

Transformation of Personal Prayer Spirituality amid Prayer Text Dependency in Christian Religious Education: A Case Study of Class X-10 at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya

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Article history

Submitted: 2026/05/12; Revised: 2026/06/20; Accepted: 2026/07/26

Abstract

This study is motivated by the phenomenon of prayer-text dependency among Christian students in Class X-10 of SMAN 4 Palangka Raya during Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning, evident in behaviors such as checking phones, reading written notes, and even writing prayer cues on their palms when asked to pray spontaneously. This study aims to describe the transformation process of students' personal prayer spirituality and to analyze how their dependency on written prayer texts influences that spiritual development. A qualitative case study approach was employed; data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and document study, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the transformation of prayer spirituality unfolds through four stages: awareness of dependency, openness to change, habituation to praying without text, and internalization of prayer as an authentic spiritual need. The study also identifies five patterns of text dependency, shaped by pedagogical, psychological, digital-technological, and theological factors, with the CRE teacher's spiritual example proving to be the primary catalyst for change. This study concludes that holistic and transformative CRE learning can shift students' prayer practice from mechanical text-reliance toward authentic personal prayer, expressing a living relationship with God. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for CRE teachers in designing more contextual and transformative approaches to teaching prayer.

Keywords

Christian Religious Education; Personal Prayer; Prayer Text Dependency; Spirituality Transformation



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INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is a conscious effort to instill Christ's teachings and nurture students' faith through the learning process (Simamora, 2024). CRE aims to foster human relationships with God to achieve spiritual maturity, one of which is through prayer as

a means of building a personal relationship with God, not merely asking for help (Gaurifa & Parrangan, 2025). Therefore, CRE should not stop at cognitive knowledge but rather produce real change in students' personal prayer lives that is authentic and meaningful (Lestariningsih, 2024).

However, based on the author's observation during the Field Experience Practice (PPL) at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya, most Christian students struggle to pray spontaneously when asked to lead prayers in class. They appeared nervous, refused with reasons of being unprepared, opened their phones to find prayer texts, and even wrote prayer notes on their palms. This condition is concerning because students who have participated in formal and continuous CRE should have the courage to pray personally and spontaneously, thus this fact demonstrates a gap between what is taught and what students practice.

This phenomenon of dependency on written prayer texts indicates that prayer has not become a natural spiritual experience but rather a formal task requiring text memorization. Telaumbanua (2018) states that CRE learning in Indonesia still tends to be cognitive-informative and has not yet touched the formative-transformative dimension, in line with Nainggolan & Janis's (2020) finding that learning centered on knowledge transfer produces students who are academically proficient but weak in spiritual practice. In fact, spontaneous prayer is a sign of a living personal relationship with God; the inability to pray spontaneously indicates spirituality that has not yet become authentic (Hutagalung & Ferinia, 2020).

Several factors reinforce students' dependency on written prayer texts. From the pedagogical factor, CRE learning centered on knowledge transfer never truly trains students to pray personally and spontaneously (Nainggolan & Janis, 2020). From the psychological factor, fear, shame, and lack of confidence when asked to pray in public become significant barriers (Shelly, 1982). From the digital technology factor, easy access to prayer texts through the internet and smartphones further strengthens dependency and reduces the drive to develop spontaneous and authentic personal prayer (Boiliu, 2024). From the theological factor, the mistaken understanding that prayer must be spoken with precise and standard words makes students feel unable to pray without textual guidance (Gaurifa & Parrangan, 2025; Sidjabat, 2019).

This issue urgently needs to be addressed, as the young Christian generation is at risk of growing up with fragile faith, knowing many doctrines but having minimal real experience of encountering God (Belay et al., 2021). Telaumbanua (2019) warns that weak spiritual discipline, particularly prayer, contributes to the crisis of spiritual leadership in the church. This confirms that spiritual transformation through CRE must involve cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects simultaneously, including the habituation of prayer as a concrete faith practice (Keriapy, 2020), and the failure to realize this reflects a fundamental error in the learning approach employed (Darti et al., 2023). True CRE must be able to bring students to experience a real encounter with God, not merely have knowledge about God (Pasaribu, 2025).

Previous studies have examined the effectiveness of CRE learning, for instance, contextual approaches proven to improve students' Christian character (Keriapy, 2020), the application of

Project Based Learning related to student creativity (Hondro, 2025), and the influence of CRE teacher's example on student spirituality in the digital era (Ndruru & Lawalata, 2023). Hutagalung & Ferinia (2020) found that prayer practice positively influences the frequency of Bible reading and church attendance, yet a declining trend in personal prayer life among the millennial generation was identified. Nainggolan & Janis's (2020) research identified the weakness of CRE learning that remains cognitive and has not yet produced real spiritual transformation. Keriapy (2020) emphasizes that spiritual transformation through CRE must involve not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor aspects, including the formation of prayer habits as a concrete faith practice.

However, these studies were generally conducted in private Christian schools, have not specifically examined prayer text dependency, have not adequately identified inhibiting factors, and have not designed transformative learning strategies to address them (Ndruru & Lawalata, 2023). This gap forms the basis for the importance of conducting this research at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya as a multicultural public school. This study aims to explore in depth the process of transformation of personal prayer spirituality among Christian students in Class X-10 at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya and to analyze how dependency on written prayer texts affects the development of their personal prayer spirituality in Christian Religious Education learning. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for CRE teachers in designing more contextual and transformative approaches to teaching prayer, as well as enriching the academic literature on the spirituality of the young Christian generation in the digital era.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design (Creswell, 2018; Moleong, 2017). This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand in depth the phenomenon of students' dependency on prayer texts in a natural context, not for statistical generalization. The case study enables the researcher to synthesize information from various sources to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the specific case at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya.

The research was conducted at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan, during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research subjects included the principal, the Christian Religious Education teacher of Class X-10, and 15 Christian students from Class X-10 selected purposively based on their direct involvement with the phenomenon under study (Fadli, 2021). The location was selected based on the author's experience during Field Experience Practice (PPL), which provided initial insights into the dynamics of students' prayer practices at the school.

Data were collected through four techniques. First, participant observation to naturally observe student behavior in prayer practice during CRE learning. Second, in-depth interviews using semi-structured guidelines to explore students' experiences, obstacles, and factors influencing their prayer practices. Third, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with small groups of students (4-6 people per session) to discuss shared experiences regarding prayer text

dependency and proposals for spirituality transformation. Fourth, document study by analyzing the CRE syllabus, teaching materials, and other school documents to obtain pedagogical context (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman interactive model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Rijali, 2018). Data reduction was conducted through selection and simplification of raw data from the field. Data were presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate interpretation. Conclusion drawing was conducted continuously throughout the research process (Bungin, 2020). Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, as well as extended observation in the field.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Initial Condition of Students' Personal Prayer Spirituality

This study found that the initial condition of personal prayer spirituality among Christian students in Class X-10 at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya was generally concerning. Most students experienced significant difficulty in praying spontaneously when asked to lead prayers in class, both before and after the CRE learning process. This finding aligns with the author's initial observations during the Field Experience Practice (PPL), where various student responses were consistently observed, ranging from nervousness with trembling and stammering voices, firm refusal with reasons of being unprepared, requests for time to open phones, to the discovery of prayer notes written on palms. This phenomenon illustrates that prayer has not become a natural part of students' spiritual experience. According to informant S-03: "I am afraid if I am suddenly asked to pray, because I don't know what to say to God" (Interview, S-03, May 12, 2026).

Process of Personal Prayer Spirituality Transformation in CRE Learning

The research findings indicate that the transformation process of personal prayer spirituality among Class X-10 students in CRE learning occurs gradually and does not happen instantly. Based on data analysis from observations, interviews, and FGD, four stages were identified that students passed through in the transformation process.

1. Awareness Stage

The first stage in the transformation process is the emergence of awareness among students that their dependency on written prayer texts is an obstacle to their spiritual growth. This awareness generally arises through reflection facilitated by the CRE teacher in the learning process.

This awareness was clearly evident in the experience of informant S-04, who recounted that he began to realize his dependency when the CRE teacher asked a reflective question: "If your phone battery dies and you need to pray in an emergency, can you?" Informant S-04 stated: "At that moment I couldn't answer. That question made me think about how I have been depending on texts to pray all this time" (Interview, S-

04, May 12, 2026). Informant S-08 also expressed a similar sentiment, that the moment of reflection with the CRE teacher became a turning point in his awareness of the importance of building a personal relationship with God through authentic prayer (Interview, S-08, May 19, 2026).

2. Openness Stage

After awareness emerged, students began to show openness to develop more authentic personal prayer. At this stage, students began to dare to try praying with their own words in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

This openness was evident in the change in attitude of informant S-02, who previously always avoided prayer turns, but began to dare to try after the CRE teacher created a non-judgmental atmosphere. Informant S-02 stated: "The teacher said there is no wrong prayer as long as it is sincere from the heart. After hearing that, I started to dare to try praying with my own words, even though it was still very short" (Interview, S-02, May 5, 2026). Informant S-03 also expressed that the safer and more respectful classroom atmosphere became a factor that encouraged him to open up to spontaneous prayer practice (Interview, S-03, May 12, 2026). Informant S-07 added that the teacher's direct accompaniment gave him the courage to try: "The teacher sat beside me and whispered, 'It's okay, just one sentence is enough.' That really helped. I finally said, 'God, thank you for today. Amen.' Very short, but the teacher said it was already extraordinary" (Interview, S-07, May 19, 2026).

3. Practice Stage

The third stage was marked by students' efforts to train themselves to pray personally and spontaneously. The encouragement and guidance from the CRE teacher, as well as the practice space provided in learning, became factors that strongly supported students at this stage.

Informant S-08 recounted that he began to train himself to pray every night before sleep without using a phone: "I turn off my phone first, then pray with my own words. At first only two or three sentences. Now I can already pray longer and more meaningfully" (Interview, S-08, May 19, 2026). Informant S-06 shared that he now prays every morning before going to school with his own words, and feels a real difference in the quality of his day (Interview, S-06, May 19, 2026). Informant S-10 also expressed his commitment to pray every morning before going to school, something he said had never crossed his mind before because prayer always felt like a formal activity that required preparation (Interview, S-10, May 26, 2026). The CRE teacher (GP-01) confirmed this observation by stating that the habituation of taking turns praying at the beginning and end of each lesson provides consistent practice space for students to develop the courage to pray spontaneously (Interview, GP-01, April 28, 2026).

4. Internalization Stage

At this stage, prayer begins to be internalized as a spiritual need that arises from the heart, not merely a formal obligation to be fulfilled. Students who reached this stage

showed more fundamental changes—they began to pray not only at school but also personally in their daily lives.

The internalization of prayer as a sincere spiritual need was evident in the testimony of informant S-04, who expressed his transformative experience: "When my grandmother was sick, I really wanted to pray but didn't have time to look for a text. So I prayed myself with my own words. Strangely, I actually felt closer to God at that time. Since then I haven't depended too much on texts anymore" (Interview, S-04, May 12, 2026). Informant S-09 stated that he now prays every night not because of obligation but because of longing (Interview, S-09, May 26, 2026). Informant S-07 revealed that he now dares to be a prayer leader at his church youth group event (Interview, S-07, May 19, 2026). Informant S-10 added that prayer now has a new meaning for him: "Before, prayer was like a requirement. Had to be done so that something would be granted. Now I see prayer as a way for me to stay connected with God every day. Like checking the signal with heaven. If I don't pray, I feel something is missing" (Interview, S-10, May 26, 2026). The CRE teacher (GP-01) noted that students who reached this stage began to incorporate concrete personal experiences into their prayers, such as mentioning exam challenges or praying for sick friends (Interview, GP-01, April 28, 2026).

Patterns of Students' Dependency on Written Prayer Texts

Based on the results of participant observation conducted during the research process, five forms of dependency patterns among Class X-10 students on written prayer texts were found to be consistently observed throughout the research process.

Table 1. List of Research Informants

No	Code	Role/Position	Data Collection Method
1	KS-01	Principal of SMAN 4 Palangka Raya	In-depth Interview
2	GP-01	CRE Teacher of Class X-10	In-depth Interview, Observation
3	S-01 s.d. S-15	Chrostoan Students of Class X-10	Interview, FGD, Observation

Source: Research Data, 2026

First, the habit of secretly opening phones to find prayer texts. This pattern is the most dominant and most frequently observed form of dependency in classroom observations. Every time the CRE teacher announced that the class would be opened or closed with prayer, several students reflexively reached for their phones. This behavior was directly confirmed by informant S-02, who admitted to secretly opening his phone every time the CRE teacher mentioned the word prayer, and informant S-08, who called his phone a "digital prayer book" (Interview, S-02, May 5, 2026; S-08, May 19, 2026). The CRE teacher (GP-01) also confirmed

that phone use during prayer moments is behavior that occurs in almost every meeting (Interview, GP-01, April 28, 2026).

Second, reading notes or written texts prepared beforehand when leading prayer. In addition to phones, several students were found to bring small notes such as notebooks or paper when their prayer turn arrived. This behavior indicates that textual preparation was done long before the prayer moment took place, suggesting that prayer is still perceived as a formal task requiring memorization and preparation, rather than a spontaneous expression of the heart. Informant S-04 mentioned that he was accustomed to finding and copying prayer texts from the internet into his notebook long before the CRE class schedule (Interview, S-04, May 12, 2026).

Third, writing prayer notes on the palm of the hand. This pattern was found to be the most unusual yet quite surprising form. Informant S-05 honestly revealed that he had written prayer points on his palm using a pen before entering CRE class: "At the beginning of 10th grade, I wrote prayer points on my palm with a pen. I thought it wouldn't be noticed. Turns out the teacher saw and asked why. I was so embarrassed at that time" (Interview, S-05, May 12, 2026). This behavior was also directly observed by the author in the first observation, where a female student appeared to be writing something on her palm just before the prayer turn began.

Fourth, refusing or delaying the turn to lead prayer. This pattern manifests in various avoidance strategies employed by students when they feel they might be chosen to lead prayer. Informant S-03 admitted to deliberately choosing a seat far from the teacher's view so as not to be chosen, while informant S-05 admitted to often asking friends to replace him or pretending not to hear when his name was called (Interview, S-03, May 12, 2026; S-05, May 12, 2026). Informant S-01 said his first response was always the word "not ready" every time he was suddenly asked to pray (Interview, S-01, May 5, 2026). This avoidance pattern reflects deep anxiety about spontaneous prayer practice in front of many people.

Fifth, showing signs of anxiety when asked to pray spontaneously. This is the pattern that is most visibly physical and emotional. In classroom observations, the author consistently observed students whose voices trembled, stammered, or whose faces appeared tense when they had to pray without preparation. Informant S-01 described it as feeling "nervous, hands immediately sweaty" (Interview, S-01, May 5, 2026), while informant S-07 mentioned that his heart immediately pounded every time he was suddenly asked to pray, to the point that he begged the teacher to be allowed to pray silently in his heart (Interview, S-07, May 19, 2026). Informant S-02 also recounted that the first time he had to pray spontaneously, his voice trembled and his words were jumbled (Interview, S-02, May 5, 2026).

These five dependency patterns collectively illustrate that prayer has not become a natural part of students' spiritual experience, but is still perceived as a formal obligation that creates its own pressure and anxiety.

Factors Influencing Personal Prayer Spirituality Transformation

Based on data analysis obtained from observation, in-depth interviews, and FGD, this study identified four groups of factors influencing the transformation of personal prayer spirituality among Class X-10 students at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya: pedagogical, psychological, digital technology, and theological factors.

1. Pedagogical Factors

The research findings indicate that the cognitive and informative approach to CRE learning is one of the dominant factors hindering the transformation of students' personal prayer spirituality. When CRE learning only focuses on knowledge transfer about prayer without providing sufficient space for direct prayer practice, students do not get the opportunity to practice and internalize prayer as a real spiritual experience. Consequently, knowledge about prayer remains at the cognitive level and does not transform into living and authentic faith practice in students' daily lives.

Informant GP-01 stated: "I realize that all this time prayer learning has been more theoretical. Students learn about how to pray, but are rarely given the opportunity to pray themselves" (Interview, GP-01, April 28, 2026).

2. Psychological Factors

Fear, shame, and lack of self-confidence are the main psychological factors hindering students from praying spontaneously. When asked to lead prayer in front of the class without preparation, most students experience significant anxiety. This factor is exacerbated by negative experiences such as ridicule or judgment from peers, which makes students increasingly reluctant to try praying spontaneously. Informant S-07 expressed: "When suddenly asked to pray, my heart immediately pounds, afraid of being wrong, afraid of being laughed at" (Interview, S-07, May 19, 2026). Informant S-03 also stated: "I'm afraid of being laughed at by friends. Once I prayed and my words were strange. Some friends smiled. Since then I don't want to pray spontaneously anymore" (Interview, S-03, May 12, 2026).

3. Digital Technology Factors

Easy access to prayer texts through the internet and phones proves to be a factor that reinforces students' dependency on written prayer texts. Instead of developing authentic personal prayer, students tend to choose the easier path by searching for ready-made prayer texts through their phones. Informant S-12 admitted: "Usually when I want to pray, I search on Google first, it's easier and the words are better" (Interview, S-12, May 26, 2026).

4. Theological Factors

Narrow theological understanding of the nature of prayer also plays a role in reinforcing students' dependency on written texts. Some students understand prayer as a religious ritual that must be spoken with precise, standard, and high-quality words, so they feel unable to pray without textual guidance. Informant S-04 stated: "I thought that when praying, the words must be good and correct, if you say it wrong, God won't hear" (Interview, S-04, May 12, 2026). Informant S-01 also expressed a similar belief: "Afraid of

saying the wrong words. I thought if I said it wrong, the prayer would be invalid or God wouldn't hear" (Interview, S-01, May 5, 2026).

Results of Participant Observation in CRE Learning

Participant observation was conducted throughout the research process by directly observing CRE learning activities in Class X-10, particularly during the opening and closing sessions of lessons involving prayer practice. Observations were conducted over four CRE learning meetings.

1. First Observation: Initial Condition Before Intervention

In the first observation, the author observed that when the CRE teacher suddenly asked a student to lead the closing prayer, the reactions that emerged were very diverse but consistently showed unpreparedness. The chosen student (observed as S-03) immediately lowered their head and asked for a moment, then appeared to secretly open an application on their phone. Two other students sitting at the back (S-07 and S-09) were seen looking at each other as if hoping not to be chosen. One female student (S-05) who had been chosen in the previous meeting appeared to be writing something on her palm using a small pen. The classroom atmosphere became tense and uncomfortable every time the prayer moment arrived, indicating that prayer had not yet become a natural spiritual experience for students.

2. Second Observation: Implementation of Small Group Prayer Approach

In the second observation, the CRE teacher began implementing a small group prayer approach (3-4 students per group). The author observed that the classroom atmosphere became slightly more relaxed compared to before. In small groups, several students began to dare to say short prayers with their own words, although still very brief. The CRE teacher appeared to walk around the class while providing verbal encouragement to each group. It was observed that S-01 and S-06 had begun to pray without looking at their phones in this small group format, although both still appeared nervous.

3. Third Observation: Reflective Prayer Practice

The third observation showed significant development. The CRE teacher introduced a simple prayer framework: praise, gratitude, petition, and faith. With this framework as a guide, several students who previously refused to pray began to try. S-10, who previously never wanted to pray in front of the class, this time said a short but meaningful prayer lasting about thirty seconds. The author noted that the frequency of phone use during prayer moments began to visibly decrease compared to the first observation.

4. Fourth Observation: Internalization and Spontaneity of Prayer

In the fourth observation, the author observed that several students had begun to pray more spontaneously and personally. S-04 led the closing prayer by specifically

mentioning his personal experiences during that week and praying for a classmate who was sick. S-08, who previously always depended on his phone, this time led the prayer confidently without once glancing at his digital device. The CRE teacher gave sincere appreciation to the entire class for the progress seen. This observation shows that the transformation process of personal prayer spirituality began to produce tangible changes that could be directly observed.

Results of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The Focus Group Discussion was conducted in one session lasting approximately ninety minutes. This FGD aimed to explore more deeply the collective perceptions of students regarding the phenomenon of prayer text dependency and the transformation process they experienced.

Based on the FGD results, students collectively expressed their initial experiences of dependency on prayer texts. S-05 stated that he always prepared prayer texts before CRE class and had even written on his palm. S-03 admitted to always choosing the farthest seat so as not to be chosen. S-07 had asked permission from the teacher to pray silently because he was afraid of being wrong in front of friends. S-09 admitted to memorizing one short prayer text and using it every time he was chosen. S-10 admitted to going completely blank the first time he was chosen and could only say "God help me."

Students also identified factors that drove change in their prayer practice. S-07 stated that the teacher sitting beside him and whispering "just one sentence is enough" was the moment that moved him the most. S-09 said the teacher's most memorable words were "God does not judge the beauty of your words, He judges the sincerity of your heart." S-10 changed because the teacher gave three simple steps: gratitude, story, ask. S-03 stated that the changed classroom atmosphere also had a big impact because the teacher reprimanded those who disturbed when friends were praying. S-05 admitted that the most transformative moment was when the teacher said that writing on the palm was a sign that he actually wanted to pray correctly, so he was no longer embarrassed but rather motivated. S-07 and S-10 also added that small groups were very helpful because praying in front of five people was easier than in front of a whole class.

Regarding the impact of change on spiritual life, students expressed various positive changes. S-09 stated that he now prays every night before sleep not out of habit but because he wants to talk to God. S-10 began to pray before exams and feels calmer. S-05 admitted that the biggest change was starting to pray for others, not just for himself. S-03 began to pray before sleep with his own words and felt prayer was more meaningful. S-07 admitted that he now dares to be a prayer leader at church youth group events, something he never imagined before.

Based on the FGD results, it can be concluded that Class X-10 students collectively realize the root causes of their dependency on prayer texts, identify the factors driving change, and have a genuine commitment to developing more authentic personal prayer lives in the future.

These FGD findings reinforce and complement data obtained from individual interviews and participant observation, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of personal prayer spirituality transformation among Class X-10 students at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya.

Discussion

Transformation of Personal Prayer Spirituality in CRE Learning

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of personal prayer spirituality among Class X-10 students at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya is a multidimensional process that occurs gradually through four identifiable stages: awareness, openness, practice, and internalization. These empirical findings align with Keriapy's (2020) view that spiritual transformation through CRE must involve not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor aspects, including the formation of prayer habits as concrete faith practice. From a theological perspective, the four-stage process found in this study is a concrete manifestation of the concept of Christian transformation as taught in Romans 12:2, which states that transformation begins with the renewal of the mind (awareness stage), continues with openness of heart to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit (openness stage), is realized in consistent spiritual discipline (practice stage), and finally produces permanent and authentic character change (internalization stage).

Furthermore, this finding strengthens Pasaribu (2025) argument that true CRE must be able to bring students to experience a real encounter with God, not merely have knowledge about God. Students who experience authentic transformation of personal prayer spirituality are those who have moved from merely knowing about prayer to experiencing prayer as a genuine personal communion with God. This is evidenced by the changes experienced by students, as expressed by informant S-07, who described his journey from someone who even begged permission not to have to vocalize prayer, to becoming someone able to pray sincerely in front of his friends. This change did not happen overnight but through patient and consistent guidance from the CRE teacher.

This finding reinforces the argument that spiritual transformation in CRE requires a holistic approach: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor working together synergistically. This is further strengthened by FGD data where students collectively acknowledged that changes in their prayer lives not only impacted the classroom but permeated their daily spiritual lives, as expressed by informant S-10 who committed to praying every morning, and informant S-09 who began to pray privately at home.

Theologically, the transformation process experienced by Class X-10 students reflects the concept of *bios* to *zoe* as explained by Gaurifa & Parrangan (2024), namely the movement from outward and ritualistic life toward truly lived spiritual life. When informant S-07 stated that he was finally able to pray tearfully without shame because he felt the real presence of God, that statement is a concrete sign of the *bios* to *zoe* transformation in the context of personal prayer. Similarly, when informant S-09 acknowledged that he now prays every night not out of obligation but out of longing, this proves that prayer has shifted from formal obligation to

sincere spiritual need, just as Parrish (2018) meant when he called true transformation of prayer as the shift from duty to joy.

From a pedagogical perspective, the transformation experienced by students cannot be separated from the change in learning strategies implemented by the CRE teacher. The application of a simple three-step prayer framework (gratitude, story, ask) that the teacher conveyed to students proved highly effective in helping students move from total deadlock toward the courage to pray spontaneously. This strategy aligns with the experiential learning principle recommended by Sidjabat (2019), that effective CRE learning must include a Christ-centered approach where every teaching method is directed toward forming disciples who live in personal communion with God through prayer and His Word. This three-step framework is not merely a technical tool but a pedagogical bridge that helps students understand that prayer is a natural conversation with God, not merely a series of formulas to be memorized.

The spiritual example of the CRE teacher proved to be the most significant catalytic factor in the transformation process of students' prayer spirituality. Interview data showed that direct accompaniment and heart-touching statements from the CRE teacher such as "God does not judge the beauty of your words, He judges the sincerity of your heart" had a far greater impact than mere cognitive teaching about the importance of prayer. Furthermore, this also affirms Warwer (2015) view that a CRE teacher is called to be a spiritual leader who guides students in their faith journey, including in developing spiritual disciplines such as consistent and meaningful personal prayer.

The Influence of Written Text Dependency on Personal Prayer Spirituality

The findings regarding patterns of students' dependency on written prayer texts reinforce and validate various theoretical studies identified in the literature review. The prayer text dependency found among Class X-10 students proves to have serious and multidimensional impacts on the development of their personal prayer spirituality.

First, from the theological dimension, dependency on written texts shows that prayer is still understood as a formal religious ritual requiring precise and standard words. This understanding contradicts the nature of prayer in the Christian perspective as stated by Gaurifa & Parrangan (2025), who affirm that prayer is sincere two-way communication between humans and God, not merely reciting perfect words. The mistaken belief held by most students that prayers with "wrong words" will not be heard by God directly contradicts the teaching of Matthew 6:6, which affirms that God the Father who sees in secret values the sincerity of the heart that prays to Him. Sidjabat (2009) affirms that the ultimate purpose of prayer is obedience to God's will, not mere contemplation of His existence, meaning that sincerity of heart is far more important than perfection of words.

Second, from the psychological dimension, prayer text dependency reflects the lack of formed spiritual self-confidence in students. This aligns with the findings of Hutagalung & Ferinia (2020) that the inability to pray spontaneously indicates that authentic spirituality has not yet been formed in a person, because spontaneous prayer is a sign that someone truly

knows God personally. FGD results revealed that fear of being judged by peers is the greatest psychological barrier experienced by students in praying spontaneously. This finding is highly relevant to Shelly's (1982) warning that when students are not given safe space to express their hearts to God in their own language from an early age, they will grow with dependency on formulas or standard prayer texts. This data also confirms the analysis of Belay et al. (2021) that the crisis of self-confidence in prayer reflects the weakness of spiritual discipline formation since childhood, which ultimately drives students to continue depending on texts as the psychologically safest way out.

Third, from the pedagogical dimension, prayer text dependency is a direct consequence of CRE learning approaches that focus too heavily on cognitive knowledge transfer. This finding strengthens Telaumbanua's (2018) argument that CRE learning in Indonesia still tends to be cognitive and informative, and has not touched the formative and transformative dimensions that should be the main goal of Christian education. The CRE teacher's acknowledgment of the dominance of cognitive approaches in CRE learning provides strong empirical evidence. Nainggolan & Janis (2020) add that CRE learning models centered on knowledge transfer produce students who are proficient at answering exam questions but weak in daily spiritual life practice.

Fourth, from the digital technology dimension, the availability of prayer texts easily accessible through phones and the internet proves to increasingly strengthen students' dependency on written texts. This finding aligns with Boiliu's (2024) analysis of the challenges of CRE learning in the digital era, where technology that should be a tool has the potential to replace personal and spontaneous spiritual experience. Informant S-08's honest admission about his phone as a "digital prayer book" completes the comprehensive picture of the multidimensionality of the problem faced in the context of CRE learning in the digital era.

Transformative CRE Learning Strategies to Overcome Prayer Text Dependency

Based on the research findings and theoretical discussion above, this study formulates several transformative CRE learning strategies to facilitate the shift from prayer practice dependent on written texts toward spontaneous, authentic personal prayer that reflects a living relationship with God.

1. *Experiential Spiritual Learning*

The first strategy is to shift the CRE learning approach from cognitive-informative toward experiential spiritual learning. CRE teachers need to provide a safe and non-judgmental space for students to try praying with their own words, without pressure to use standard formulas or prayer texts. This approach aligns with Shelly's (1982) recommendation emphasizing the importance of providing safe space for students to express their hearts to God in their own language.

2. *Habituation of Reflective Prayer in the Learning Process*

The second strategy is to integrate reflective prayer practice as an inseparable part of every CRE learning session. CRE teachers can begin and end each meeting with prayers led by students in turns, accompanied by brief reflection on the prayer

experience. This habituation will gradually help students build spiritual self-confidence and internalize prayer as a natural spiritual need. This was proven in this study when the habituation of taking turns praying at the beginning and end of each lesson provided consistent practice space for students to develop the courage to pray spontaneously.

3. Spiritual Example of the CRE Teacher

The third strategy is to make the CRE teacher's spiritual example a powerful instrument of transformation. CRE teachers who have a strong and authentic prayer life will be a real model for students on how to pray personally and spontaneously. Kambu et al. (2026) affirm that the spiritual quality of a CRE teacher greatly determines the success of forming students' spirituality. This study's findings prove that direct accompaniment and affirmative statements from the CRE teacher have a transformative impact far greater than mere theory teaching about prayer.

4. Transformation of Theological Understanding about Prayer

The fourth strategy is to help students develop a richer and deeper theological understanding of the nature of prayer. Students need to be taught that prayer is not about stringing together beautiful and perfect words, but about sincerity of heart that turns and directs itself fully to God. Correct theological understanding of prayer will free students from dependency on texts and open the way for spontaneous and authentic prayer. Gaurifa & Parrangan (2025) affirm that prayer is sincere two-way communication between humans and God, not merely reciting perfect words.

5. Personal Mentoring and Group Discussion

The fifth strategy is personal mentoring by the CRE teacher and the formation of small discussion groups where students can share prayer experiences, spiritual struggles, and pray for one another. This communal approach aligns with the Christian spiritual tradition that emphasizes the importance of faith community in supporting individual spiritual growth. The second observation finding in this study proved that the small group prayer approach (3-4 students per group) made the classroom atmosphere more relaxed and several students began to dare to say short prayers with their own words.

The five strategies above do not stand alone but complement and strengthen each other. Holistic and consistent implementation of these strategies is expected to effectively facilitate the transformation of students' personal prayer spirituality, from prayer practice dependent on written texts toward spontaneous, authentic personal prayer that reflects a living relationship with God.

Synthesis of Theory and Findings: Implications for Transformative CRE Learning

Bringing together the empirical findings of this study with the theoretical framework developed yields several important implications that have significant relevance for the development of true and transformative CRE learning.

First, this study empirically proves that the transformation of personal prayer spirituality cannot occur only through cognitive teaching about prayer but requires a holistic

learning approach that encompasses three dimensions simultaneously: cognitive (understanding the true nature of prayer theologically), affective (creating an emotionally and psychologically safe learning atmosphere), and psychomotor (providing consistent and repeated practical prayer practice). This perfectly affirms the arguments of Keriapy (2020) and (Darti et al., 2023) that CRE's failure to produce spiritual transformation is rooted in the imbalance of learning approaches that overly emphasize the cognitive dimension alone.

Second, this study found that the creation of a safe learning environment cannot be ignored for the occurrence of personal prayer spirituality transformation. Field data consistently show that students who experienced the most significant transformation were those who felt the CRE teacher's presence as a non-judgmental companion, not as an evaluator measuring the quality of their prayers. This finding aligns with the principle affirmed by Shelly's (1982) that the formation of an authentic prayer life requires safe space for students to express their hearts to God in their own language. In the context of CRE learning at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya, this safe atmosphere was created through concrete actions by the CRE teacher such as whispering "just one sentence is enough," affirming that "God does not judge the beauty of your words but the sincerity of your heart," and forming small groups that made students feel safer to try praying without shame.

Third, this study confirms that the relationship between CRE learning and prayer spirituality is reciprocal and dynamic. Transformative CRE learning not only produces growth in students' prayer spirituality, but the growth of prayer spirituality that occurs in turn also enriches the quality of CRE learning itself. When students begin to pray with their own words, they indirectly begin to internalize the Christian faith values learned in class into their daily lives. FGD data showed that the transformation of Class X-10 students' prayer spirituality did not stop in the classroom but permeated their entire spiritual lives, including the courage to lead prayer at church youth groups, the habit of praying before exams, and the willingness to pray for others in difficulty. This phenomenon affirms Pasaribu (2025) view that true CRE must be able to bring students to experience a real encounter with God that impacts all aspects of their lives.

Fourth, this study found that digital technology factors have a paradoxical influence on students' prayer spirituality. On one hand, easy access to prayer texts through phones exacerbates dependency on written texts and hinders the development of spontaneous and authentic personal prayer. On the other hand, the same technology can be creatively utilized by CRE teachers to distribute prayer frameworks, Bible meditation guides, or spiritual reflections that can help students build consistent personal prayer discipline. This finding shows that the challenge of technology in CRE learning is not a reason to avoid technology, but a call to use it wisely and transformatively according to the principles formulated by Boiliu (2024). In other words, what is needed is not rejection of technology, but redefinition of how it is used in the context of forming students' spirituality.

Based on the overall discussion conducted, this study successfully proves that the transformation of personal prayer spirituality among Christian students in Class X-10 at

SMAN 4 Palangka Raya can be facilitated through transformative, holistic, and contextual CRE learning. The transformation process that occurs is not merely a change in outward behavior in prayer practice but a fundamental change in students' personal relationship with God—from mechanical and textual prayer toward prayer that flows naturally from a heart that truly knows and loves God. According to Romans 12:2, this transformation begins with the renewal of the mind through proper CRE learning, continues with attitude change that becomes increasingly open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and is realized in authentic and consistent personal prayer practice as an expression of living faith. Thus, this study not only confirms the theoretical relevance of existing theories but also provides valuable empirical contribution for the development of CRE learning strategies that can truly produce authentic spiritual transformation in students in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transformation of personal prayer spirituality among Christian students in Class X-10 at SMAN 4 Palangka Raya occurs through four interconnected stages: awareness, openness, practice, and internalization. The awareness stage marks students' realization that dependency on written texts hinders spiritual growth. The openness stage reflects their willingness to pray with their own words in a safe learning environment. The practice stage involves consistent habituation of spontaneous prayer facilitated by the CRE teacher. The internalization stage represents prayer becoming a sincere spiritual need flowing naturally from the heart. This transformation is significantly influenced by the CRE teacher's spiritual example, with affirmative statements such as "God does not judge the beauty of your words, He judges the sincerity of your heart" proving more transformative than theoretical teaching alone.

This study also concludes that students' dependency on written prayer texts has serious multidimensional effects on their spiritual development. This dependency manifests in five behavioral patterns: secretly opening phones to find prayer texts, bringing written notes when leading prayer, writing prayer notes on palms, refusing prayer turns, and showing anxiety when asked to pray spontaneously. Theologically, it reflects a mistaken understanding that prayer requires perfect words. Psychologically, it reflects a lack of spiritual self-confidence reinforced by peer ridicule. Pedagogically, it results from CRE approaches that focus excessively on cognitive knowledge transfer without sufficient prayer practice. From the digital technology dimension, easy access to prayer texts through phones perpetuates this dependency, as students no longer feel motivated to develop authentic personal prayer.

Theoretically, this study contributes to CRE scholarship by empirically proving that effective spiritual transformation requires cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions simultaneously, and by identifying four stages of prayer spirituality transformation as a conceptual framework for future research. Practically, this study implies that CRE teachers need to shift from knowledge-transfer-centered approaches toward experiential-spiritual-formation approaches, providing more space for direct prayer practice and making spiritual

example the primary learning instrument. Schools need to design more comprehensive spiritual development programs, and IAKN Palangka Raya needs to strengthen the spirituality formation dimension in its CRE teacher curriculum.

For future researchers, further studies with broader scope involving more public schools in various regions, the development of transformative CRE learning models through action research, exploration of family and church roles in shaping prayer habits, and comparative studies between public and private Christian schools are recommended to provide more comprehensive insights into the development of personal prayer spirituality among young Indonesian Christians in the digital era.

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