

Evangelical Sunday School and Character Building: A Study of Christian Education for Children of Pre-adolescent Level

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Abstract

SMTPI is a form of formal church education that also serves as a platform for Christian Religious Education services for children. At SMTPI, children have the opportunity to learn and receive various teachings. One of the primary goals of Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMTPI is character building, a process where children undergo changes in inner attitudes that influence their thoughts, behavior, character, and overall human nature. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence the character-building of SMTPI children at the pre-adolescent level and to evaluate how SMTPI contributes to their character-building, viewed from the perspective of CRE. Based on analysis conducted through observation, interviews, and literature review, two key factors are identified as influencing children's character building: internal and external factors. Additionally, SMTPI contributes significantly to character building by employing various creative and innovative teaching methods in its learning process. These methods help reduce children's boredom while studying, making it easier for them to grasp the meanings and messages conveyed by caregivers. This approach ensures that children experience a process of character building that aligns with Christian values, fostering the formation of better character traits by Christian principles.

Keywords: SMTPI, sunday school, character building, Christian religious education

Introduction

Sunday School is a formal church educational program designed to teach and nurture children aged 2 to 15 across various age levels within the Protestant Church of Maluku (GPM). Through this formal church education, children are provided with the foundational principles of the Christian faith, equipping them with knowledge, religious doctrines, and Christian values to shape their character in alignment with their faith. Sunday School teachers are responsible for educating and guiding each child in developing their faith, knowing, and interacting with Jesus in their daily lives through a life of prayer. The purpose of Christian Religious Education (CRE) is to provide children with accurate teachings about the foundations of the Christian faith, grounded in the truth of God's Word, and to enable them to apply these teachings in their daily lives (Gultom, 2011). It is a deliberate effort given to all age groups, ensuring that each child can understand and grow in faith and spiritual maturity, becoming a witness and servant to others and the world (Paristiyanti, 2017). Sunday School teachers, as individuals called to serve, hold the responsibility of helping children and adolescents recognize Jesus as their Lord and Savior while shaping their character according to Christian values in everyday life. However, in practice, some children have not yet matured in their Christian faith to make ethical decisions or exhibit attitudes and character consistent with what is taught in Sunday School. This shortcoming often occurs because Sunday School teachers tend to focus more on religious doctrines rather than on character building by the Christian faith.

Children Evangelical Sunday School (*Sekolah Minggu Tunas Pekabar Injili - SMTPI*) plays a crucial role as a formal church educational platform, nurturing children aged 2 to 15 within the context of the GPM. Through CRE, children receive foundational Christian teachings, knowledge, and values aimed at shaping their character in alignment with Christian principles. Sunday School teachers bear the responsibility of guiding children to recognize and interact with Jesus in their daily lives, particularly through prayer practices. However, discrepancies have been observed among SMTPI children. Some exhibit good behavior during Sunday School but act poorly at home, while others, perceived as unruly outside, display commendable attitudes when engaging with caregivers. Observations reveal that many Sunday School teachers have not been fully effective in shaping the character of children aged 10 to 12. This ineffectiveness stems from a lack of close relationships between teachers and children, as well as limited understanding of

children's learning styles. This study is significant as it highlights the need to balance doctrinal teaching with character building. By focusing on the implementation of more varied and engaging teaching materials, the research aims to enhance the effectiveness of education at SMTPI. Recognizing that a child's character is heavily influenced by the teaching methods applied, the study seeks to offer new insights into how teachers can better guide children, ensuring they not only understand religious teachings but also apply them in their everyday lives. This research not only contributes to the academic understanding of character building in the context of Christian religious education but also provides practical recommendations for Sunday School teachers to refine their teaching methods. It is expected that these efforts will help children grow into better, more responsible individuals in line with Christian values.

The results of this study and a review of previous research revealed that there has been limited exploration of SMTPI as a platform for character building among children aged 10 to 12 in the GPM. In the Yawuru congregation, located in the Kisar Island Congregation, it was observed that some children were diligent in attending Sunday School to receive teachings and guidance from their teachers but still lacked character consistent with the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Some exhibited harsh behavior toward friends, parents, and caregivers, were rebellious and disobedient, reluctant to attend Sunday School, lied, or even took items belonging to friends that were left behind. The teachings provided by Sunday School teachers were not effectively balanced with the implementation of Christian faith fundamentals, as reflected in the character development of children in the pre-adolescent group. Sunday School teachers often place insufficient emphasis on character building while teaching, which is a critical aspect of this developmental stage. This study focuses on addressing how Sunday School teachers implement lesson materials to foster character building among children aged 10 to 12 in the Yawuru congregation, Kisar Island Congregation, Southwest Maluku Regency.

Several previous studies have explored the moral development of children through Sunday School programs. Wadu et al. (2019) found that Sunday School plays a significant role in moral development, aiming to shape good citizens and involve the church in fostering moral values. Similarly, Duma (2020) examined the role of Sunday School teachers in building children's character within the church as followers of Christ. The study highlighted that shaping a child's character is not solely the responsibility of parents but also requires parental support in bringing

their children to Sunday School. Through this platform, children are guided and molded into individuals with good character. The study concluded that churches must nurture children while maintaining active communication with parents to achieve the desired character building, reflecting a shared responsibility between parents and Sunday School teachers. Yenny Anita Pattinama's research emphasized Sunday School as a vital Christian education program implemented in every church. Through Sunday School, churches deliver the gospel to children via structured teaching and learning processes. The child's character-building in Sunday School heavily depends on the patience and dedication of teachers in guiding the character-building process. Similarly, Daniel Supriyadi (2021) investigated the implementation of Christian best practices in Sunday School religious education, highlighting that the church provides diverse avenues for character building, including Sunday School. Christian education in Sunday School encompasses worship, the proclamation of God's Word, and simultaneous teaching and learning processes (Homrighausen & Enklar, 2011). Siswoyo (2020) focused on Sunday School as a means to cultivate faith and character in children. Sunday School is described as a church institution established to serve children, aiming to strengthen their faith and develop strong character through proper teaching. The study found that Sunday School services provide children with guidance, education, and direction from an early age, encouraging them to live according to the truth of God's Word. Panjaitan and Fransisco (2024) explored the role of Sunday School teachers in shaping children's behavior at HKBP Sutoyo. Their study recognized Sunday School as a platform for the spiritual and moral development of children. It provides a supportive environment for strengthening spiritual and moral foundations, helping children grow into responsible and virtuous individuals within society. The role of Sunday School teachers is crucial, as they not only teach religious and moral values but also help shape children's personalities, character, and spiritual discipline. Additionally, Yunarti (2014) examined character education as a strategic approach to character building. The study aimed to identify forms of character education necessary for implementation in shaping character. Education was described as a conscious human effort to foster and develop character, emphasizing its critical role in shaping individual's character.

Based on the findings from previous studies, as outlined above, it can be concluded that prior research has predominantly focused on Sunday School education and children's personalities. However, there has been limited

exploration of character building in pre-adolescent children aged 10 to 12 years. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to thoroughly examine how Sunday School teachers implement teaching materials to shape the character of pre-adolescent children in the Yawuru congregation, Kisar Island Congregation, Southwest Maluku Regency. The author assumes that if Sunday School teachers effectively master teaching materials and employ appropriate teaching methods, they can maximize the implementation of character building during the Children Evangelism (*Tunas Pekabaran Injil*) program held every Monday. On Sundays, however, teachers are more focused on delivering teaching materials specifically tailored for the children.

Sunday School serves as an educational ministry for children, where many parents entrust their children to Sunday School teachers to experience positive character and spiritual growth (Nainupu & Darmawan, 2021; Riniwati, 2020). In this context, Sunday School teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's character. However, in practice, the use of teaching methods in CRE is often viewed as less important by some educators. Many are still relying on traditional methods such as question-and-answer, storytelling, lectures, and memorization (Darmawan & Kristanti, 2020; Darmawan & Priskila, 2020). While these methods are effective, there is a need to combine them with more varied approaches such as audiovisuals, projects, and simulations to create a more engaging and dynamic learning environment.

Previous research highlights the significant role of Sunday School in the Children Evangelism program in shaping children's character. However, this study focuses specifically on character building among children in the pre-adolescent group at the GPM Yawuru congregation. Behavioral inconsistencies observed among these Sunday School participants indicate that, despite their active involvement, their behavior outside the classroom often fails to reflect the values taught. This issue may stem from teaching methods that encourage passivity, where children merely listen without truly understanding or applying the lessons in their daily lives.

The conceptual framework of this study integrates theories of character education and teaching methodologies to explore how internal and external factors influence children's character building. Character education theories emphasize the importance of holistic and interactive learning experiences (Yunarti, 2014), while modern pedagogical theories advocate for diverse methods to enhance student engagement (Panjaitan & Fransisco, 2024). By combining these

approaches, this research aims to examine how the effective implementation of teaching materials can optimally shape children's character.

This study aims to address the extent of SMTPI's contribution to character building in the pre-adolescents, analyzed in the light of Christian religious education. This research aspires to provide new insights for Sunday School teachers to improve their teaching methods, ultimately fostering better character building in children.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to understand the conditions and dynamics in the Yawuru Congregation of the Kisar Island District, Southwest Maluku Regency. Through this approach, the researcher aims to describe and analyze the research object comprehensively, based on data obtained from observations and interviews with informants in the field. The data collection methods include direct interviews with informants to gather accurate and relevant information. According to Sugiyono, interviews are an effective method in qualitative research as they enable researchers to obtain firsthand information through in-depth and dialogic interactions with informants (Sugiyono, 2012). The research subjects encompass observations of the location, individuals, and activities involved.

The study was conducted in the Yawuru Congregation of the Kisar Island District, focusing on individuals such as Sunday School teachers, the head of the children and youth commission, mentors, and the congregation's pastor. Observed activities include interactions and educational processes involving pre-adolescent children. The research is planned to take place over three months, from April 2023 to June 25, 2023. During data collection, the researcher will conduct direct observations and interviews to gain a comprehensive perspective from all parties involved in formal church education. The informants include Sunday School teachers, the head of the children and youth commission, mentors, and the chairman of the congregation council.

Result and Discussion

SMTPI as a Means of Character Building for Children

Sunday School serves as a platform established by Jesus Christ, the head of the church, to provide spiritual guidance and nurturing for children and youth

(Siswoyo, 2020). It gathers children into a fellowship of believers (the church) to learn the truth of God's Word that they may grow in faith and maturity, aligning their actions with Christian values taught by Sunday School teachers (Duma, 2020).

Sunday School teachers act as instruments used by God to equip children with the foundational truths of His Word, fostering character that reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ. Character is described as the inherent traits of an individual that influence their thoughts and actions. From infancy, children exhibit character traits, such as crying to communicate their needs to a familiar caregiver. Crying serves as a form of early communication, expressing desires to those they trust (Interview with K.H. as Caregiver).

The character of Sunday School children in the pre-adolescent group varies. Some children are friendly, obedient, attentive, and actively engaged during lessons. Others may exhibit indifferent, mischievous, or unruly behavior, making it challenging to guide them toward positive conduct (Interview with K.H. Children's Commission). Therefore, Sunday School teachers must understand each child's unique characteristics and learning styles. Mastering these learning styles enables teachers to tailor lesson plans and implement teaching materials effectively, supporting the character building of each child (Fatonah, 2009).

The character of children in the pre-adolescent group (ages 10 to 12) differs significantly from that of other age groups. At this stage, children begin to express their opinions more confidently about their observations and can develop critical thinking skills with guidance from Sunday School teachers. Children in this group tend to be different, being more independent, energetic, and curious. They exhibit a keen desire to explore and understand new things. Children aged 10 to 12 in the SMTPI experience both physical and emotional changes. They start forming social relationships, enjoying shared activities, jokes, and laughter with their peers in playgroups. In their cognitive development, they begin engaging in dialogues, defending their arguments, and assessing events critically (Nugroho et al., 2021). During their transition into adolescence, these changes require careful mentoring from Sunday School teachers to help shape their character in alignment with Christian values. Teachers need to understand the psychology of learning to support the children development during this phase. Given their diverse personalities and learning styles, a close teacher-student relationship is essential for effective teaching and character building (Tanjaya & Sopacua, 2023). Sunday School teachers deliver lessons based on the

GPM curriculum every Sunday. On Mondays, the focus shifts to applying these teachings through various creative activities. This program, known as Children Evangelism, employs methods such as group discussions and games to develop the children's potential and character. However, external factors like family environment and peer influence can negatively impact a child's character, making it inconsistent with Christian values. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to foster a close and trusting relationship with the children to guide their character building effectively.

The environment plays a crucial role in the emotional character-building of children. Social interactions in settings such as the church, community, and educational institutions significantly influence children's character building. According to Gunawan, character is a collection of values that underlie a person's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, the environment in which a child grows up greatly impacts the character they develop (Gunawan, 2023). SM/TPI plays a vital role in shaping a child's character, as it is the environment where they learn and are educated. The method of learning through play is employed to support this process. In SM/TPI, children not only learn biblical knowledge and spiritual values but are also taught good morals and ethics. Sunday School teachers bear a significant responsibility in character building, and positive interactions between teachers and children are crucial. For example, a child who is initially shy can develop greater self-confidence through guidance from the teacher in activities such as leading worship. However, a child's character is also influenced by their social interactions and family environment, which is why education at SM/TPI must align with support from parents to achieve optimal results in character building.

SM/TPI serves as an important place for shaping a child's character. While teachers play a central role, parents must also be involved in educating their children to develop good character (interview with Mrs. H., Chair of the Children and Youth Commission). There are many examples children who were once mischievous but have become successful thanks to the guidance they received at SM/TPI (interview with D.K., Caregiver). However, some parents are less involved in some cases, making it difficult for caregivers to guide these children. Although some parents are inactive, the majority want their children to develop good life attitudes and entrust Sunday School teachers with their character education (interview with Mrs. H., caregiver). Collaboration between parents and teachers is crucial for character building of children. This study aims to

explore the factors that shape a child's character and the contribution of SM/TPI in this process from the perspective of Christian Religious Education.

A person's character is shaped by different factors, including internal and external influences. The internal factors refer to the traits inherent in a child since birth, which are linked to the central nervous system, organs, tissues, and cells within the body – collectively known as the human nervous system (Suryabrata, 2006).

The second factor influencing a child's character building is external factors, including the family and the environment in which the child grows up. Children spend more than two full days (2x24 hours) at home with their parents and close family members, making parents the primary influence in their character development. Moreover, although children spend much time at home, they are naturally inclined to play, socialize, and learn from their surroundings. SM/TPI serves as a medium for character formation. At SM/TPI, children not only interact with their peers but also learn to adopt good attitudes as children of God. This learning process includes positive cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, all of which support the formation of a good personality. With a good personality, a child's character can be further nurtured (Winkel, 1989).

Learning Methods for Character Building of Pre-Adolescent Children

Each child has a different capacity for absorbing learning material due to their unique learning styles. For the learning process to be effective, Sunday school teachers must understand and master the characteristics of each child's learning style. The Sunday school learning process will be more effective and of higher quality if they can adapt to each child's learning characteristics (Hasibuan, 2013). They must have appropriate teaching strategies to manage the diversity of each child, ensuring that the teaching process helps children absorb the material and foster character growth as part of implementing the material in the child's development.

Sunday school teachers, in their efforts to shape the character of children in the pre-adolescent group, need to use teaching methods that foster reciprocal interaction, guiding each child to solve the various challenges they face (Nasution, 2011). Caregivers are required to create creative methods that capture the children's attention during the teaching process in Sunday school (interview with G.N., Sunday school teacher). There are many creative methods that caregivers can use, such as teaching with teaching aids that align with the theme,

using question-and-answer methods, storytelling, and teaching through games. Games like the "telephone game" and other creative methods can also be employed by caregivers to engage the children in learning (interview with A.T., Sunday school teacher trainer).

Creative Learning Methods

Creative teaching methods are crucial in shaping the character of children at the pre-adolescent level. Sunday school teachers must be able to adjust their methods to the learning characteristics of each child to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching process. Some methods used include: 1) The use of teaching aids that align with the learning theme, which can improve the children's understanding; 2) The question-and-answer method. Through this, children are encouraged to actively participate in discussions, making them more engaged in the learning process; 3) Storytelling. Using stories as a learning tool helps children better understand moral and spiritual values; 4) Learning through games. Educational games, such as the "telephone game," are not only fun but also educational, allowing children to learn while playing.

According to G.N. (Sunday School Teacher), teachers must be able to adjust their methods to the learning characteristics of each child so that the teaching process can help them absorb the material and foster character growth. In an interview with A.T. (Sunday School Teacher Trainer), it was revealed that the use of creative methods such as teaching aids and games is very effective in capturing children's attention. Observing the practices in the field, Sunday school teachers use various teaching aids and the question-and-answer method to enhance student interaction in the classroom. Enjoyable learning activities, such as educational games, are also used to make the learning process more engaging.

Creative Worship

Creative worship is conducted outside the church environment, such as in nature or while visiting the sick. This activity aims to build teamwork and solidarity among friends, teach mutual respect and appreciation, and enhance children's emotional intelligence through social interaction. H.P. (Sunday School Teacher) explains that "Creative worship is not only held in the church but also outdoors, providing children with the opportunity to adapt and learn." Creative worship activities like visiting the sick or learning about nature demonstrate an increase in empathy and solidarity among children. All children participate in

learning and play activities as part of the curriculum, helping them develop teamwork and unity within their learning groups. Through creative worship, children are taught to work together with friends, practice diligence and patience in completing tasks, foster unity within learning groups, show mutual respect and appreciation, demonstrate solidarity with peers, and build emotional intelligence in their social interactions with others (Sopakua et al., 2024).

In creative worship, all children are involved in learning and play activities as part of the implementation of the material. On Sundays, teachers provide lessons that focus on instilling knowledge about the fundamentals of Christian faith, which are built upon three pillars: a) the Word, b) the church, and c) the context of the world. However, on Mondays, during the Children Evangelism activity, teachers place more emphasis on developing children's attitudes, character, and skills (Saimima, 2021). Thus, in the training process at the Protestant Church of Maluku, teachers not only provide doctrinal understanding of the basics of Christian faith, aligned with the truth of God's Word, but also focus on character development and skill-building. Creative worship activities, typically conducted during the Children Evangelism activities on Mondays, serve as a way to implement the Sunday lesson content (interview with the congregation pastor).

Group Discussion

Group discussions allow children to interact with one another and with the teacher. Through these discussions, children can stimulate their critical thinking abilities, learn to express their opinions, and listen to others' perspectives. S.R. (Sunday School Teacher) explains that group discussions help build a closer relationship between the teacher and their students. Observations reveals that group discussions lead to improvements in critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills among children. Teachers play a key role in guiding them to solve problems and develop a critical and positive attitude.

Sunday School learning using the group discussion method helps build a closer relationship between the teacher and the children in the process of social interaction. The discussion method between the Sunday School teacher and the students stimulates critical thinking, enabling them to solve various problems. Teachers guide them according to the teaching materials provided, focusing on character building aligned with Biblical truths. Through group discussions, each child is encouraged to think critically, believe in their own abilities, confidently

express their opinions, practice a critical and positive attitude, and interact with both the teacher and their peers (Sopakua et al., 2021).

Social Activities

The method of social activities in character education at SMTPI plays a crucial role in shaping children's attitudes and behaviors. Social activities like community service and helping sick friends not only teach values of care and sharing, but also contribute to the development of good character.

Social activities provide children with the opportunity to learn about compassion for others. Through participating in community service, they learn to cooperate and help one another, which is part of developing a generous and helpful attitude. These activities also help children overcome apathy and lethargy that often arise at this age. Mrs. KH emphasizes that instilling independence and responsibility is essential to avoid these negative traits.

Through social activities, SMTPI children at the pre-adolescent level can enhance their sense of empathy and compassion. They learn to share with their friends and help each other, which is the first step in developing a positive attitude toward others. By engaging in social activities, children not only gain practical experience but also understand the importance of working together for the common good.

Social activities at SMTPI are designed to support character building based on the nine core values that have been established. For example, through community service, children can apply values such as independence, honesty, and tolerance. They learn to appreciate different viewpoints and accept feedback from their peers, which is an integral part of the broader character-building process.

By involving children in social activities, character education at SMTPI can be effectively carried out. They not only learn about moral values but also gain firsthand experience in applying them. This helps shape them into individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also empathetic and compassionate toward others. Therefore, the method of social activities becomes an effective way to build children's character, preparing them to face future challenges with a positive and loving attitude.

Pillars of Character as Learning Outcomes at SMTPI

The goal of education at SMTPI is to shape children's character through nine core pillars rooted in universal values. Each pillar plays a crucial role in

developing a balanced and faithful personality. The first pillar is love for God and His creation. This pillar teaches children to recognize and love God as the Creator. It encompasses two key aspects: being grateful to God for all that they have and showing love for others and all of God's creations. By understanding God's love, children are expected to appreciate others and the world around them. The first pillar in SMTPI's Sunday School learning focuses on introducing and strengthening the children's faith in the Creator. In this context, there are two essential aspects that need to be taught: first, children are taught to be thankful to God for everything they have; second, they are taught to love God, which is reflected in their attitude and actions toward others and all of creation. This way, they are expected to grow into individuals who respect others. The success of the educational process in Sunday School is not only measured by academic grades but, more importantly, by how well children can apply Christian faith values in their daily lives. Therefore, Sunday School teachers have the responsibility to introduce God as the Creator and Savior, who must be believed in and trusted by every child. Experiencing faith in God must be nurtured through practices like prayer and meditation on His Word, which serve as their life foundation. Introducing God at an early age is crucial in shaping a child's character, so they can trust and seek His guidance willingly. Sunday School teachers also play a role in evangelizing children to accept Jesus as Lord in their hearts, enabling them to experience positive character transformation. Through encounters with God in prayer and His guidance, children will feel peace and become more sensitive to doing good in alignment with God's will.

The second pillar is independence and responsibility. Independence and responsibility are important traits that need to be developed in children from an early age. Independence is defined as the ability to not rely on others, particularly in completing tasks assigned to them. This becomes increasingly relevant for children at the pre-adolescent stage in Sunday School at SMTPI, where many children display indifferent attitudes and sometimes a lack of effort, often depending on their parents to finish their tasks. Therefore, instilling the character of independence is essential, especially at this stage. By developing independence, children not only learn to take responsibility for themselves but also understand that they can manage their own actions without intervention from others, whether teachers or parents. Independence does not come naturally; it requires guidance from both Sunday School teachers and parents to nurture this quality of self-reliance and responsibility. This process will help build a strong, responsible

character as they grow into adulthood. Sunday School teachers must provide proper training on independence and responsibility so that these traits can be cultivated wherever the child is. Through a systematic and consistent approach, children can learn to be independent and accountable for their actions, marking the first step toward building strong character.

Honesty is the third pillar, emphasizing the importance of speaking and acting truthfully. Children are taught to acknowledge their mistakes and become trustworthy individuals. This truthful attitude is a manifestation of the faith taught in Christianity. It is a crucial aspect of character, serving as the foundation for a fulfilling life. It reflects a child's effort to be trustworthy in their words, actions, and work. Children who practice honesty possess the ability to express the truth, admit their faults, and become reliable individuals. This behavior of honesty reflects their identity as children of God, filled with the Holy Spirit. The importance of honesty in children's education must be taught by Sunday School teachers, based on the truth found in God's Word. In John 44, it is stated that those who are born of God are free from deceit, for God Himself does not lie. Therefore, every child of God is expected to exhibit the character of honesty as a manifestation of their dignity and worth, which aligns with God's nature. Honesty is not just a moral value; it is also the foundation of a child's social and spiritual relationships. By teaching honesty from an early age, Sunday School teachers help children understand the importance of being trustworthy and responsible. This process shapes their character, guiding them to always stand by the truth and uphold integrity in their daily lives. Through creative and interactive teaching methods, Sunday School teachers can instill the value of honesty in children in an engaging and comprehensible way. As a result, honesty becomes an integral part of their character, guiding them throughout life as individuals who fear God and value the truth.

The fourth pillar, respect and courtesy, encourages children to be polite and respectful toward others. By instilling a sense of respect, the aim is for children to live harmoniously within society and develop qualities of gentleness and patience. Honor and courtesy are two vital traits in creating harmony and peace within a community. Teaching children about respect and politeness is an essential part of character education at SMTPI, helping them cultivate traits like kindness, goodness, and patience. In addition, qualities such as generosity, helpfulness, and cooperation are crucial in shaping a child's character. Generosity teaches children to share with others. Children who grow up in an environment

of living by sharing will develop empathy and sympathy for others, especially for those facing difficulties. The importance of character education goes beyond individual development; it also emphasizes how children interact with their social environment. By fostering respect, courtesy, and values like generosity and mutual help, children will learn to care not only for themselves but also for those around them. Through creative teaching approaches at Sunday School, teachers can guide children in understanding and internalizing these values. As a result, children will not only learn about good character but also how to apply it in their daily lives, contributing positively to society.

The fifth pillar, generosity, helpfulness, and mutual cooperation, focuses on instilling the value of sharing with others. Children are taught to be empathetic individuals who are ready to help those in need, allowing them to grow into people who care about their social environment. Generosity, a willingness to help, and mutual cooperation are essential traits that should be incorporated into children's character education. It reflects a social habit that must be developed early on, such as encouraging children to share with others. Children who are accustomed to this practice will grow into individuals who are eager to help and naturally feel sympathy and empathy for others in difficult situations. In the context of SMTPI, character education should integrate these values to help children understand the importance of mutual aid and collaboration.

By teaching children to be generous and to work together, they not only learn social values but also develop interpersonal skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Through creative and interactive teaching approaches, Sunday School teachers can create an environment where children are motivated to share and assist each other. This helps cultivate generosity within them, making them sensitive to the needs of others and ready to offer help selflessly. Thus, character education at SMTPI plays a vital role in shaping a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also rich in humanitarian values.

The sixth pillar, self-confidence, and hard work, emphasizes the importance of self-confidence in facing life's challenges. Children are trained to overcome feelings of shyness and doubt so that they can approach various situations, including leading worship activities, with self-confidence. Self-confidence is the belief in one's ability to tackle challenges and overcome the awkwardness and hesitation that often arise. To build strong self-confidence, children must make consistent efforts and practice. For example, when children

are asked to stand and lead a worship service during SMTPI or TPI activities, they may initially feel shy and hesitant. However, with continuous practice, these feelings of discomfort gradually diminish, and they begin to feel more confident. This process illustrates how, through experience and repetition, children can transform their shyness into strong self-confidence. Sunday School teachers must create a supportive environment where children feel comfortable taking on active roles, such as leading activities. In this way, children not only learn to believe in their own abilities but also develop a hardworking attitude that will help them achieve the best results in various aspects of life.

The seventh pillar, leadership, and justice, focuses on teaching children about good and fair leadership from an early age. Through leadership experiences in school activities, they learn to become responsible leaders who can make fair decisions. Leadership and justice are crucial pillars in children's character education, as children are the future leaders. Therefore, they need to be guided and trained to become good and just leaders. Leadership training should begin during the pre-adolescent stage, when children have more knowledge and can understand the meaning of leadership.

A concrete example of leadership education can be found at Yawuru Congregation, where children at the pre-adolescent level in SMTPI are trained to develop their leadership qualities. They are accustomed to leading worship services during TPI activities. The goal of this training is to help children practice from an early age and gain the confidence to lead in front of others as capable leaders. Through proper teaching and direct experience, children not only learn about the responsibilities of a leader but also the importance of justice in all their actions. Thus, character education in Sunday School plays a crucial role in shaping a generation of just and responsible leaders who will be able to bring about positive change in society in the future.

The eighth pillar, kindness and humility, emphasizes nurturing a sense of respect for others and selflessness in children. They are taught to be polite, express gratitude, and apologize sincerely when they make mistakes. Kindness and humility are essential character traits that should be instilled from an early age. Humility is reflected in gentleness, politeness, and simplicity, enabling children to appreciate all that God has given them.

Teaching children to say "sorry" when they make mistakes, as well as "please" and "thank you," is a fundamental part of character building. While fostering independence is important, children must also learn the value of

respecting others. It is crucial to discourage selfishness and self-centered behavior, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing collective well-being over personal gain. By instilling these values, children can grow into individuals who not only value themselves but also show respect and consideration for those around them. Consistent character education in the SMTPI environment ensures that children internalize and practice kindness and humility in their daily lives. With the right guidance, they will develop into thoughtful individuals who respect others and contribute positively to society.

The ninth pillar, tolerance, peace, and unity, emphasizes teaching children to respect differences among others. By fostering an attitude of tolerance, children are expected to live peacefully amidst diversity and understand the importance of unity within society. These values are essential components of character education. Tolerance reflects the willingness to respect differences in religion, ethnicity, race, or opinions. Peace represents a state of security and tranquility, while unity highlights the cohesiveness required in communal life.

In shaping the character of children at the pre-adolescent level, cultivating tolerance is particularly vital. For instance, children should be guided to remain open-minded and respectful of differing opinions among their peers. At this age, children tend to enjoy expressing their views, especially during group discussions. Hence, they need to learn to accept opposing perspectives graciously as a way to broaden their understanding.

The ninth pillar, tolerance, peace, and unity, emphasizes teaching children to respect differences among others. By fostering an attitude of tolerance, children are expected to live peacefully amidst diversity and understand the importance of unity within society. These values are essential components of character education. Tolerance reflects the willingness to respect differences in religion, ethnicity, race, or opinions. Peace represents a state of security and tranquility, while unity highlights the cohesiveness required in communal life. In shaping the character of children at the pre-adolescent level, cultivating tolerance is particularly vital. For instance, children should be guided to remain open-minded and respectful of differing opinions among their peers. At this age, children tend to enjoy expressing their views, especially during group discussions. Hence, they need to learn to accept opposing perspectives tactfully as a way to broaden their understanding.

Within the SMTPI framework, teachers play a crucial role in instilling tolerance so that children can develop a respectful attitude toward diversity as a

gift from God. This education should also include an understanding of human rights and the freedom to express opinions without coercion. By nurturing tolerance, a harmonious and peaceful environment rooted in humanitarian values can emerge. Through effective teaching, children not only learn to appreciate differences but also recognize the significance of peace and unity in society. In this way, SMTPI's character education contributes significantly to shaping a generation that can coexist harmoniously, value one another, and create a peaceful environment (Susanto & Kumala, 2019; Zubaedi, 2011).

The nine pillars of character form the foundation for spiritual, emotional, and social development of children in SMTPI. Through creative and interactive learning approaches, Sunday School teachers act as guides, helping children recognize and apply these values in their daily lives. Putri (2022) emphasizes that introducing faith in God at an early age fosters a character of trust and reliance on God's guidance and help at all times. Meanwhile, Widiyono (2022) highlights the importance of cultivating independence, particularly in pre-adolescent children, to prevent apathy and lethargy. These character pillars are instilled through Sunday School daily activities, ranging from creative worship sessions to social programs. Children are encouraged to internalize these values within the context of their daily experiences, enabling them to grow into individuals who contribute positively to society. Diverse teaching methods play a crucial role in shaping the character of pre-adolescent children. By employing creative and interactive approaches, teachers can help children not only grasp the material but also embed the values that will shape them into responsible and virtuous individuals in the future. Through such innovative teaching, each child is expected to grow into a person who values themselves and others and is capable of making meaningful contributions to their community.

Character building in SMTI activities focuses on three interconnected aspects: cognition, affection, and action. 1) Knowing the Good (Cognition). The first aspect, cognition, emphasizes imparting knowledge through teaching materials. During Sunday activities, Sunday School teachers provide lessons in an easy way for children to understand, enabling them to internalize positive values cognitively; 2) Feeling and Loving the Good (Affection). The second aspect, affection, acts as a driving factor that encourages children to embrace and love virtuous values. Monday sessions focus on implementing these teachings through creative games and varied teaching methods. These activities help children experience and develop a love for goodness, inspiring them to act

positively; 3) Action the Good (Action). The third aspect is action, which involves cultivating habits. On Mondays, Sunday School teachers conduct creative learning and worship activities by involving group discussions and case studies. These sessions help children understand and adopt the behaviors and character traits being instilled. Additionally, social activities, such as visiting sick friends, are integrated into character education to reinforce these values.

The process of character building is not always easy; however, with consistent habits of doing good, children can more readily develop positive behavior. Through character education, children not only gain intellectual, emotional, and social intelligence but also come to know God as their Savior. Each child possesses a multidimensional personality, encompassing emotional, spiritual, mental, and willpower aspects (Herawati, 2018; Musfah, 2012). The involvement of Sunday School teachers and parents is crucial in meeting the diverse developmental needs of children. However, challenges remain, as some teachers do not fully understand the specific needs and developmental stages of the children under their care. The spiritual maturity of teachers also significantly influences how they educate children. A close relationship between the teacher and the child is therefore vital for assessing the child's spiritual growth. Spiritual maturity involves building a relationship with God through prayer and reflection on His Word. Sunday School teachers who can integrate Christian values into their teaching can make a significant positive impact on the character development of children (Mea & Meak, 2024). Christian education is essential to be instilled in children from an early age so they can grow into individuals who fear God and reflect good character in their lives (Gultom, 2011). Thus, Christian education plays a significant role in guiding children to experience God's love in their daily lives while helping them grow in faith through their words and deeds (Putirulan & Sopakua, 2024).

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The research findings highlight significant theoretical implications regarding the role of formal church education, specifically the Sunday School, in character building among children. The study suggests that both internal and external factors influence character development, indicating a complex interplay between individual traits and environmental influences. This contributes to

existing theories on moral education by emphasizing the importance of a supportive learning environment that incorporates innovative teaching methods.

Moreover, the findings challenge traditional views that prioritize doctrinal teaching over character development. By demonstrating that effective character building requires a balance of knowledge and practical application, this research encourages a reevaluation of educational strategies within religious contexts, aligning with contemporary theories on holistic education.

Practical Implications

Practically, the research underscores the need for improved teaching methodologies in Sunday School to enhance children's engagement and understanding. The emphasis on creative and innovative teaching methods can lead to more effective learning experiences, reducing boredom and increasing comprehension of Christian values. This has direct implications for educators, suggesting that training programs should focus on diverse pedagogical approaches that cater to different learning styles.

Additionally, the findings advocate for stronger collaboration between parents and educators to ensure consistent character development. This practical approach can foster a supportive community around children's moral education, enhancing their overall growth.

Advantages of the Research

The advantages of this research are manifold: 1) Contribution to Educational Practices. It provides actionable insights into how Sunday School can evolve to better serve its educational purpose, thereby enhancing the quality of religious education; 2) Foundation for future studies. The exploration of character building in children aged 10 to 12 fills a gap in existing literature, offering a basis for further investigation into age-specific educational needs; 3) Community impact. By addressing character building within a religious context, the research promotes community engagement and moral responsibility among children.

Impact on Science Development

This research has significant implications for the development of educational science, particularly in religious contexts. It encourages interdisciplinary collaboration between theology and education, fostering a more

integrated approach to moral and character education. Furthermore, it opens avenues for future research exploring the effectiveness of various teaching methods in different cultural and religious settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further studies are essential due to several advantages: 1) In-depth understanding. Additional research can explore the nuances of character building across different age groups and cultural contexts, providing a more comprehensive understanding of moral education; 2) Methodological innovation. Investigating new teaching methodologies can lead to the development of best practices that enhance engagement and retention among students.

However, there are limitations that necessitate further investigation: 1) Sample size and diversity. The current study may have limited generalizability due to its specific focus on one community. Broader studies across various demographics are needed to validate findings; 2) Longitudinal studies. The need for longitudinal research is evident to assess the long-term impact of educational interventions on character development over time.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal two primary factors influencing the character-building of children in the pre-adolescent age group: internal and external factors. Internal factors include psychological aspects and values internalized by the children, while external factors encompass social environments and educational influences that shape their character development. SMTPI makes a significant contribution to this process, particularly through the implementation of creative and innovative teaching methods. These methods not only alleviate boredom during learning sessions but also help children gain a deeper understanding of Christian values.

The significance of this research lies in the understanding that character-building in children depends not only on doctrinal teaching but also on active interaction between teachers and students, as well as the application of diverse teaching methods. This highlights the critical role of Sunday School teachers in creating a learning environment that supports character development aligned with Christian faith values.

Overall, this study provides new insights into how SMTPI can more effectively nurture children's character and identifies the challenges in

implementing Christian Religious Education (PAK). Consequently, the findings lay the groundwork for developing improved educational strategies in the future.

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