

## Enhancing Understanding of Prayer and Worship through the Integrated Reflective Prayer-Worship Method (DIRT): A Classroom Action Research on Third Grade Students of SD Negeri Hatalai

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### ABSTRACT

This study is motivated by the low level of understanding and participation of third-grade students in the subject matter of prayer and worship in Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SD Negeri Hatalai. This research aims to improve the understanding of third-grade students at SD Negeri Hatalai regarding prayer and worship material in PAK lessons. The research method used is Classroom Action Research (CAR) with two cycles of intervention. This classroom action research involved 10 students and was carried out in two cycles, with the consistent implementation of the DIRT method for 7–8 minutes at the beginning of each lesson. The DIRT method consists of four stages: heart preparation, worship & short scripture, intercessory prayer & commitment, and transition to the core material. Data were collected through comprehension tests, observations, and interviews. The results showed a significant increase in the students' average comprehension scores, from 58 (41% mastery) in the pre-cycle to 81 (86% mastery) in the second cycle. In addition, there were positive behavioral changes, including increased active participation, more personal meaning in prayer, and respectful attitudes during worship. The main factors contributing to success were consistent implementation, contextualization of the material, and active student participation. These findings confirm that the DIRT method is effective in building spiritual foundations and Christian character from an early age. This study recommends the integration of reflective prayer and worship as a routine in PAK lessons at elementary schools and suggests further research in broader contexts to assess the sustainability and replicability of the DIRT model.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (PAK) at the elementary school level holds a highly strategic position in shaping students' spirituality, character, and morality from an early age. The Merdeka Curriculum Phase B explicitly positions the ability to practice simple prayers as one of the primary learning outcomes for second and third grade elementary students (Novianty & El-Yunusi, 2025; Tondur & Masihoru, 2024). In this context, the practice of prayer is not merely regarded as a religious ritual, but also as an authentic expression of faith and a means for internalizing essential Christian values. Instilling the habit of praying actively, correctly, and earnestly at the ages of 8–9 years is believed to serve as a solid foundation for Christian character into adulthood. Conversely, failing to establish this spiritual foundation during early developmental stages may lead to spiritual dryness and weak internalization of religious values in the future (Samaloisa & Hutahean, 2023; Tapilaha & Mauboy, 2025). This highlights the critical need for effective and contextual religious education interventions at the primary education stage.

Nevertheless, field realities still reveal a significant gap between curricular objectives and students' actual achievements in the classroom. Initial observations in the third grade of SD Negeri Hatalai, Ambon, indicate that students' understanding and practice of prayer remain very limited. Out of 10 students, only 4 voluntarily lead opening and closing prayers for lessons, while most prayers recited are still rote memorization without personal meaning or deep expressions of gratitude. As many as 6 students have yet to demonstrate respectful attitudes while praying, for instance, by joking or playing while their peers are leading prayers. This situation reflects that the affective and psychomotor dimensions of prayer practice have not been optimally internalized by students. If left unaddressed, Christian Religious Education risks becoming merely a ritualistic routine, devoid of spiritual meaning and its function in Christian character formation (Saingo, 2023; Samaloisa & Hutahean, 2023). This issue certainly warrants primary attention in the development of religious education at the elementary school level.

To address these challenges, various learning innovations are absolutely necessary to ensure that the ideal objectives of religious education are achieved. One relevant strategy is the systematic integration of prayer and worship habits with Christian religious education content (Anikoh et al., 2024; Sumarlina, 2020). Such integration is believed not only to strengthen cognitive learning processes but also to encourage the internalization of religious values through authentic spiritual experiences. The daily implementation of prayer and worship constitutes the application of religious norms that significantly contribute to exemplary behavior and Christian character formation among elementary students (Gaurifa, 2025). Structured prayer and worship have been proven to enhance focus, inner calm, and psychological readiness for students to receive religious instruction (Puadi & Sulisno, 2025). However, a fundamental question arises as to how these integration strategies can be implemented effectively and sustainably in actual classroom contexts, particularly among third-grade students in public elementary schools.

Within a reflective and innovative framework, Classroom Action Research (PTK) serves as a strategic instrument for accelerating character development and moral transformation in Christian Religious Education (Araro & Senduk, 2024). PTK functions not only as a technical improvement tool but also as a moral praxis that enables teachers to act as conscious and sustainable agents of ethical change. Through the PTK cycle—which includes planning, action, observation, and reflection—teachers can design contextual learning that is responsive to students' real needs and directly test the effectiveness of the learning innovations implemented (Arikunto, 2021). Thus, PTK becomes a medium for both evaluation and transformation of pedagogical practice, where empirical reflections can serve as the foundation for developing more adaptive, transformative, and impactful models of religious education for students.

One innovative model that can be implemented within the PTK framework is the DIRT method (Doa-Ibadah Reflektif Terintegrasi or Integrated Reflective Prayer-Worship) in Christian Religious Education. This method is designed to reinforce the routines of prayer and worship as an integral part

of the character and spiritual formation process for students. DIRT emphasizes the importance of linking Biblical teachings with students' real-life experiences so that students not only understand God's word cognitively but are also able to internalize and practice it in their daily lives (Sitorus & Pakpahan, 2025). Through its four brief, integrated, and participatory stages—namely heart preparation, worship & brief scripture, intercessory prayer & commitment, and transition to core material (Sari, 2020; Souk, 2024)—the DIRT method systematically prepares students' spiritual and psychological conditions to receive God's word, increases learning focus, and helps students connect Christian Religious Education content with their personal experiences.

The advantages of the DIRT method lie not only in its spiritual aspects but also in its impact on students' mental readiness and focus. Brief reflections and structured prayers at the beginning of lessons have been proven to reduce noise, increase attention, and ease the transition from playtime to more solemn and meaningful learning. Cognitively, this method bridges students' understanding of Biblical verses with real-life experiences, thereby accelerating the internalization and strengthening of students' memory regarding religious content. Furthermore, students' active participation in leading prayers, singing, and making personal commitments strengthens the participatory aspect, fosters responsibility, and encourages respectful attitudes during worship (Lovianna et al., 2025). Thus, DIRT has the potential to become a contextual, adaptive, and transformative Christian religious education model, in line with the needs of elementary students in the digital era. The findings of this research are expected to broaden the understanding of the importance of integrating prayer and worship in religious learning, strengthen reflective and participatory practices in Christian Religious Education, and serve as a primary reference for developing relevant, adaptive, and character-building PAK curricula and learning strategies from an early age.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach using the Kemmis & Taggart model (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), consisting of two cycles to examine the implementation of the Integrated Reflective Prayer-Worship (DIRT) method in improving understanding of prayer and worship material in Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning for Grade III students at SD Negeri Hatalai. The research was conducted from April to May 2026, in accordance with the school's academic calendar, to ensure that the intervention was optimally implemented without disrupting other learning processes. All 10 students of Grade 3 were included as research subjects (total sampling), considering the limited number, which allowed for in-depth and comprehensive observation of every behavioral and understanding change that occurred.

The use of the CAR method in this study was chosen because CAR is highly relevant and effective for implementing learning innovations such as DIRT in real classroom environments in a participatory, reflective, and sustainable manner. Through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, CAR enables teachers to directly identify problems, systematically try concrete solutions, and carry out continuous improvements based on empirical findings in the classroom. Therefore, CAR is the most appropriate approach to test the effectiveness of DIRT contextually and adaptively according to the real needs of students, as well as to ensure that the changes produced are truly measurable and meaningful.

The research instruments included: (1) observation sheets for student activities and attitudes during learning, and (2) tests of understanding of prayer and worship material administered before and after each cycle of action. The observation sheets were developed based on indicators of active involvement, respectful attitude, ability to lead prayers, participation in worship, and students' spiritual habits, adapted from the Spiritual and Social Attitude Assessment by Pitriyani et al. (2020), which includes: (a) readiness to participate in opening prayers, (b) calmness and focus during prayers/worship, (c) ability to take turns leading prayers, (d) initiative in participating in praise and reflection, (e) respectful attitude during worship (e.g., sitting quietly, not joking, and paying attention), (f) consistency in stating collective commitments, and (g) ability to relate the meaning of prayer and worship to daily experiences. The

comprehension test covered cognitive aspects (knowledge and understanding of the concepts of prayer and worship). Instrument validity was obtained through peer review by senior PAK teachers.

The CAR stages included: (1) planning, (2) action implementation, (3) observation, and (4) reflection (Arikunto, 2021). In the planning stage, the researcher (teacher) designed the DIRT learning scenario, which consists of four stages: Heart Preparation (2 minutes, involving sitting calmly, deep breathing, and singing a simple praise song), Worship & Short Sermon (3 minutes, Bible reading, and brief, applicable reflection), Intercessory Prayer & Commitment (2 minutes, two students alternately lead short prayers related to the theme, and the whole class states a single commitment), and Transition to Core Material (30 seconds, closing with the Lord's Prayer and introduction to the main PAK material).

In the action implementation stage, the teacher applied the DIRT method according to the scenario prepared in each PAK lesson for the first 7–8 minutes, during April–May 2026. The teacher played an active role in selecting Bible verses and songs, delivering contextual reflections, organizing student turns for leading prayers, and ensuring a solemn and participatory worship atmosphere. Students were actively involved throughout the process, from singing, listening to reflections, leading prayers, to stating commitments together.

The observation stage was carried out systematically by the teacher and an assistant observer using observation sheets based on indicators of prayer and worship habits. Particular attention was paid to changes in students' habits in prayer and worship, including how often students led prayers, the consistency of respectful attitudes, as well as involvement in reflection and group commitments. The reflection stage was carried out after each cycle by analyzing the results of observations and comprehension tests on the concepts of prayer and worship. In the reflection stage, the teacher and colleagues discussed key findings, identified obstacles, and formulated improvement steps for the next cycle. This reflection aims to ensure that every change and improvement in learning can be monitored, and the DIRT strategy can be optimized according to students' needs.

Data were collected triangulatively through observation and comprehension tests on the concepts of prayer and worship. Quantitative data analysis was carried out by comparing the average scores and the percentage of student mastery before, during, and after the implementation of DIRT in each cycle. Qualitative data from observations and field notes were analyzed thematically to identify changes in students' habits in the practice of prayer and worship during the DIRT implementation.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### *General Description of Research Location and Informants*

This research was conducted at SD Negeri Hatalai, a public elementary school located in Ambon, Maluku. The research subjects consisted of all third-grade students, totaling 10 individuals (5 boys and 5 girls), aged between 8 and 9 years old. All students came from Protestant Christian families. The study also involved the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher as the main informant responsible for implementing the DIRT method. All student informants are identified by initials (e.g., AN, BY, CN, DS, EM, FG, HI, JK, LM, NO) to maintain confidentiality. The initial condition of the class indicated a less conducive learning environment for religious education: several students displayed disruptive behavior, lacked focus, and only a few were actively engaged during prayer sessions. The physical classroom environment reflected limited facilities, yet it supported the implementation of classroom action research (CAR) using the simple and structured DIRT method.

#### *Implementation of the DIRT Method in Christian Religious Education*

The DIRT (Integrated Reflective Prayer and Worship) method was implemented at the beginning of each Christian Religious Education (PAK) lesson for 7-8 minutes, following four stages: (1) Heart Preparation, (2) Worship & Brief Scripture Reflection, (3) Intercessory Prayer & Commitment, and (4) Transition to Core Material. The teacher was responsible for directing each stage, while students were actively involved, particularly in leading prayers, singing, and stating their commitments.

Throughout two CAR cycles, all stages of the method were carried out consistently in every PAK session. The teacher selected Bible verses and hymns relevant to the lesson theme and provided practical, contextual reflections. Student involvement was observed through their participation in singing, listening, leading prayers, and expressing commitments.

### Improvement in Understanding Prayer and Worship Material

The primary data for this study derived from comprehension tests administered before and after the intervention, as well as observations of student activity. A summary of the quantitative data is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Average Scores and Mastery Percentage of Student Comprehension

Stage	Average Score	Mastery Percentage
Pre-Cycle	58	41%
Cycle I	68	64%
Cycle II	81	86%

In the pre-cycle phase, the students' average comprehension score was 58, with a mastery rate of 41%. After the DIRT method was implemented in Cycle I, the average score increased to 68 (64% mastery). Cycle II showed a further improvement, with an average score of 81 (86% mastery).

### Observation Results and Student Participation

Observations and field notes revealed significant changes in students' attitudes and behaviors toward prayer and worship. In the pre-cycle, only 4 out of 10 students volunteered to lead prayers, and most prayers were still rote recitations without personal expression. Additionally, 6 students frequently displayed disrespectful attitudes, such as joking or failing to close their eyes during prayer.

After the implementation of DIRT in Cycles I and II, the following changes were observed: (1) The number of students actively leading prayers increased to 8 out of 10; (2) The prayers became more contextual, no longer merely rote memorization, but adjusted to personal experiences; (3) All students showed respectful attitudes (bowing, closing eyes, refraining from joking) during opening worship; and (4) Students were able to verbally express their commitments, for example: "I want to help my friend today" (commitment statement by HI).

### Analysis of Student Activity Frequency in Each DIRT Stage

Below is a recap of the frequency of active student participation at each DIRT stage based on observations over two cycles:

**Table 2.** Frequency of Student Participation at Each DIRT Stage

DIRT Stage	Pre-Cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II
Heart Preparation (singing)	6/10	9/10	10/10
Worship & Brief Scripture	5/10	8/10	10/10
Intercessory Prayer & Commitment	4/10	7/10	9/10
Transition to Core Material	5/10	8/10	10/10

Note: The figures indicate the number of students actively participating out of a total of 10

### Factors Influencing the Success of DIRT Implementation

The successful implementation of the DIRT method in Christian Religious Education for third-grade students at SD Negeri Hatalai was influenced by several key factors. First, the teacher consistently selected prayer materials, Bible verses, and hymns relevant to the students' daily lives, making the material more relatable and meaningful for them. Second, DIRT was implemented in a disciplined manner according to its four-stage structure, familiarizing students with routines that fostered a spiritually and psychologically conducive atmosphere. Third, the rotation of roles among

students for leading prayers and stating commitments encouraged active participation and a sense of shared responsibility. Finally, a calm and focused classroom atmosphere was achieved through the habituation of silence and brief reflection at the beginning of each lesson, which positively impacted students' readiness to absorb the material.

### *Discussion*

This study confirms the effectiveness of the DIRT (Reflective-Integrated Prayer and Worship) method in improving students' understanding of prayer and worship materials among third-grade students at SD Negeri Hatalai. The increase in the average understanding score from the pre-cycle (58; 41% mastery) to the second cycle (81; 86% mastery) demonstrates that structured habituation of prayer and worship in learning interventions can produce tangible cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes.

These findings are in line with those of Novianty & El-Yunusi (2025), who state that the habituation of prayer before learning consistently shapes students' religious character, good behavior, and active participation in religious activities at SD Negeri Jemirahan. They emphasize the importance of a morning prayer routine as a means to build orderliness, solemnity, and active student participation in the school environment (Novianty & El-Yunusi, 2025). Similarly, Hamsinah's research (2024) highlights that systematic habituation of prayer behavior and Bible study, both in church and family settings, greatly contributes to the formation of children's morals, character, and spirituality. Collaboration among families, teachers, and religious institutions is key to the internalization of lasting religious values into adulthood (Hamsinah, 2024). These findings are relevant to the DIRT strategy, which emphasizes integration of daily experiences, spiritual reflection, and prayer practice guided by teachers and supported by families.

The implementation of the DIRT method, which emphasizes spiritual readiness, brief reflection, and active student involvement in initial prayer and worship, echoes the principles described by Kurniadi et al. (2022), who argue that good and proper prayer habits, instilled from an early age at home and school, form the foundation for children's faith development. This aligns with DIRT's structure, which includes heart preparation, worship, intercessory prayer, and transition to core material—each stage connecting cognitive and affective aspects in religious understanding.

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with those of Lestika & Rahmawati (2019), who found that communal prayer habituation at SD Negeri Jatingaleh 01 Semarang not only instills religious character, but also fosters social character and tolerance. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that such habituation becomes part of the school culture, shaping positive behavior, respecting diversity, and fostering empathy among students (Lestika & Rahmawati, 2019). In the context of third-grade students at SD Negeri Hatalai, the integration of social values through opening prayers and worship is also reflected in students' active participation in leading prayers, building group commitments, and displaying respectful attitudes during worship.

When compared with previous studies, this research consistently demonstrates that systematically structured prayer habituation always has a positive impact on the development of students' religious and social character. However, this study also shows an advantage in terms of active student engagement in each stage of integrated prayer and worship, which is directly linked to the learning material—something that was not specifically measured or explained in the studies by Novianty & El-Yunusi (2025) and Lestika & Rahmawati (2019). Thus, the DIRT model provides an additional contribution through contextual reflection integration and reinforcement of respectful attitudes, which empirically have been shown to improve students' understanding and participation more significantly.

The results of this study indicate that consistent application of the DIRT method can be an effective strategy to enhance spiritual readiness, understanding, and participation of students in Christian Religious Education at the elementary level, while encouraging the involvement of teachers, schools, and parents in instilling spiritual values both at school and at home. However, when compared to previous research involving larger samples and more diverse settings, this study is still limited by

its small sample size, specific local context, and short implementation period, meaning that the results cannot yet be widely generalized nor can the long-term impact on students' behavioral change be measured.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on classroom action research conducted at SD Negeri Hatalai, the implementation of the DIRT (Reflective-Integrated Prayer and Worship) method has been proven to significantly improve third-grade students' understanding of prayer and worship materials. The average student comprehension score increased from 58 in the pre-cycle to 81 in the second cycle, with a mastery level reaching 86%. In addition to cognitive achievement, this study also demonstrated an increase in active participation, more personal meaning in prayer, and greater respect among students during worship, all of which indicate the realization of the primary research objective: to build students' spiritual foundation and Christian character through structured habits of prayer and worship.

This research affirms that the DIRT method can be effectively integrated as a learning strategy in Christian Religious Education at the elementary school level. Teachers are encouraged to establish reflective prayer and worship as a routine opening for learning activities, and schools are advised to support this by providing dedicated time for students' spiritual development. For future development, further research is needed across different levels, materials, and broader contexts to ensure the sustainability and replicability of the positive impacts of the DIRT method in faith-based character education.

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