Sejahtera Sentani Early Childhood Education Centre. The study employs a qualitative, descriptive design, involving teachers and children aged 4-5 years as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and were subsequently analysed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The research findings indicate that teachers play a vital role as role models by utilising creative media such as hand puppets when telling stories. The values of love, honesty, and cooperation have been successfully internalised by the children, as evidenced by tangible behavioural changes in their daily interactions. This success is attributable to teachers directly guiding children's emotions and actions through attention, retention, and motivation, in line with Bandura's social learning theory. This study concludes that interactive storytelling is an effective and contextually appropriate mechanism for fostering integrity in children in the Sentani region. The study recommends enhancing teachers' storytelling skills and strengthening collaboration between schools and parents.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is the cornerstone of character development and the instilling of moral values in children, particularly within the context of Christian-based education in Indonesia. Within the framework of national policy, the National Education System Act No. 20 of 2003 has affirmed that education aims to develop learners' potential so that they possess intelligence, a strong character, and noble moral values, which implicitly places character development at the heart of the curriculum from an early age (Indonesia, 2003). The research findings highlight that this stage of education is crucial for developing moral literacy, integrating religious values with moral education to build a strong foundation of character in children (Sari et al., 2024). Tasijawa et al. (2026) emphasise that education is fundamentally holistic in nature, encompassing philosophical foundations, pedagogical principles, and practical implementation aimed at developing the whole person intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. In this era of globalisation and rapid technological advancement, young children are vulnerable to environmental influences that do not support the development of noble values. Exposure to violent content or arguments in digital media can lead children to imitate such behaviour when playing with their peers, for example, by pushing, hitting, or teasing. Research on the influence of gadgets and digital media indicates that exposure to negative content encourages an increase in aggressive behaviour and a tendency to imitate acts of violence seen on screen (Depalina, 2025). According to Pattipeiluhu (2024), early childhood education focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on children's moral and spiritual development through daily interactions within the learning environment. At ECE Sejahtera Sentani, the lack of Christian character development is becoming increasingly apparent; observational data reveal that many children display a lack of mutual respect, such as refusing to share toys, showing little empathy towards their peers, or exhibiting egocentric behaviour that runs counter to Christian values of love and brotherhood. This forms the primary background to the research, in which teachers, as the main agents of learning, are expected to make a tangible contribution to teaching and learning activities to instil good moral values from an early age. Teachers do not merely teach, but also serve as active role models who use storytelling methods to shape children's Christian morality, thereby addressing these shortcomings and fostering a generation of integrity.

Previous literature indicates that the role of teachers in the development of Christian character has been widely discussed, yet there remains a significant gap. Wiranto et al. (2024) emphasise that Christian Religious Education teachers play a vital role as role models in instilling moral and spiritual values through interactive and contextual teaching strategies. In line with this, Sabuna et al. (2025) conclude that the code of ethics for Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers serves as a moral foundation for instilling Christian values in young children, despite facing diverse cultural challenges. Darma & Tapilaha (2025) added that Christian nursery school teachers act as role models in instilling values such as love, honesty, discipline, and gratitude through everyday activities. Gea & Malelak (2023) and Saingo (2023) highlight the internalisation of religious values through Christian religious education lessons, as well as the role of Christian early years teachers as key moral pillars. Hasibuan et al. (2025) further emphasise the importance of Christian-based classroom rules in fostering discipline and character in young children. From a theoretical perspective, Wang (2021) and Amsari et al. (2024) apply Albert Bandura's social learning theory to moral education, which emphasises

that children learn through observation, imitation, and modelling the behaviour of role models (teachers) in their social environment. These studies have not specifically addressed the supportive role of teachers through storytelling as a primary means of instilling Christian values in early childhood education. Yet this approach is crucial to address, as storytelling is a method that is highly suited to the developmental stage of young children, capable of conveying values narratively and emotionally that is easily internalised. Furthermore, this integration is becoming increasingly relevant in the local context of Sentani, Papua, which possesses unique socio-cultural characteristics, where the community is rich in folk traditions and local wisdom, such as *holei narei* (building and nurturing bonds of brotherhood), cooperation, and respect for customs that remain deeply ingrained. Previous studies have been more general in nature, focusing on the role of teachers or Bandura's theory, without examining in depth the influence of teachers' supportive roles as mediated by narrative storytelling.

This research is important because it puts forward a hypothesis that can be tested empirically: the influence of the teacher's supportive role through storytelling has the potential to be an effective mechanism for facilitating the internalisation of Christian values among young children at the Sejahtera Sentani Early Childhood Education Centre. This preliminary hypothesis is based on the assumption that teachers, as the primary agents of learning, are capable of systematically designing, implementing, and evaluating storytelling activities based on Christian values, thereby fostering meaningful and measurable behavioural changes in children. The contribution of this research is twofold: theoretically, it enriches the application of Bandura's social learning theory within the context of Christian-based early childhood education; and practically, it provides actionable recommendations for teachers and educational institutions in the Sentani region to optimise the process of Christian character formation from an early age.

Real-world phenomena at the Sejahtera Sentani Early Years Centre further reinforce the relevance of this theory. Every day instances show that children with limited exposure to Christian moral stories tend to display a lack of mutual respect, such as minor disputes that are not resolved through forgiveness or cooperation. This aligns with Bandura's concept that without strong role models and supportive guidance from teachers, the process of observing and imitating Christian values does not occur optimally. Teachers who proactively use storytelling methods such as Bible stories about love and kindness can act as catalysts in the process of internalising values, thereby transforming children's behaviour from egocentric to empathetic and responsible, as explained in Bandura's triadic reciprocal determinism theory (Amsari et al., 2024; Wang, 2021). Storytelling effectively instils moral values such as empathy, honesty, and responsibility, particularly when engaging narratives are used that resonate emotionally with children (Mawarni & Zarin, 2024; Putri et al., 2025).

As part of its contribution, this study presents a conceptual research model, as shown in Figure 1. This study aims to analyse and describe how teachers' supportive role, through storytelling, can facilitate the internalisation of Christian values among young children at the Sejahtera Sentani Early Childhood Education Centre, as well as to provide practical recommendations for improving the quality of Christian character-based learning in similar early childhood education institutions. It is therefore hoped that this research will make a tangible contribution to the advancement of Christian education management in Indonesia.

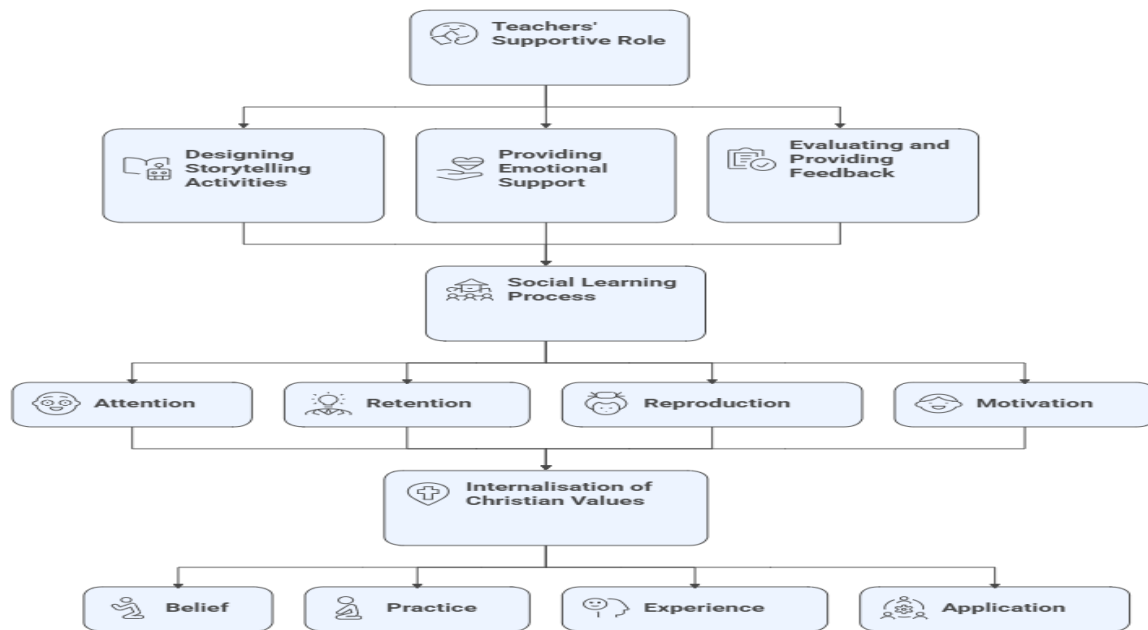


Figure 1. Internalisation of Christian Values through Teacher's Supportive Role Model (ICV-TSR Model)

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to provide an in-depth understanding of how the supportive role of teachers as role models facilitates the internalisation of Christian moral values among young children at the Sejahtera Early Childhood Education Centre in Kampung Homfolo. A descriptive design was chosen as it is best suited to describing in detail and factually the phenomena occurring in a natural setting without manipulating variables, thereby enabling the capture of the real experiences, practices, and behaviours of both teachers and children holistically and contextually. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on capturing the essence of participants' experiences as they are in natural settings, to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate picture of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2019; Pattipeiluhu et al., 2026; Tasijawa et al., 2024). The research subjects comprised three early years teachers as the main informants and eight children aged 4–5 years as the subjects of observation, selected using purposive sampling based on the relevance of their experience and their involvement in the learning process (Wisudaningsih et al., 2024). This research was conducted at the Sejahtera Early Childhood Education Centre in Homfolo Village over a period of approximately two months, namely April and May 2025.

The researcher was present in person as the primary research instrument (*human instrument*), supported by semi-structured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation. The researcher's presence in the field aims to build relationships with informants and gain a deep understanding of the social context, whilst the informants serve as the primary data sources providing information regarding the practice of Christian moral education (Pattipeiluhu et al., 2026). Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, participatory observation and document analysis to obtain comprehensive data. In-depth interviews were conducted on a semi-structured basis with teachers to explore their experiences and understanding. Participatory observation was carried out using field notes and audio recordings during storytelling activities, whilst documentation included

photographs of activities, short video recordings, and analysis of learning documents such as lesson plans and children's work (Pattipeiluhu et al., 2026; Tasijawa et al., 2024).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which involves the continuous stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, supported by a data exploration process to identify patterns and research themes (Pattipeiluhu et al., 2026). To ensure data validity, this study employed source and method triangulation as well as member checking. Triangulation is used to enhance credibility by comparing various data sources and techniques (Morgan, 2024), whilst member checking is conducted to ensure that interpretations align with participants' experiences (Mckim, 2023). To meet the criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research, this study employs triangulation of sources and methods to enhance credibility, conducts member checking with informants to ensure confirmability, and provides a detailed description of the context to support transferability and dependability (Kawar et al., 2024).

RESULTS

The research findings indicate that teachers at ECE Sejahtera Sentani play a fundamental role in the internalisation of Christian moral values through the Internalisation of Christian Values through Teacher's Supportive Role Model (ICV-TSR). Teachers do not merely act as storytellers, but proactively design storytelling activities using hand puppets and picture books to capture the children's attention. Observations noted that the effectiveness of instilling values begins with the teachers' preparation stage in selecting materials appropriate to the psychological development of children aged 4–5 years, followed by two-way interaction through question-and-answer sessions during the storytelling process.

The Christian moral values successfully fostered include compassion, honesty, mutual aid, and good manners. Descriptive findings indicate concrete behavioural changes in the children, such as a willingness to share toys and the courage to admit mistakes after hearing stories from the teacher. Teachers consistently linked the moral messages of the stories to the example set by Christ and applied them in daily routines; for instance, by inviting the children to tidy up the chairs together as a way of practising the value of mutual assistance. This internalisation was reinforced by concluding activities with a prayer of thanksgiving, which integrated spiritual aspects into the children's social behaviour.

Although it has yielded positive results, the implementation of this storytelling method faces challenges in the form of fluctuations in the children's concentration and limited support from the home environment. Observational data indicates that children tend to become bored quickly if the story is too long, so teachers adapt their strategies by varying their vocal intonation, using expressive facial expressions, and incorporating songs into the narrative. The limitations of learning materials are overcome through the teachers' creativity in utilising whatever props are available to maintain high levels of child engagement. These findings suggest that the teacher's supportive role is key to bridging the gap between the narrative content of the Bible and real-life actions in the children's daily lives.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that the supportive role of teachers through storytelling is an effective mechanism for facilitating the internalisation of Christian values among young children at the Sejahtera Sentani Early Childhood Education Centre. The main findings

indicate that the success of this internalisation depends not only on the story content, but also on how teachers position themselves as supportive role models who directly guide children's emotions and actions. This addresses the research objective regarding the importance of teachers' tangible contribution as the primary agents of character education within a Christian school environment.

In theory, these findings are fully consistent with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasises that children learn through observation and imitation of role models in their environment (Amsari et al., 2024; Wang, 2021). In the context of ECE Sejahtera, teachers act as role models whose honesty and kindness are observed and emulated by their pupils. This process involves the components of attention, retention, and motivation, whereby the teachers' use of creative media successfully captures the children's attention so that the values conveyed can be retained in their memories (Amsari et al., 2024; Fatimah et al., 2025; Wang, 2021).

A scientific interpretation of these findings suggests the application of the concept of triadic reciprocal determinism, wherein there is a reciprocal influence between personal factors (the child's moral knowledge), the environment (the classroom atmosphere and the teacher's narrative), and behaviour (the child's actual actions) (Amsari et al., 2024; Wang, 2021). The use of storytelling enables children at the concrete operational stage to understand abstract values such as forgiveness and honesty through real-life, relevant examples. The teacher's strategy of linking stories to the children's packed lunches is a form of contextual learning that accelerates the internalisation of these values (Amsari et al., 2024; Fatimah et al., 2025).

These findings regarding the vital role of teachers as moral role models are consistent with research Wiranto et al., (2024), which states that Christian Religious Education teachers play a key role in shaping pupils' spiritual character through interactive strategies and personal example. This consistency reinforces the argument that teachers in Christian schools are often regarded as surrogate parents who hold significant moral authority over their pupils (Sabuna et al., 2025). The integration of the professional code of ethics with the spiritual calling of teachers at ECE Sejahtera forms a strong moral foundation for the performance of their educational duties (Sabuna et al., 2025; Wiranto et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of this strategy is also supported by the findings Saingo (2023), which reveal that the internalisation of religious values through the practical and experiential dimensions of religion in primary schools has proven to be highly effective. At ECE Sejahtera, this is evident when teachers require children to take concrete actions, such as helping a friend immediately after a story has been read. The positive reinforcement approach employed by teachers, through praise and rewards for children's honest behaviour-has proven effective in reinforcing the habit of such positive character traits (Amsari et al., 2024; Fatimah et al., 2025; Hasibuan et al., 2025).

This study identifies a gap between the ideals of character education in schools and practices at home, where the role of Christian families in shaping the character of young children in Sentani is often found to be less than optimal due to parents' busy daily work schedules (Doni & Kelin, 2025; Labobar & Pattipeiluhu, 2023). This study identifies a gap between the ideals of character education in schools and practices at home, where the role of Christian families in shaping the character of young children in Sentani is often found to be

less than optimal due to parents' busy daily work schedules (Doni & Kelin, 2025; Fatimah et al., 2025; Pattipeiluhu & Tasijawa, 2024).

Community and family involvement is crucial, in line with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, as the family is the child's closest and most influential environment (Fatimah et al., 2025; Wiranto et al., 2024). The family is also a cornerstone of character education, yet the roles of love and supervision are often not fulfilled to the full due to parents' limited time and the influence of the family environment (Pattipeiluhu & Tasijawa, 2024). Researchers found that external challenges, such as the influence of digital media and the social environment in Sentani, require teachers to do more than simply teach; they must also provide guidance to parents to ensure that values at home and at school are aligned (Darma & Tapilaha, 2025; Labobar & Pattipeiluhu, 2023; Saingo, 2023). Researchers found that external challenges, such as the influence of digital media and the social environment in Sentani, require teachers to do more than simply teach; they must also provide guidance to parents to ensure that values at home and at school are aligned.

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers' creativity in using hand puppets and songs despite limited resources demonstrates an effective adaptation of classroom management theory for young children. The use of communicative symbols and songs not only serves to alleviate boredom but also acts as a scaffolding tool to help children understand the sequence of events and the moral lessons of the stories (Amsari et al., 2024; Fatimah et al., 2025). This indicates that early years teachers in regions such as Papua must possess innovative skills to overcome facility-related obstacles in order to achieve the objectives of character education.

These findings are also consistent with research Darma & Tapilaha (2025) and Gea & Malelak (2023) which emphasises the role of teachers as role models in instilling Christian values. However, the novelty of this research lies in the empirical evidence that such role modelling is most effective when mediated by interactive storytelling methods, thereby leading to tangible behaviours such as sharing and forgiveness. The challenges relating to children's attention spans and the limitations of the media found are consistent with Hasibuan et al. (2025) on Christian values-based classroom rules. Teachers' creative solutions (vocal variations, songs, and simple media) demonstrate the flexibility of pedagogical leadership that supports the internalisation of values even under constrained conditions.

These findings also support Saingo (2023), who states that the internalisation of religious values through Christian religious education will be effective if teachers link these stories to everyday experiences. At ECE Sejahtera Sentani, linking stories to hands-on activities (such as tidying up toys after a story about helping one another) reinforces the dimension of religious practice (religious effect) within Glock and Stark's framework. Compared with the results of previous research, the findings at ECE Sejahtera offer a gentler approach through storytelling. This narrative approach is considered more suitable for children aged 4-5 years as it does not come across as authoritarian and is able to foster empathy in children through their identification with the characters in the stories. This provides a new perspective on child behaviour management that places greater emphasis on emotional and spiritual approaches (Doni & Kelin, 2025; Hasibuan et al., 2025; Ambarita et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this study emphasises the importance of developing a Christian religious education curriculum rooted in the local culture of Sentani, so that moral messages can be more readily accepted (Fatimah et al., 2025). Although previous research has largely focused

on cognitive aspects, findings from the field confirm that affective aspects and spiritual experiences gained through regular school worship have a far more profound impact on the development of children's character. This challenges the common view that often separates academic activities from spiritual development within formal education (Wiranto et al., 2024; Saingo, 2023).

Overall, the ICV-TSR model implemented at ECE Sejahtera Sentani demonstrates that the supportive role of teachers, mediated by storytelling methods, is a key catalyst in the development of integrity in young children. The findings of this study recommend the need to enhance teachers' storytelling skills and to provide a wider variety of learning materials. (Doni & Kelin, 2025). Through closer collaboration between schools and families, it is hoped that Christian moral values will be fully internalised and form the foundation of children's character well into the future.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the supportive role of teachers through storytelling is an effective and contextually appropriate mechanism for facilitating the internalisation of Christian moral values among young children at the Sejahtera Kampung Homfolo Early Childhood Education Centre. Teachers successfully fulfilled their role as the primary agents of learning by systematically designing, implementing, and following up on storytelling activities, ensuring that the values of love, honesty, mutual aid, courtesy, gratitude, and forgiveness were not only understood cognitively but also manifested in the children's daily behaviour. These findings directly address the research objectives of analysing and describing the teachers' contribution to the process of internalising Christian values, whilst also substantiating the proposition that the teachers' supportive role has the potential to serve as an effective strategy within the context of Christian-based early childhood education in Sentani.

In substantive terms, this study has produced a new line of thought in the form of an enrichment of the Internalisation of Christian Values through Teacher's Supportive Role Model (ICV-TSR), which integrates Bandura's social learning theory with a Christian narrative approach. This model emphasises that the internalisation of Christian values in early childhood is most effective when teachers act not only as behavioural role models but also as spiritual catalysts who connect biblical stories with children's real-life experiences. It is hoped that the theoretical and practical contributions of this research will serve as a reference for the development of Christian early childhood education curricula in the Papua region, whilst also fostering closer collaboration between teachers and parents to strengthen the formation of Christian character from an early age.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations, including a case study design focused on a single institution (*PAUD Sejahtera Kampung Homfolo*) with a duration of only two months, as well as a limited number of informants; consequently, the findings cannot be broadly generalised to all Christian early childhood education centres in Indonesia. Furthermore, the descriptive qualitative nature of the study, which relies on participant observation and in-depth interviews, is potentially subject to the researcher's subjectivity, despite the use of

triangulation and member checking. For future research, it is recommended to use a mixed-methods or longitudinal approach with a larger sample and involving multiple ECE locations across various regions in Papua and beyond, in order to test the validity of the Model of Internalisation of Christian Values through the Teacher's Supportive Role Model (ICV-TSR) and to measure the long-term impact of storytelling methods on the formation of Christian character in early childhood.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest, whether financial, personal, professional or non-financial (including political, religious, ideological, academic or intellectual), relating to the manuscript of this article. This research is entirely independent and funded from the author's personal funds as part of a joint research project with students, without any influence from any party that could affect the objectivity of the results and the interpretation of the findings. The author takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the content of this article.

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