

The Dynamics of Christian Religious Education Learning through Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful Learning Experiences among Eighth-Grade Students

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Abstract. This study explores the dynamics of Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning through mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences among eighth-grade students at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru. The study involved 45 students and employed a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data. The researchers collected quantitative data through questionnaires and learning achievement assessments, while they obtained qualitative data through classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The findings indicate that the integration of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning enhanced students' learning motivation, active participation, conceptual understanding, and ability to apply Christian values in daily life. Qualitative findings also revealed increased learning satisfaction, self-awareness, and positive interpersonal relationships. The study concludes that mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning provides an effective framework for improving the quality of CRE and supporting students' academic and spiritual development.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education; Mindful Learning; Meaningful Learning; Joyful Learning; Mixed Methods.

1. Introduction

Education is a process aimed at developing students' potential holistically across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. In the context of education in Indonesia, learning is directed not only toward the achievement of academic competencies but also toward the development of students' character, values, and spirituality. This is consistent with the goals of national education, which emphasize the development of individuals who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, possess noble character, and have the competencies required to participate in social, national, and civic life. In achieving these goals, education faces increasingly complex challenges and diverse demands, requiring the implementation of innovative and adaptive learning strategies to improve the quality of educational services comprehensively (Lestari, Khoiroh, et al., 2024). Therefore, Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a strategic role in developing students' character and spirituality through learning processes that are meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Christian Religious Education in the digital era faces increasingly complex challenges. Along with the rapid development of technology, the education sector is required to integrate digitalization into the learning process (Khoiroh et al., 2025). The development of 21st-century educational paradigms requires transformation in the learning process. This transformation encourages the implementation of deep learning, which develops higher-order thinking skills, self-awareness, emotional engagement, and the ability to connect knowledge with real-life contexts through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Jumanto & Wicaksono, 2026). The Merdeka Curriculum provides schools and teachers with greater flexibility to design learning in accordance

with the learning outcomes expected at each phase (Yunus et al., 2025). Continuous changes in the educational landscape require education to adapt and innovate to remain relevant and effective (Lestari et al., 2025). Accordingly, learning is no longer primarily teacher-centered but increasingly emphasizes student-centered learning.

Within this paradigm, students are encouraged to actively construct knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, collaborate, and reflect on their learning experiences. This paradigm also requires curriculum development that can accommodate diverse student needs while creating equal opportunities for every student to access educational services and participate actively in the learning process (Lestari, 2025). However, in practice, Christian Religious Education learning is still frequently dominated by lecture-based methods and one-way knowledge transfer. This condition limits students' active involvement in the learning process, making learning less engaging and meaningful and reducing its potential impact on the development of Christian character.

In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced a learning approach that emphasizes Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) learning experiences. This is one of the government's efforts to address the growing challenges and crises in the learning process (Lestari, Susilawati, et al., 2024). Mindful learning encourages students to learn with awareness, focus, and reflection on the material being studied. In its implementation, mindful learning can serve as an effective strategy for developing students' ability to maintain attention and concentration and engage in self-reflection throughout the learning process (Feri, 2025). Meaningful learning emphasizes the connection between learning materials and students' real-life experiences so that the knowledge acquired becomes meaningful and relevant to their daily lives. Meaningful learning is an active process that enables students to connect new knowledge with their existing knowledge, thereby constructing deeper understanding (Abu-ghaneema, 2018). Meanwhile, joyful learning creates a learning environment that is enjoyable and comfortable while encouraging students' active engagement in the learning process. The joyful learning approach can increase students' motivation and active participation while creating enjoyable and memorable learning experiences from the beginning of the learning process (Purba, 2025). These three dimensions complement one another in creating holistic and student-centered learning experiences.

In the context of Christian Religious Education, the implementation of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences is highly relevant. CRE is not only intended to enhance students' understanding of Christian teachings but also to encourage them to experience, reflect upon, and implement Christian values in their daily lives (Homrighausen & Enklaar, 1969). Through learning that is mindful, meaningful, and joyful, students are expected to develop deeper relationships with God, others, and their surrounding environment. In addition, positive learning experiences can enhance learning motivation, active participation, and students' ability to internalize Christian faith values.

Eighth-grade students are at the adolescent developmental stage, which corresponds to the early phase of Phase D and is characterized by significant physical, emotional, social, and spiritual changes. At this stage, students begin to develop their identities, strengthen their abstract thinking abilities, and seek meaning in various life experiences (Groome, 1980). Therefore, Christian Religious Education needs to be designed in ways that respond to students' developmental needs and provide opportunities for them to reflect, discuss, and engage in contextual and enjoyable learning experiences.

Previous studies have shown that the implementation of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning approaches can support more active, meaningful, and enjoyable learning. The integration of these three approaches can improve students' focus, understanding, motivation, emotional engagement, and learning outcomes, although challenges remain, particularly regarding limitations in learning media and classroom management (Kusmawati et al., 2025). Meaningful learning helps develop students' understanding and thinking abilities, mindful learning enhances awareness and concentration, while joyful learning supports students' motivation, enthusiasm, and participation (Ramadhan, 2025). Integrating these three approaches within deep learning can create deeper learning experiences while supporting students' understanding of learning materials and character

development (Syafi'i & Darnaningsih, 2025). The application of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning principles through contextual, conscious, creative, and participatory activities can also foster deep learning that is appropriate to students' characteristics (Sutopo et al., 2025). Based on these studies, mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning can improve the quality of students' learning experiences across cognitive and affective domains, as well as student engagement. However, studies specifically examining the dynamics of integrating these three approaches into Christian Religious Education among eighth-grade students remain limited.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of Christian Religious Education learning through mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences among eighth-grade students. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the learning process, students' level of engagement, and the effects of these learning experiences on students' cognitive, affective, and spiritual development. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Christian Religious Education and provide practical guidance for teachers in designing learning that is more innovative, reflective, meaningful, and enjoyable.

2. Method

This study used a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning through mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences among eighth-grade students. This approach was selected because it enables the researcher to quantitatively measure trends and the effects of the learning implementation while further exploring the findings through qualitative data derived from students' and teachers' experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2007). The study was conducted at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru. The participants consisted of 45 eighth-grade students and one CRE teacher. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in the learning process and their use of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning approaches.

Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire developed based on indicators of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly. Before administration, the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability to ensure the quality of the data collected. Qualitative data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Classroom observations were conducted throughout the learning process to examine student engagement, classroom interactions, and the implementation of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher and selected students as informants to obtain in-depth information about their learning experiences. Supporting documentation included lesson plans and other instructional materials, field notes, photographs of learning activities, and students' work.

Quantitative data were analyzed using percentage analysis to describe students' responses to the mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences. The percentage of responses was calculated to identify the proportion of students reporting positive learning experiences. Qualitative data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process to identify patterns, themes, and meanings emerging from the classroom observations and interviews. Data credibility was established through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from students, the teacher, and learning documents, while method triangulation involved comparing data from questionnaires, observations, interviews, and documentation. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated at the interpretation stage to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of CRE learning through mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences among eighth-grade students.

3. Result

This study aimed to analyze the dynamics of Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning through mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning experiences among eighth-grade students. Based on data collected through questionnaires, observations, interviews, and documentation, the findings indicate that the implementation of these three dimensions of learning experience had positive effects on students' engagement, understanding of learning materials, and development of Christian character.

Mindful Learning Experiences in Christian Religious Education

The questionnaire results showed that most students responded positively to the implementation of mindful learning. Specifically, 84% of students reported that they were more focused and attentive to the learning materials when the teacher used reflection activities, group discussions, and case studies related to everyday life. In addition, 81% of students reported that they better understood the meaning of God's Word after being given opportunities to reflect personally on the learning materials.

Observational findings showed that students became more active in expressing their opinions, asking questions, and responding during the learning process. The teacher was no longer the sole source of information but instead acted as a facilitator who supported students in constructing their understanding independently. Interview findings further revealed that students became more aware of the importance of applying Christian values in their daily lives after participating in learning activities that emphasized awareness and self-reflection. These findings indicate that mindful learning supported the development of students' learning awareness and reflective abilities. Learning activities that gave students opportunities to think, reflect, and connect learning materials with their personal experiences helped them develop a deeper understanding than activities focused primarily on memorization.

Meaningful Learning Experiences in Christian Religious Education

The findings showed that learning activities connecting instructional materials with students' real-life experiences supported their conceptual understanding and internalization of Christian values. A total of 87% of students reported that they found the learning materials easier to understand when the teacher connected them with issues encountered in their daily lives, including friendship, honesty, responsibility, and social media use.

Observation data showed that students were more enthusiastic about learning when they were given contextual tasks. For example, students analyzed real-life cases based on Christian teachings and discussed applicable solutions. These activities encouraged students to think critically while connecting their knowledge with real-life situations. Interview findings indicated that students not only understood the learning materials but also recognized their relevance to their daily lives. Several students stated that CRE learning became more interesting because they could see the direct benefits of the materials they studied. Thus, meaningful learning supported students in developing a more relevant and applicable understanding of the learning materials.

Joyful Learning Experiences in Christian Religious Education

The questionnaire results showed that 89% of students enjoyed CRE learning more when the teacher used varied learning activities, including educational games, instructional videos, group work, creative presentations, and other interactive activities. The enjoyable learning environment encouraged students to express their opinions more confidently and participate actively in learning activities.

Observation findings also showed that interactions between teachers and students became more open and communicative. Students appeared more enthusiastic and naturally joyful while participating in the learning activities, as reflected in their high levels of attendance and participation. In addition, a positive classroom atmosphere supported the development of harmonious relationships among students. Interview findings revealed that students felt more motivated to learn and less pressured when participating in enjoyable learning activities. These findings indicate that joyful learning supported students' intrinsic motivation and engagement in CRE learning.

4. Discussion

The Dynamics of Christian Religious Education Learning through Mindful Learning Experiences

The findings indicate that mindful learning supports students' awareness, attention, concentration, and reflection during the learning process. Rather than focusing solely on the transmission of learning materials, this approach provides students with opportunities to become more aware of what they are learning and to reflect on the meaning of the learning experience. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that mindful learning can enhance students' awareness and concentration during the learning process (Ramadhan, 2025). The present finding further suggests that reflective activities are particularly relevant to Christian Religious Education (CRE), where learning is expected to extend beyond cognitive understanding toward the development of faith and character.

In the context of CRE, awareness and reflection play an important role because Christian teachings must be understood and connected to students' personal experiences. Through reflection, students can move from simply knowing Christian teachings toward considering how these teachings relate to their attitudes, decisions, and everyday actions. This process makes learning more personally relevant and supports the transformative orientation of CRE. Thus, mindful learning supports the achievement of CRE objectives by creating opportunities for students to develop greater awareness of themselves, their learning, and the Christian values they encounter.

The Dynamics of Christian Religious Education Learning through Meaningful Learning Experiences

The findings show that meaningful learning helps students recognize the relevance of CRE materials to their everyday lives. The meaningfulness of learning is developed when students are encouraged to connect the concepts discussed in class with situations that they encounter in their social and personal lives. This connection helps students see that Christian teachings are not merely theoretical content but values that can guide their responses to real-life situations. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that meaningful learning supports students' understanding and thinking abilities (Ramadhan, 2025).

The finding is also in line with Sutopo et al., (2025) who emphasize the importance of contextual, conscious, creative, and participatory learning activities in developing deeper learning experiences that correspond to students' characteristics. In the context of CRE, this contextual dimension is particularly important because the internalization of Christian values requires students to understand their relevance to everyday experiences. When learning materials connect to issues familiar to students, such as friendship, honesty, responsibility, and the use of social media, students have more opportunities to interpret Christian values in contexts that are meaningful to them. Therefore, meaningful learning can serve as a bridge between students' understanding of Christian teachings and their application in everyday life, thereby supporting the development of character that is relevant to contemporary student needs.

The Dynamics of Christian Religious Education Learning through Joyful Learning Experiences

The findings indicate that joyful learning supports students' motivation, enthusiasm, confidence, and active participation in CRE. An enjoyable learning environment appears to create more favorable conditions for students to participate openly in classroom activities, express their opinions, and interact with teachers and peers. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that joyful learning supports students' motivation, enthusiasm, and participation in learning (Ramadhan, 2025).

In the context of CRE, a positive and enjoyable learning environment is important because students may need a sense of comfort and openness to discuss personal experiences, values, and spiritual matters. When classroom interactions are more relaxed and communicative, students have greater opportunities to ask questions, express their perspectives, and engage in dialogue with others. Enjoyable learning therefore does not simply mean creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere, but also developing learning conditions that encourage meaningful participation and positive teacher-student interactions. This finding is relevant to the humanistic and dialogic

orientation of CRE, in which learning can become a space for students to develop not only knowledge but also interpersonal and spiritual dimensions.

Integration of Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful Learning Experiences in Christian Religious Education

One of the main findings of this study is that mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning complement one another in creating a holistic learning experience. Mindful learning provides opportunities for awareness and reflection, meaningful learning connects learning materials with students' lives, and joyful learning creates an environment that encourages active engagement. The three dimensions therefore address different but interconnected aspects of the learning experience: awareness of learning, relevance of learning, and positive engagement in learning.

This finding is consistent with Kusmawati et al., (2025), who found that the integration of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning can support students' focus, understanding, motivation, emotional engagement, and learning outcomes. It is also consistent with Syafi'i & Darnaningsih (2025), who found that integrating these three approaches within deep learning can support deeper learning experiences, understanding of learning materials, and character development. Similarly, Sutopo et al., (2025) emphasize that the implementation of these principles through contextual and participatory activities can support learning that is appropriate to students' characteristics.

This study places these findings in the specific context of Christian Religious Education. In this context, the integration of the three dimensions is relevant because CRE requires learning experiences that engage students intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Awareness and reflection can help students examine the meaning of Christian teachings, meaningful learning can help them connect those teachings with everyday life, and joyful learning can encourage them to participate actively in the learning process. Therefore, the integration of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning provides a relevant framework for developing CRE that is more student-centered, contextual, and connected to students' everyday experiences.

The findings also indicate that the three dimensions should not be viewed as separate learning strategies. Their value lies in their complementary function within the learning process. A learning experience that is mindful but not meaningful may provide awareness without sufficient connection to students' lives. In contrast, meaningful learning without a positive learning environment may not fully encourage active participation. Likewise, joyful learning needs to be accompanied by awareness and relevance so that enjoyment remains connected to meaningful learning objectives. Thus, the integration of these dimensions can support a more balanced learning experience in CRE by bringing together awareness, relevance, and active engagement.

Overall, this study shows that integrating mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning in Christian Religious Education supports learning quality, student engagement, understanding, and Christian character development. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the contribution of these dimensions to students' awareness, motivation, participation, understanding, and character development. However, because this study was conducted in one school with a limited number of participants, interpret its findings within that educational context. The study also focused on students' experiences during the research period and therefore could not assess the long-term effects of the integrated approach. Further research involving larger, more diverse samples and multiple schools is needed to examine its broader applicability and effectiveness. Therefore, these findings support the development of CRE learning that is more innovative, contextual, reflective, enjoyable, and student-centered.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of Mindful, Meaningful, and Joyful (MMJ) learning experiences in Christian Religious Education (CRE) among eighth-grade students contributes positively to the quality of the learning process and learning outcomes. Mindful learning helps students develop awareness, concentration, and reflective abilities in understanding Christian values. Meaningful learning enables students to connect the learning materials with their experiences and everyday realities, making their understanding of

Christian teachings more relevant and applicable. Meanwhile, joyful learning creates an enjoyable learning environment that supports students' motivation, active participation, and enthusiasm throughout the learning process.

In this context, the learning process enables students to experience the Word of God as the good news of salvation, which they receive with joy. The findings also show that the integration of these three learning experiences can support students' holistic development across cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. Students not only demonstrate better understanding of CRE materials but also show development in their attitudes, character, and ability to live out Christian values in their daily lives at school, at home, and in the church. In addition, student-centered learning encourages more active, reflective, and collaborative interactions between teachers and students. Thus, the dynamics of CRE learning through Mindful, Meaningful, and joyful experiences provide a relevant approach to creating learning that is more contextual, humanistic, and transformative. Therefore, CRE teachers are encouraged to integrate these three approaches into the planning and implementation of learning to improve the quality of education and support the development of strong Christian character among students. Future research is expected to extend this study to different educational levels and broader contexts in order to develop a deeper understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of the MMJ approach in Christian Religious Education.

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