



The Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Enhancing Students' Academic Achievement at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae South Nias Regency

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Abstract

Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers play a pivotal role in improving students' learning achievement. This requires teachers to be actively involved not only in teaching, but also in educating, guiding, and motivating students to participate consistently in learning. PAK teachers also need to identify factors that reduce students' interest, which may lead to declining achievement. Low learning awareness can be influenced by limited targeted attention from PAK teachers, the school climate, and students' daily habits in their home and community environments. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the role of PAK teachers in improving student achievement at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae. Using a qualitative approach, the study employs a literature review, observations, and interviews. The study highlights the importance of teacher support in encouraging students to become more active, disciplined, and responsible learners, which contributes to better academic outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in the life of a nation, not only as a means of transmitting knowledge but also as a foundational instrument for shaping human dignity and social progress. In the Indonesian context, this mandate is closely linked to the constitutional aspiration to "enlighten the life of the nation" as articulated in the 1945 Constitution. This constitutional vision affirms education as a right of every child and as a collective responsibility of the state and society. Consequently, education must be understood beyond the boundaries of formal instruction or school attendance; it is a conscious, planned, and continuous effort to cultivate learners who are intellectually capable, ethically grounded, and socially responsible.

Within formal schooling, education operates through structured processes of guidance and instruction carried out by professional educators. Such guidance reflects educational competence, namely the capacity of educators to design learning environments that enable students to grow academically, morally, and personally. Sanjaya (2009) explains education as a process of nurturing and guiding children so that they may discover and develop their authentic selves. This view highlights the relational character of education: teachers and students are not merely positioned as transmitter and recipient of information, but as active participants in a dynamic educational interaction. Therefore, the quality of educational outcomes is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of teacher-student engagement, the climate of learning, and the professionalism of teaching practices.

The holistic orientation of education is reflected in Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process that enables students to actively develop their potential,

including spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by individuals, communities, and the nation (Law No. 20/2003). This definition indicates that national education is not limited to academic performance but also emphasizes character formation and competency development. In line with this orientation, Indonesia's character education guidelines underline that national education goals should be strengthened through school-based implementation and integrated into learning activities and school culture rather than prioritizing cognitive attainment alone (Supinah & Parmi, 2011).

In this framework, teachers occupy a central and irreplaceable role. Teachers are not only instructors who deliver lesson content, but also educators who nurture values, mentors who guide development, and models who demonstrate ethical conduct. In many educational contexts, teachers are often described as students' "second parents" because of their sustained influence on learners' habits, attitudes, and self-concept through daily interactions and guidance in the school environment (Sele & Anto, 2023). This role requires teachers to demonstrate competence in pedagogy, professionalism, social relations, and personal integrity, as mandated in Indonesia's teacher competency framework (UU Nomor 14/2005; Permendikbud No. 16 Tahun 2007). Legally and professionally, this responsibility is reinforced by Law No. 20 of 2003 Article 39 paragraph (2), which states that educators are professionals tasked with planning and implementing learning processes, providing guidance and training, and conducting research and community service. Therefore, improving students' learning achievement cannot be separated from teacher professionalism, instructional quality, and the presence of supportive guidance mechanisms.

The strategic role of teachers becomes particularly significant in Christian Religious Education (PAK). PAK teachers contribute not only to students' religious knowledge but also to moral character formation, faith development, and value-based decision-making. In this regard, PAK is not merely a subject aimed at cognitive mastery of doctrines or biblical narratives; rather, it is an educational process that encourages students to internalize Christian values and express them through daily conduct. This orientation is consistent with Indonesia's policy on religious education, which emphasizes that religious education should foster learners who understand and practice the values of their faith and develop commendable character (PP Nomor 55/2007 tentang Pendidikan Agama dan Pendidikan Keagamaan). In the Christian education context, PAK is expected to help students understand Christian life values and reflect them in lived behavior, while PAK teachers function as facilitators of faith learning and character formation (Manik & Tanasyah, 2020). Accordingly, the effectiveness of PAK learning may be viewed not only through report card scores, but also through indications of behavioral transformation and the consistency of value application in everyday life (Samaloisa & Hutahaean, 2023; Manik & Tanasyah, 2020).

Understanding student achievement requires attention to the nature of learning itself. Learning is widely recognized as a complex process involving cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions (Dimiyati & Mudjiono, 2006). From a student perspective, learning is accompanied by internal mental processes such as attention, motivation, interest, and emotional regulation. From a teacher perspective, learning complexity is reflected in the need for careful planning, classroom management, instructional strategy selection, and assessment design. Asni Asni et al. (2020) conceptualizes learning as a process of change, indicating that learning should result in measurable transformation—whether in knowledge, attitudes, habits, or skills. Consequently, when student achievement declines, its causes should be examined comprehensively across internal and external factors, including motivation, classroom conditions, family support, and socio-cultural influences.

Preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae suggest that student achievement in PAK has not yet developed optimally in a manner aligned with student-centered learning and achievement-oriented instruction. One observable concern is that students' ability to apply religious values in daily life remains limited, indicating a gap between taught values and lived practice. Interviews with a PAK teacher, Famaano, indicate that many students tend to prefer playing rather than studying, and this tendency appears alongside a classroom environment that is often less conducive during instruction (Famaano, 2025). Such conditions challenge the effectiveness of teaching and reduce opportunities for students to concentrate, participate, and develop learning discipline. In addition, several interconnected factors were identified as

contributing to declining achievement, including low learning interest, limited parental guidance, insufficient attention to classroom management, rapid technological development that can distract students, and influences related to religious education in church settings (Famaano, 2025). An eighth-grade student, Imel Sari, also reported that the learning process was not optimal because weak classroom management resulted in noisy conditions that hinder learning (Imel Sari, personal communication, 2025). These accounts suggest that student achievement is shaped by a network of influences rather than a single cause, and classroom climate is a decisive element in supporting academic development.

However, although prior discussions highlight the importance of teachers for learning outcomes, the concept of “teacher roles” is often presented in broad terms. This creates a practical research gap in the present context: it remains insufficiently clear which operational roles of PAK teachers are most salient for strengthening students’ achievement at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae. To sharpen the research focus, this study specifies the role of the PAK teacher into more operational functions, including the teacher as (1) a learning motivator, (2) a classroom manager, (3) a character educator, (4) a remedial instructor, and (5) a spiritual counselor/mentor. In this study, “student academic achievement” is primarily understood through school-based academic indicators (e.g., grades and/or learning mastery as reflected in assessment records), while value application in daily life is treated as a contextual outcome of PAK learning that complements—rather than replaces—the academic achievement construct.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to examine how the operational roles of PAK teachers contribute to improving students’ academic achievement in PAK at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae. To guide data collection and analysis, this study addresses the following research questions (i) how does the PAK teacher’s role as a learning motivator contribute to improving students’ learning interest, discipline, and engagement in PAK learning? (ii) how does the PAK teacher’s role as a classroom manager shape a conducive classroom climate that supports students’ academic achievement in PAK? (iii) how does the PAK teacher’s role as a character educator and spiritual counselor/mentor support students’ internalization and application of Christian values in relation to PAK learning? (iv) what remedial or follow-up learning strategies are implemented by the PAK teacher, and how are these efforts linked to students’ academic achievement (e.g., grades and/or learning mastery) in PAK?

By explicitly articulating the research gap, operationalizing teacher roles, and clarifying the achievement indicators used in the study, this article provides a clearer conceptual direction for understanding how PAK teachers can strengthen student achievement through motivational, managerial, character-building, remedial, and mentoring pathways within the school context.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design to examine how the operational roles of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers contribute to students’ academic achievement in a specific school context (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Patton, 2015). The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae, South Nias Regency, from November to December 2025. (Patton, 2015).

Participants were selected purposively (Patton, 2015) and included PAK teacher(s), school leadership (principal/vice principal related to curriculum or student affairs), and Christian students involved in PAK learning. Inclusion criteria were direct involvement in PAK learning or supervision, voluntary participation, and ability to provide information relevant to the study indicators (teacher roles as motivator, classroom manager, character educator, remedial instructor, and spiritual counselor/mentor).

Data were collected through literature/document review (Bowen, 2009), non-participant classroom observation to document classroom climate and teacher–student interaction (Patton, 2015; Spradley, 1980), and semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth perspectives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). With permission, interviews were audio-recorded and supported by field notes.

Data were analyzed inductively using Miles et al. (2014) interactive model: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Trustworthiness was

strengthened through method and source triangulation, member checking with selected participants, maintaining an audit trail (field notes, logs, and analytic memos), and peer debriefing. Ethical procedures included school permission, informed consent, anonymization of participants, and secure data storage.

This study is context-specific to one school and is not intended for statistical generalization; findings should be interpreted as an in-depth account within the constraints of the field setting.

3. RESAULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

PAK Teachers as Instructors, Mentors, and Academic Support Providers

The findings confirm that Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers play a central role in improving student learning achievement because their responsibilities encompass both instructional and developmental functions. In the school context studied, the PAK teacher's duties include delivering lesson content, providing learning guidance, offering remedial instruction for students who do not meet the required standards, assigning tasks and homework, facilitating exercises, and conducting learning evaluation. These responsibilities position the PAK teacher not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a mentor who supports students in developing learning discipline and responsibility. When such duties are implemented consistently, they become a structured mechanism for helping students strengthen comprehension, improve performance, and develop positive learning habits over time.

This role is particularly important because student learning achievement is not produced solely by student effort; it emerges through a continuous interaction between teacher practices, classroom climate, and students' motivation. In other words, the teacher's effectiveness in guiding, monitoring, and reinforcing learning behaviors can directly shape how students participate during lessons and how they respond to academic expectations.

Learning Achievement as Both Academic Outcomes and Behavioral Change

A key insight from this study is that student learning achievement should be understood more broadly than academic scores alone. Achievement is indeed visible through grades and class ranking; however, it also appears through behavioral indicators such as learning discipline, attention during lessons, persistence in completing tasks, cooperation in group activities, and the development of character-related habits. This broader understanding is especially relevant to PAK because the subject aims to build values, attitudes, and moral reasoning, not merely factual knowledge.

Therefore, achievement in the PAK context includes students' ability to demonstrate positive attitudes and apply religious values in daily life. This perspective supports the view that "successful learning" is reflected in changes in students' habits, skills, and attitudes—an outcome that may not always be immediately captured through report card scores.

The Influence of Student Diversity and Classroom Climate on Achievement

The study also highlights that improving achievement requires patience and sustained intervention because students differ in their characteristics, learning readiness, and motivational levels. These differences can create uneven achievement outcomes, particularly in the domain of character development. The classroom situation described in the findings suggests that learning is sometimes disrupted by an uncondusive atmosphere, including noise, limited attention to instruction, and low engagement. Such conditions reduce opportunities for meaningful learning because students struggle to concentrate, interact productively with learning materials, and internalize lesson content.

Importantly, these classroom dynamics do not only affect academic learning; they also influence character formation. When students repeatedly experience disorganized or noisy learning situations, they may develop habits of inattentiveness, reduced responsibility, and low discipline. This finding implies that classroom management is not merely a technical teaching skill; it is a foundational condition for both academic achievement and character development.

School Leadership Views: Teacher Professionalism and Social Approachability

From the principal's perspective, the PAK teacher has generally fulfilled professional responsibilities well. The principal noted the teacher's discipline, personal conduct, and reliability in carrying out tasks assigned by school leadership. The principal also emphasized the teacher's friendliness and positive relationships within the school environment. This dimension is important because approachability can foster trust and improve communication between teachers and students, which is essential in value-based education such as PAK.

Teacher professionalism—shown through discipline and consistent performance—also sends a strong message to students about responsibility and commitment. In value education, the teacher's personal example often functions as an informal curriculum that shapes student attitudes. Thus, the principal's assessment suggests that the PAK teacher's professional character may contribute positively to the broader school climate.

Evidence of Academic Improvement, with Gaps in Character-Based Achievement

In academic terms, the results indicate that Christian students at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae often achieve high rankings, comparable to non-Christian students. This suggests that, at least in terms of grades, there is evidence of improvement and competitive performance. However, the principal also stressed that achievement must be interpreted more comprehensively, including character, personality, and behavioral attitudes. In this respect, the study identified that some students have not yet met expected standards. These gaps are visible in certain attitudes and behaviors that still require continuous mentoring.

This finding is significant because it suggests that academic achievement and character development may progress at different speeds. While students may perform well on tests or assignments, their learning attitudes and everyday behavior may not fully reflect the values and discipline expected. For PAK teachers, this implies that success cannot be assessed through grades alone; consistent reinforcement, mentoring, and classroom routines are needed to translate learning into lived character.

Student Voices: Teacher Strategies, Learning Practices, and Relational Distance

Student accounts provide further insight into how PAK teaching is experienced in daily practice. Students reported that the teacher's primary instructional method involves explaining lesson material, giving assignments and homework, and sometimes encouraging group learning. Students also linked learning achievement to being able to complete assignments and participate in group work. For example, one student described achievement as learning how to work on assignments and cooperate in group activities, while noting that the teacher mainly explains the material and distributes tasks (Marpel, *Interview*, 2025). These statements indicate that students view achievement largely through task completion and classroom participation.

At the same time, one student reported reluctance to share personal problems with the teacher, worrying that the issue might become prolonged or widely known (Saluna, *Interview*, 2025). This is an important qualitative signal: although the teacher is described as friendly by school leadership, some students may still perceive boundaries or uncertainty regarding confidentiality and emotional support. In value-based education, students' willingness to communicate openly can strengthen guidance and mentoring. Therefore, this finding suggests a potential need to strengthen the supportive relationship dimension of PAK teaching, particularly in creating a safe space for students to discuss learning challenges or personal concerns without fear of stigma.

Overall, the findings suggest a pathway through which PAK teachers influence student achievement: (1) teacher responsibilities and instructional practices shape (2) classroom climate and learning routines, which affect (3) student motivation and engagement, leading to (4) academic outcomes and character-related behaviors. When classroom management is less effective, student attention and discipline weaken, and character development becomes more difficult to reinforce. Conversely, when teachers implement guidance, remedial support, structured tasks, and consistent evaluation—supported by a conducive classroom environment—

students are more likely to become active, responsible learners, and achievement improves both academically and behaviorally.

Discussion

The findings indicate that PAK teachers influence student learning achievement through a dual function: academic instruction and character-value formation. This dual emphasis is consistent with Indonesia's national education mandate, which frames education as a deliberate process to develop learners' spiritual strength, self-control, intelligence, noble character, and skills (Law No. 20/2003). In this study, the PAK teacher's duties—explaining lesson content, mentoring, remedial teaching, assigning tasks, and evaluating learning—reflect the professional obligations of educators to plan and implement instruction and provide guidance (Law No. 20/2003). Conceptually, this aligns with the view of education as a guided process that helps learners develop their potential through purposeful teaching and nurturing (Sanjaya, 2009).

A central implication of the results is that student achievement should be interpreted holistically rather than narrowly as test scores or report-card grades. Although the principal noted strong academic performance among Christian students, stakeholders also emphasized gaps in attitudes and behavior. This distinction supports the learning theory perspective that learning outcomes include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions (Dimiyati & Mudjiono, 2006). In PAK, this is particularly relevant because achievement is expected to include the internalization of values and consistent application in everyday conduct. Thus, academic success may coexist with unfinished character development, suggesting that cognitive gains and affective-behavioral outcomes can progress at different rates.

The findings also highlight classroom climate and management as a key mechanism linking teacher roles to achievement. Student reports of noisy and uncondusive lessons suggest that limited classroom order can reduce attention and engagement, thereby weakening both academic learning and value internalization. This interpretation is supported by evidence that classroom management is strongly associated with student achievement and that effective management depends heavily on teacher-student relationships and clear behavioral expectations (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Recent synthesis work also shows that classroom management interventions can produce measurable benefits across academic and behavioral outcomes, reinforcing the importance of structured learning environments for sustained improvement (Korpershoek et al., 2016).

A further discussion point concerns the relational dimension of PAK teaching. While school leadership perceived the PAK teacher as friendly and approachable, some students expressed reluctance to share personal problems due to concerns about confidentiality. This matters because research consistently shows that supportive teacher-student relationships predict engagement and academic outcomes, partly by strengthening students' sense of belonging and perceived support (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Meta-analytic evidence also indicates that learner-centered teacher-student relationships are significantly associated with achievement outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). Therefore, even when teachers are viewed positively by administrators, students' perceptions of psychological safety and confidentiality can determine whether mentoring functions effectively—especially in value-based education where personal concerns, moral dilemmas, and behavioral struggles may surface.

In terms of teaching strategies, students described learning experiences dominated by explanation, assignments, and group work. These strategies can strengthen achievement by building routine, accountability, and cooperative skills. However, the results suggest that these practices may be enhanced through more intentional formative feedback and individualized learning support. Formative assessment research demonstrates that frequent, high-quality feedback and opportunities for students to self-assess can generate meaningful learning gains (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In this setting, formative practices—such as short reflective prompts, value-application tasks, structured group roles, and brief feedback cycles—may help bridge the observed gap between understanding PAK content and consistently practicing it.

Synthesizing the evidence, the findings support a pathway in which teacher professionalism and instructional support shape learning structures; classroom management and relational

quality influence motivation and engagement; and these factors together predict both academic performance and character-related outcomes. This integrated view suggests that improving student achievement at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae requires not only strong teaching routines and remedial support, but also strengthened classroom norms and trust-based mentoring relationships that make students feel safe to seek help.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers play a vital role in improving student learning achievement at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Idanotae. Their contributions extend beyond delivering lesson content to include mentoring, remedial instruction, assignment design, and continuous evaluation, which collectively support students' academic development and learning discipline. The findings also confirm that learning achievement should be understood holistically: while academic performance among Christian students is generally strong, achievement must also be reflected in students' character, attitudes, and daily learning behavior.

Furthermore, the study highlights that classroom climate and student diversity influence learning outcomes. Unconducive classroom conditions—such as noise and limited student attention—can weaken engagement and reduce the effectiveness of learning, including the internalization of PAK values. Student perspectives indicate that teaching practices are largely centered on material explanation and task completion, suggesting the need for stronger individualized guidance and a more supportive, trust-based relationship that encourages students to communicate learning or personal challenges.

Overall, improving student learning achievement requires an integrated effort involving effective PAK teaching, strengthened classroom management, and collaborative support from the school and families so that academic achievement and character formation develop together.

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