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# Instilling Christian Character in Children with Special Needs at Shining Kids School Kindergarten, Palangka Raya

**Mimi Junustie[1], Jeffry Simson Supardi[2], Dwi Sartica[3]**

[1] Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia; mimijunustie515@gmail.com
[2] Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia; jeffrysimson@gmail.com
[3] Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia; dwisartica02@gmail.com
*085654793606

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**Abstract**

This research is motivated by the importance of instilling Christian character for children with special needs as part of moral, spiritual, and social formation from an early age. This study aims to describe the Christian character values instilled, the process of instilling them, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation with the foundation head, classroom teachers, accompanying teachers, and children with special needs. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, while the validity of the data was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results of the study showed that the character values instilled included generosity, honesty, forgiveness, gratitude, mindfulness, responsibility, order, and obedience. Character cultivation was carried out through habituation, teacher example, devotion activities, learning, individual mentoring, and social interaction. Supporting factors include school commitment, teacher example, cooperation with parents, and teacher readiness. The inhibiting factors include differences in the characteristics of children with special needs, unstable emotional and concentration conditions, limited experts, and the lack of optimal understanding of some parents in supporting the formation of children's character.

**Keywords** Character Education, Children with Special Needs, Christian Character.

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced and competitive era, education is often focused on academic achievement and formal achievements, while children's character formation tends to be neglected. In fact, character is the main foundation that determines the direction of life, personality, and children's ability to face various social situations in the future. Character is not only about moral behavior, but also includes the values that shape a person's ethics, social attitudes, and spirituality. In his book, Lickona (2013:81) states that character is a person's moral quality that involves aspects of moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions that are integrated in life, including ethical values, social responsibility, and spiritual dimensions that guide a person's behavior.

In the context of Christian education, character education has a very important position because it is believed that every child is a precious creation of God and worthy of guidance

according to the teachings of Christ. Zai and Danang (2020:17) emphasized that Christian education not only aims to form intellectual intelligence, but also fosters spiritual values so that children grow up to be whole, loving, and moral individuals.

The Christian school environment must be applied to all students without exception, including children with special needs. Children with special needs (ABK) are children who experience differences in physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development who need special educational services (Sitohang, 2021:25). In the implementation of education that provides services to children with special needs, the existence of ABK requires comprehensive attention, not only to the academic aspect, but also to the formation of their character and socio-emotional development. This is important because ABK requires a special approach in order to be able to grow into confident individuals, independents, and able to socialize with the surrounding environment positively.

Integrated education that provides learning opportunities to all children, including children with special needs (ABK), emphasizes the importance of respecting the diversity of characteristics, abilities, and needs of each student. Through the implementation of education like this, every child gets the opportunity to learn in the same environment with the support of tailored services in order to develop optimally (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006:8).

In the context of faith-based education, especially in Christian schools, the provision of educational services for children with special needs is not only oriented towards equal sharing of learning opportunities, but also on instilling Christian values in every learning process. Christian schools that provide services to children with special needs strive to create a learning environment that is friendly, compassionate, and respects every difference that students have regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, or emotional condition.

One of the important aspects of the implementation of education is the cultivation of Christian character, which is a set of moral and spiritual values derived from the teachings of the Bible and the example of Jesus Christ, such as love, honesty, humility, patience, forgiveness, and responsibility (Zai & Danang, 2020). These values not only shape moral behavior, but also foster faith and build good social relationships between students. Therefore, the cultivation of Christian character for children with special needs needs needs to be carried out through an approach that is tailored to the conditions, potentials, and needs of each child.

In line with the opinion of Suharsiwi (2017:158), character education for children with disabilities requires adaptive methods so that Christian values can be deeply embedded in children. These values are important provisions in forming positive attitudes, empathy, confidence, and spiritual awareness so that they are able to actively participate in life in the school environment and society.

Marlina and Masrida (2020:66) stated that character cultivation for children with children is effectively carried out through direct experience in social activities that are in accordance with the child's condition and abilities. This is supported by Zai and Danang (2020:19) who emphasized that positive habits such as getting children into the habit of saying thanks, being grateful for good things, and engaging in activities together really help children

realize the values of God's love in their lives. A friendly, inclusive, and loving school environment is an important factor in building children's confidence and self-esteem.

The cultivation of Christian character for children with children also requires a personal, patient approach, and a deep understanding of the child's psychological condition. Sitohang (2021:27) emphasized that the character education of children with children cannot be generalized, because each child has unique characteristics that require special attention. On the other hand, cooperation between schools and parents is a very important supporting factor. Zai and Danang (2020:25) stated that holistic Christian education must involve synergy between schools, churches, and families so that character development can take place consistently in various children's environments.

A safe, comfortable, and peaceful learning environment is believed to help children feel accepted and loved in the school community. Siagian (2021:84) emphasized that a positive atmosphere in inclusive schools will foster a sense of belonging, learning motivation, and confidence in children. More than just providing learning spaces, schools are required to truly implement the principles of inclusion holistically. Sutarto (2023:41) stated that cultivating character in schools cannot only be the responsibility of Christian Education teachers, but also a shared obligation for all school residents. The example shown by school principals, teachers, administrative staff, and cleaners will form an environment conducive to the overall growth and development of children's character.

Based on the results of the initial observations made by the author at Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten, it was found that this school is a Christian educational institution that accepts and provides educational services to children with special needs (ABK) along with other students. Of the approximately 70 students at the Play Group (KB) and Kindergarten (TK) levels, there are around 14 children who have special needs with various characteristics. Based on information from teachers, these characteristics include children with speech delay, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), tantrum behavior, and obstacles in communication, concentration, and emotional control. The diversity of these characteristics requires teachers to implement learning strategies and cultivate Christian character that are tailored to the needs of each child.

Although this school has not yet had the status of an inclusive education provider based on formal provisions, in practice the school seeks to provide learning opportunities and assistance to children with special needs according to their abilities and resources. The existence of these children is a challenge as well as an opportunity for the school to show its commitment to realizing inclusive education that not only provides equal academic services, but also instills intact Christian values. In its implementation, Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten seeks to build an exemplary school culture through educators and all school residents. Honest, disciplined, loving, generous, confident, and caring for others.

Although Christian character education has been widely discussed in various studies, studies that specifically highlight the cultivation of Christian character for children with special needs (ABK) at the early childhood education level are still relatively limited. Most of

the research focuses more on regular students or discusses character education in general without examining the process of cultivating Christian character in the context of schools that provide educational services to children with special needs. In addition, there are not many studies that reveal how Christian character values are instilled in children with special needs through learning activities, habituation, and teacher examples in Christian schools. The limitations of these studies show that there are research gaps that need to be studied further, especially in early childhood education institutions that implement inclusive education.

## METHODS

This type of research is qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena in depth through narrative descriptions and interpretation of non-numerical data. Sugiyono (2017:9) stated that qualitative research is used to research the natural conditions of objects, where the researcher is a key instrument, data collection techniques are carried out in a triangulation (combined) manner, data analysis is inductive, and the results of the research emphasize meaning rather than generalization.

The data collection technique in this study was carried out using three main methods, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. These three methods were chosen to obtain complete, in-depth, and qualitative research needs, as well as to ensure the validity of the data through triangulation techniques. The data analysis technique in this study uses the qualitative data analysis method of the Miles and Huberman (2014) model. The analysis is carried out through three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. To ensure the validity of the data obtained in this study, the triangulation technique is used. Moleong (2017:330) explained that triangulation is a technique for checking the validity of data by utilizing something other than the data for checking purposes or as a comparison to the data. Triangulation used in this study includes source triangulation, technique triangulation, and theoretical triangulation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Christian Character Values Instilled in Children at Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten

There are eight main characters that are the focus of coaching at Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten. However, during the observation implementation, the researcher only found five characters that became the theme of character learning specifically. This does not mean that other characters are not taught, but rather these characters are integrated into various learning activities, social interactions, and daily habits so that they do not always appear as separate learning themes.

Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten instills eight Christian character values in students, including ABK, namely generosity, honesty, forgiveness, gratitude, caring, responsibility, order, and obedience. These values are taught to all students without distinguishing between regular children and ABK. The difference only lies in the approach and method used according to the needs of each child.

This shows that the school does not only focus on the academic development of students, but also on the formation of characters based on Christian values. These characters are instilled through various school activities such as morning devotions, classroom learning, play activities, and daily social interactions. The findings of this study are in line with the opinion of Thomas Lickona (2013) who stated that character education is a deliberate effort to help students understand, love, and practice moral values in daily life. Character education not only aims to develop moral knowledge, but also moral feelings and moral actions. Thus, the character taught at Shining Kids School Kindergarten does not stop at the aspect of knowledge, but is also manifested in the real behavior of children while in the school environment.

In line with the opinion of Mega and Jonathan (2022) who explain that Christian character is a quality of life that reflects Christian values in relation to God and fellow humans. Characters such as love, honesty, responsibility, obedience, and generosity are important parts of personal formation that reflect the teachings of Christ. Based on the results of observations, the value of knowing gratitude is the most common character that appears in daily activities. Children are accustomed to thanking God, teachers, and friends. In addition, the characters of responsibility, honesty, generosity, and obedience are also seen to develop through various activities that are carried out repeatedly and consistently. These findings show that character education implemented by schools has helped children understand and practice Christian values in daily life.

1. The Process of Cultivating Christian Character for Children at Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten

The cultivation of Christian character for children in Shining Kids School is carried out through several main strategies, namely morning devotion, teacher example, habituation, individual approach, positive reinforcement, and integrated social interaction in all school activities. The findings of the study also show that the cultivation of Christian character is not only aimed at forming good behavior, but also helps children understand that they are valuable individuals before God. The Head of the Foundation explained that many children with disabilities have experienced rejection or poor treatment from the surrounding environment. Therefore, the school seeks to instill the love of Christ in children so that they are able to accept themselves, respect others, and grow as individuals who have value before God.

Morning devotion is the main means of introducing Christian character values to children. Through prayer, praise, and Bible stories, teachers connect character values with children's daily lives. This process helps children understand the meaning of character simply according to their developmental stages. In addition to devotion, teachers also instill character through example. Based on the results of observations, teachers consistently show behaviors that they want to instill in children, such as saying thank you, being patient, helping others, and obeying rules. Example is important because early childhood tends to learn through observation and imitation of the behavior of the adults around them.

The process of character cultivation is also carried out through habituation. Every day,

children are accustomed to praying, saying thank you, apologizing, sharing with friends, tidying up learning supplies, and following school rules. In line with the theory in chapter II, habituation that is done repeatedly helps children internalize character values until they become part of daily behavior. For ABK, schools apply an individualized approach according to the needs of each child (Suharsiwi, 2017). In one of the learning activities, the researcher observed the teacher giving a warning to a student who continued to play with his saliva and disturbed his friend by saying that the student would be given chili peppers if he did not stop his behavior. On another occasion, the researcher also observed a student who spat on his friend was given a small amount of chili pepper by the teacher as a consequence of the behavior committed. After that, the teacher explained to the students that the act of spitting on a friend is bad behavior and should not be repeated.

These findings show that in addition to using habituation, example, and positive reinforcement approaches, teachers also apply certain forms of consequences to behaviors that are considered to violate school rules. The provision of consequences aims to provide a deterrent effect and help students understand unacceptable behavior in the school environment. Based on the results of observations, the practice of giving chili peppers as a consequence of certain behaviors needs to be reviewed, especially in the context of early childhood education and inclusive education. Although the goal of teachers is to reduce inappropriate behavior and form child discipline, this approach has the potential to be less aligned with the principles of inclusive education that emphasizes acceptance, mentoring, and fulfilling the individual needs of each child with disabilities. Suharsiwi (2017) emphasized that education for children with disabilities requires a personalized, flexible, and consistent approach according to the characteristics and needs of each child. In addition, Mega and Yonatan (2022) stated that the cultivation of Christian character is more effective through example, habituation of positive behavior, and the creation of a welcoming and accepting learning environment.

Thus, the process of cultivating Christian character in Shining Kids School Kindergarten is not carried out through one method alone, but through various strategies that complement each other and are implemented consistently in all school activities.

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for Cultivating Christian Character for Children at Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten

There are several factors that support the success of instilling Christian character for children at Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten.

a. The first supporting factor is the school's commitment to implementing character education as part of school culture. This can be seen from the existence of character programs that are integrated into all learning activities and daily school life.
b. The second supporting factor is the example of teachers and ABK Companions. Teachers not only teach character through words, but also show behavior that is in accordance with Christian character values so that children get real examples that can be imitated.

c. The third supporting factor is the existence of a crew companion who assists crew members during the learning process and social interaction. The presence of crew crew companions allows each child to receive attention and assistance according to their individual needs.
d. The fourth supporting factor is the school environment that accepts and appreciates the existence of ABK. Based on the results of observations, peers accept ABK in play and learning activities so as to help their social and emotional development.
e. Another supporting factor is the readiness of teachers in handling ABK. Based on the results of the interview with the Head of the Foundation, teachers who handle ABK have received special training both through educational institutions and professional training. In addition, the school also collaborates with professionals to conduct an assessment of the needs of each child. The results of the assessment are the basis for determining learning strategies and character development that are in accordance with the conditions of each child.

On the other hand, there are several inhibiting factors in the process of character cultivation.

a. The main inhibiting factor is the differences in the characteristics and needs of each child and crew. Some children need longer to understand instructions, control emotions, or form certain habits.
b. Another inhibiting factor is the emotional condition and concentration of children who are not always stable. Some children often experience tantrums at first, have difficulty focusing, or have difficulty interacting with friends. This condition causes the process of character cultivation to require more intensive patience, consistency, and mentoring.
c. The next factor is the limitation of experts who have special competencies in assisting ABK is also a challenge in the implementation of character education in schools. This condition causes schools to need to optimize the ability of existing teachers through professional training and mentoring so that the needs of each child can still be well served.

Although there are various obstacles in its implementation, the results of the study show that these obstacles can be overcome through cooperation between teachers, ABK companions, the school environment, and the application of habituation that is carried out consistently and continuously. These efforts help children understand expected behavior and form positive habits in daily life. Thus, the cultivation of Christian character in Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten can run well and have a positive impact on the development of ABK behavior.

This success is in line with the concept of Christian character education which is not only oriented towards direct behavior change, but also on the growth of moral and spiritual awareness rooted in Christian values. Zai and Danang (2020) explain that Christian character is manifested through an attitude of love, patience, forgiveness, and responsibility that is

reflected in daily life. In addition, Saputra (2024) emphasized that Christian education for children with disabilities must be based on love and acceptance without discrimination as a form of appreciation for each child as a precious creation of God.

Based on this perspective, the practice of using chili peppers as a form of consequence for children's behavior needs to be re-evaluated to be more in line with the principles of Christian character education and inclusive education. Although it aims to provide a deterrent effect, this approach has the potential to be less reflective of the values of love, patience, and respect for children's dignity. Therefore, schools can consider more educational discipline strategies, such as strengthening positive behavior, giving individual direction, consistent habituation, and teacher example. This approach is considered more effective in helping children understand the meaning of correct behavior while supporting the development of Christian character based on love and acceptance.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on the cultivation of Christian character for children at Shining Kids School Palangka Raya Kindergarten, it can be concluded that: 1) The Christian character values instilled in ABK include generosity, honesty, forgiveness, gratitude, attentiveness, responsibility, order, and obedience. These values are taught to all students without distinguishing between ABK and ordinary students. 2) The process of cultivating Christian character is carried out through devotionon or morning worship, classroom learning, teacher example, daily habits, individual approaches according to children's needs, and providing positive reinforcement and guidance in a sustainable manner. 3) Supporting factors for the cultivation of Christian character include the school's commitment to implementing character education, the example of teachers and ABK Companions, the school environment that accepts ABK, and the readiness of teachers supported by special training and psychological assessments. The inhibiting factors are the differences in the characteristics of each ABK, the emotional condition and concentration of children that are not always stable, and the limitations of experts who have special competence in assisting ABK. For future researchers, it is hoped that they can develop more in-depth research on the cultivation of Christian character in ABK by involving more informants and different research locations.

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