



Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in Christian Religious Education: From Knowledge Transfer to Faith Transformation

Rocky Agustry Vernando Simamora^{1*}, Rajiun Nababan², Hotmaulina Sihotang³

Universitas Kristen Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Rocky Agustry Vernando Simamora ravsiamamora13@gmail.com

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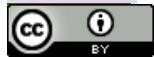
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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia has traditionally been transmitted through a predominantly cognitive-normative approach, resulting in an emphasis on rote memorization of doctrines and repetition of theological content. This approach has yet to effectively create space for authentic and contextual faith transformation. On the other hand, Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which has rapidly developed within the national curriculum, offers a learning framework oriented toward the measurable achievement of student learning outcomes. This study aims to explore a theological reinterpretation of OBE principles from the perspective of Christian Religious Education as a conceptually based interdisciplinary endeavor. Using a qualitative-conceptual methodology combined with hermeneutic-reflective analysis, the research integrates the core principles of OBE, namely clarity of focus, backward design, high expectations, and expanded opportunity, in the light of Christian theology that emphasizes faith formation and the praxis of love.

INTRODUCTION

In the reality of education in Indonesia, learning through Christian Religious Education (CRE) is still often carried out with a cognitive-normative orientation: memorization of doctrine, repetition of biblical content, reinforcement of right–wrong behavioral norms, without providing adequate space for personal meaning-making or deep spiritual reflection. For example, research shows a significant gap between the faith education provided in schools and the actual lives of students in living out their faith in society. A study by Nelly, Siswoko & Wahyuni states that “*in Indonesia there is a striking contrast between faith education and Christian learning ... participants often hold Christian values without integrating them into actionable Christian living*” (Nely et al., 2024, p. 170).

This issue of relevance becomes even more apparent when the outcomes of faith learning do not result in changes in attitude, decisions, and actions of students. In other words, mastery of religious knowledge does not automatically lead to life transformation. There is a risk that CRE becomes merely a cognitive transmission that only delivers “what must be known” without producing “how to live by faith” in real-life contexts. This challenge is exacerbated in the rapidly developing digital era and hybrid urban society: students live in fluid environments, filled with alternative identity offerings, where technology and social plurality transform how they experience and express faith (Pasuang & Saogo, 2023, pp. 72–73).

Amid these challenges, the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) paradigm has begun to be more widely adopted within the national education system, particularly through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and higher education. OBE emphasizes that the learning process must be designed based on the desired end results (outcomes) for students, not merely on the content taught. In this system, learning outcomes become the main starting point for curriculum design, teaching methods, and evaluation. A study by Restu Mufanti, Carter, and England (2024) states that “*many Indonesian lecturers acknowledge OBE’s potential to improve*

student engagement and performance, but also highlight the need for contextual adaptation.” (Mufanti et al., 2024, p. 7). Asbari and Novitasari (2024) also state that OBE increases lecturer creativity and learner effectiveness as it mainly highlights the expected learning outcome, which is clear and measurable in nature (Asbari & Novitasari, 2024, p. 23). Yet, while OBE holds much promise, it cannot be adapted directly in the case of CRE without taking into account the unique theological and pedagogical issues. OBE emerges from a contemporary rational-instrumental educational philosophy that emphasizes competencies, outcome assessment, and axiological accountability. So, while CRE is grounded in the Christian faith tradition and its emphasis on personal relationship with God, transformation of character, transformative community of faith, and acts of love that cannot always be able to be quantified through quantitative measurements.

Given the tension between the outcome-focused orientation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and the commitment of Christian Religious Education (CRE) to holistic and transformative faith formation, a theological reinterpretation is necessary to bridge these two perspectives. Rather than abandoning the clarity and intentionality that OBE offers in curriculum design, Christian educators in Indonesia must engage in what Didier Pollefeyt (2020, p. 7) describes as “hermeneutical learning,” which is a threefold hermeneutical task involving the interpretation of text (Scripture and theological tradition), context (educational and cultural realities), and biography (students’ life experiences and spiritual journeys). In this hermeneutical pedagogical approach, two pitfalls must be avoided: monocorrelation (the imposition of predetermined meaning without dialogue) and relativism (the assumption that all interpretations are equally valid). Instead, this approach promotes critical reflection and meaning-making that honors both the Christian Story and the particular contexts of the learners.

Therefore, the main question in this study arises: How can the core principles of OBE be theologically interpreted and adapted within the context of CRE so that faith learning is not only informative but truly transformative? This study aims to conduct an interdisciplinary conceptual analysis between the OBE approach and the theological principles of CRE. The main focus is not on developing a comprehensive empirical model, but rather on opening space for reflection and reinterpretation of the direction and content of faith learning through the lens of spiritual learning outcomes. By referring to recent literature and studies, this paper offers a theological interpretation of OBE within the context of CRE, not to replace the CRE paradigm, but to enrich and expand its learning direction. Thus, this article is expected to contribute to the theological-pedagogical discourse in CRE in Indonesia and provide direction for the development of a more contextual, holistic, and transformation-oriented curriculum and learning strategy.

METHODS

This article employs a qualitative-conceptual approach using an interdisciplinary literature review method, focusing on the fields of Christian theology, religious education, and modern pedagogy. The qualitative approach is chosen because it emphasizes deep and contextual understanding of meaning, rather than the measurement of variables or statistical calculation. As Creswell explains, qualitative research is a research strategy that explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem or condition (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative research, the focus is on how ideas, values, and experiences are interpreted within a specific context, in this case, how the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) can be theologically integrated into the framework of Christian Religious Education (CRE).

Such an approach may be appropriate because the central agenda of this article is not to collect empirical data, but rather to theoretically and reflectively discuss the potential use and reinterpretation of OBE principles in relation to Christian faith. The goal of such theoretical work is to provide a new understanding or a broader, richer interpretation of existing theories by synthesizing ideas from multiple intersecting disciplines. The conceptual framework is developed via a systematic and argumentative literature review, which is characteristic of conceptual research (Jozkowski, 2017, pp. 33-35).

The analysis is conducted through theological interpretation of the concept of outcome-based education (OBE), which is then reread in light of the foundational principles of CRE, such as faith formation, spiritual transformation, and the praxis of love. In the analysis process, a reflective hermeneutic approach is used—interpreting educational theories from the perspective of Christian faith to generate new, contextual, and transformative understanding (Kublikowski, 2023, pp. 1–10). Thus, the outcome of this study is conceptual-reflective in nature, grounded in a systematic and argumentative literature review, and seeks to address the central focus of this paper: how OBE principles can be theologically understood and adapted to enrich the direction of faith learning in the context of CRE in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Outcome-Based Education: Principles and Conceptual Foundations

The Outcome-Based Education (OBE) paradigm is one of the most influential approaches in contemporary global educational reform. Introduced by William Spady in the late 20th century, OBE emphasizes that every aspect of education, including curriculum planning, instructional delivery, and evaluation, must be oriented toward the achievement of measurable, meaningful, and life-relevant learning outcomes. The focus is not on what the teacher teaches, but on what students truly learn and are able

to do after the learning process concludes (Rao, 2020, pp. 2–3).

The four foundational principles of the OBE approach are as follows (Aminah et al., 2025, p. 31501): (1) Clarity of Focus: every learning process must have clear and measurable objectives. Curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment are designed consistently to ensure students achieve the expected final competencies; (2) Design Backwards (Design Down): planning begins with defining the intended outcomes first, then moves backward to the content, strategies, and assessments. This ensures that all components of learning are aligned with the targeted outcomes; (3) High Expectations: the OBE system encourages all learners to reach high standards, based on the belief that every individual can learn and grow when given proper support; (4) Expanded Opportunity: learners are provided with various opportunities and approaches to achieve the desired learning outcomes. This principle acknowledges that students learn in diverse ways and at different paces.

One of the essential shifts with OBE is towards learner-centeredness rather than teacher-centeredness. The teacher is no longer a transmitter of information, but a facilitator of learning who is guiding students to process the formation and development in an appropriate manner. Thus, by promoting such guided learning experiences, students are tasked with becoming active knowledge constructors who internalize values through reflection and authentic experience (Sharma, 2023, p. 67-68). The primary advantage of OBE is its structured and orderly approach. This model results in a specific direction, transparent evaluation, and a dynamic framework that allows tailoring of learning to the circumstances of textbooks faced by learners.

Nevertheless, this approach to education also attracts criticism. Its programming limitation lies in the fact that OBE, with its micro-outcome orientation, virtually omits the epistemology of knowledge; that is, the whole process of making meaning cannot be reduced to a list of skills mastered or measured performances. In other words, a generation of educators of the future is deprived of

an affective, reflective, and existential dimension of education. For this reason, OBE has been criticized for non-reflection and inability to rethink one's own assumptions and fields, which thus deprives students of the opportunity to express this fine value (Naskar & Karmakar, 2023, p. 70–73). That is why such additional values of education as spirituality and sensitivity to the world are often forgotten. Meanwhile, the educational process should go beyond cognitive-normative, and normative should lead to changing the face and behavior of the human mind in the name of holding life erect.

Despite these critiques, however, several studies have affirmed that the OBE method is still applicable to value and character education, if used reflectively and contextually. It is possible to customize it to include the spiritual, ethical, and social aspects and use the method as a practical guide to crafting a meaningful initiative of learning transformation (Sharma, 2023, pp. 69–70). Having realized the strengths and weaknesses of OBE, it becomes apparent that it is possible to combine contemporary education methods with spiritual values under Christian Religious Education. The article will dwell on this theme in the subsequent section.

Christian Religious Education: Essence, Purpose, and the Crisis of Practice

Christian Religious Education (CRE) has a strong theological foundation as part of the Church's mission and its calling to nurture believers in their faith in Christ. Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 emphasizes the call to "teach them to observe everything I have commanded you," while Ephesians 4:13 highlights the growth toward "full maturity" in Christ. Romans 12:2 underscores the urgency of transforming the mind as a key aspect of Christian spirituality. Thus, the aim of CRE is not merely to transfer doctrine but to shape the character of Christ's disciples who live in love, truth, and service.

According to educators like Thomas Groome, faith education is not educating about religious facts but rather the formative process of helping people lead a 'good life'. Groome developed the concept of Shared Christian Praxis, which connects critical reflection and acts of faith to students' own situations (lived reality) (Groome, 2020, pp. 51–52). This indicates that authentic Christian education is always holistic, transformative, and connected to character and spirituality. This model focuses on five movements: naming life experience (action), critical reflection, discernment with/through the Christian Story/Vision, dialectical hermeneutics, and along the way living one's faith in a life-giving and meaningful way (lived Christian faith) (Groome, 2020, pp. 54–57). The objective is not to create knowledge about faith but to shape persons who are living justly and compassionately, and integrating in some way Christian values into actions, thereby bringing about holistic transformation that integrates the head, heart, and lifestyle.

This complexity has been further intensified by the challenges of digital culture in an increasingly pluralist and urban society. On the one hand, the digital generation is awash with religious data; on the other, it too frequently forms a belief identity that is thin and easily overridden by media, popular fashion, or peer pressure. This is where the position of Christian Religious Education (CRE) is essential in developing spiritual resilience, situational faith formation, which is based in context and ethical engagement in the midst of today's complex situation (Pasuang & Saogo, 2023, pp. 72–73). Furthermore, within Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious context, faith education is also required to address the challenges of intolerance, social polarization, and identity conflict. Christian Religious Education must take an active role in shaping inclusive interfaith awareness, transformative love, and responsible social engagement (Natonis et al., 2024, pp. 7312–7313).

In this regard, an approach that integrates theological values with practical spirituality is greatly needed. Thus, today's Christian Religious Education cannot rely solely on curriculum content and conventional methods. A paradigm shift is needed toward a model of faith education that is more dialogical, reflective, and contextual. CRE must be bold in facilitating living faith development, which is rooted in a relationship with God and bearing fruit in tangible action within society.

Interdisciplinary Analysis: Rereading OBE in the Light of Christian Religious Education

The OBE and CRE consist of two different epistemological worlds. OBE is an embodiment of the contemporary pedagogy where control, measurability, and accountancy in education dominate. CRE, on the other hand, has to do with being a faith, a spirituality, and a person's own personal relationship with God. Yet, upon reflection, there is a possibility for fusion of both, in that they are both deeply concerned with the transformation of learners. Under this convergence, OBE emphasizes objectives that are concrete and quantifiable. In general education, these can be cognitive ideas, skills, or attitudes that are tested. In this way, CRE identifies faith's fruits as the outcome of spiritual acculturation: Christian character, personal development, and concrete acts of love. Despite their varying languages and signs, both models are concerned with demonstrable change in the life situations of learners.

In this context, OBE's principles can be re-read and theologically interpreted. For instance: (1) Clarity of Focus refers to the clarity of direction in faith formation, namely understanding that the purpose of CRE is not merely doctrinal acquisition, but rather an entire transformation into Christlikeness; (2) Design Backwards is a call to design spiritual learning in relation to the quality of Christian life God seeks, namely a life that is human, loving, just, humble and responsible; (3) High Expectation can be viewed as the belief that each Christian is expected to reach spiritual maturity, not merely as an ambition, but a divine call; (4)

Expanded Opportunity acknowledges the many ways grace can be encountered; faith-based learning must allow for rich experiences through which individuals can discover God in the midst of life's challenges.

Although Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has often been associated with cognitive and technical competencies, recent studies show its potential to be reinterpreted and adapted to support holistic learning outcomes, especially in the realm of religious and spiritual education. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), where the ultimate goal is not only knowledge acquisition but also character transformation, the relevance of OBE must be approached theologically and contextually.

Spiritual formation, unlike cognitive mastery, cannot be measured merely by exams or performance rubrics. It involves internalization of faith values, personal encounter with the Divine, and ethical responsiveness in daily life. A study by Fleenor et al. (2021) at the Icahn School of Medicine demonstrated that integrating spirituality across the curriculum led to students' increased sensitivity to spiritual needs and their role as compassionate professionals. While this study was situated in medical education, it proves that spiritual learning outcomes can be meaningfully assessed when integrated with reflection, interpersonal engagement, and lived experiences (Fleenor et al., 2022, p. 215). Similarly, Paendong and Marbun (2025) emphasize that the transformation of learners through CRE heavily depends on the spiritual competence and professionalism of teachers. Their research, focusing on CRE in Indonesia, confirms that the design of curriculum and assessment should consider students' journey toward self-transformation and character development, which represents an educational goal that aligns with the expanded philosophy of OBE when interpreted reflectively (Paendong & Marbun, 2025, pp. 132–133). Lase (2021) further argues that Christian Religious Education teachers must embody the values they teach, combining both personal and relational dimensions of spirituality. He stresses the importance of integrity, humility, and compassion not as learning outputs to be merely assessed, but as outcomes to be nurtured over time. His conceptual

framework supports the theological reimagining of OBE as a tool that can serve faith education by shifting the metric from performance to transformation (Lase, 2021, p. 39–40).

Hence, the spiritual reinterpretation of OBE does not imply abandoning its structure, but reorienting its priorities: learning outcomes should not only focus on “what students can do,” but also “who students are becoming.” In this sense, faith-based education should integrate spiritual reflection, embodied praxis, and communal experiences as legitimate forms of assessment. These can include faith journals, acts of service, group discernment, and personal testimonies of transformation, which are tools more qualitative than quantitative, yet profoundly educational. By integrating these perspectives, CRE can embrace an OBE model that upholds theological integrity, promotes lifelong spiritual growth, and fosters a faith that is not only believed but lived. This synergy between structure and spirit, outcome and formation, will ensure that Christian education responds faithfully to its context and calling

Outcome-Based Faith Formation: A Conceptual Bridge between OBE and CRE

Outcome-Based Faith Formation (OBFF) emerges as a conceptual bridge between two seemingly divergent paradigms: the structured and measurable framework of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and the goal of Christian Religious Education (CRE), which is deeply rooted in spiritual formation and a theological vision of humanity. OBE is often perceived as a product of modern pedagogy, characterized by rational-instrumental thinking with an emphasis on control, clarity, and measurable outcomes. In contrast, CRE directs learners toward a different orientation: character formation, spiritual maturity, and a relationship with God. However, when examined more reflectively, both share a common thread: transformation. OBE emphasizes observable changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes, while CRE focuses on the fruits of faith manifested in daily life. Although the language and

indicators differ, both ultimately seek tangible impact in the learner's life.

At the heart of OBFF is a reframing of what constitutes a "learning outcome." This approach does not reject the importance of achievement but redirects its meaning away from outcomes measured by numerical scores to those evidenced in transformed lives. In OBFF, the fruits of faith, such as love, integrity, humility, and justice, are not supplementary but central goals. Through this perspective, the core principles of OBE can be reinterpreted theologically. "Clarity of focus" no longer refers merely to specific content objectives but to the clear direction of faith formation toward Christ. "Backward design" invites educators to begin with the end goal of spiritual maturity and then shape the curriculum, materials, and methods accordingly. "High expectations" reflects the theological conviction that every individual is called to grow in grace. Meanwhile, "expanded opportunity" affirms that God's grace operates through diverse pathways, and faith learning must provide space for authentic and reflective life experiences.

To ensure OBFF does not remain a theoretical construct, this approach must materialize in concrete classroom decisions. Firstly, the curriculum must shift from mere content delivery to life formation. Themes such as justice, vocation, forgiveness, and identity in Christ become guiding principles in learning design. In this framework, doctrine is not discarded but re-situated as part of a reflective journey and spiritual identity formation. A study by Betakore, Wulansari, & Boiliu (2022) supports this direction, emphasizing that Christian religious education must create space for deep and participatory spiritual reflection. Faith formation is not merely an intellectual process but also existential and relational one that involves the body, emotions, community, and real-life experience (Betakore et al., 2022). This aligns with the reflective and contextual reading of OBE: authentic learning outcomes emerge when students are engaged holistically as persons being formed, not just as instructional objects.

The pedagogical implications of OBFF also call for a redefinition of the teacher's role. Teachers are no longer mere conveyors of information but spiritual companions who walk alongside learners in their journey of faith. Christian & Kilgour (2014, p. 20-21) argue that faith formation is most effective when teachers become living witnesses who embody the very values they teach. This demands a relational, narrative, reflective, and emotionally engaged approach. Learning thus becomes an incarnational process that unfolds within real relationships shaped by grace and mutual trust.

Assessment within OBFF likewise demands substantial rethinking. Spiritual growth cannot be measured by multiple-choice tests or written exams. Instead, meaningful evaluation can take the form of reflective journals, life testimonies, creative projects, acts of service, or narratives of ethical decision-making. Fleenor et al. (2022, pp. 218-219), though writing in the context of medical education, demonstrate that spirituality can be integrated and assessed through reflective practices and empathy-based evaluation an approach that can be creatively adapted to Christian education. Paendong and Marbun (2025, p. 133) also highlight that the spiritual competence of teachers plays a vital role in shaping student character, and that this competence must form the foundation of learning design and evaluation in CRE.

Furthermore, OBFF stresses that faith formation is inherently communal. The learning environment must be viewed as a faith ecosystem involving teachers, students, parents, the church, and the wider community. Hall & Sultmann (2020, p. 11-13) underscore the importance of partnership in religious education, especially in pluralistic societies where faith narratives are often marginalized in public discourse. Effective implementation of OBFF requires cross-context collaboration: school programs involving parents, spiritual leaders engaging with classrooms, and service-learning initiatives that connect students with surrounding social realities.

Of course, OBFF is not without its challenges. Faith formation is nonlinear, deeply personal, and often difficult to measure in the short term. The challenge lies in ensuring that learning outcomes are not reduced to compliance or content mastery. OBFF invites us to view structure as a means, not an end. Learning outcomes are not fences, but windows that open horizons of hope and renewal. In this light, OBFF is not a ready-made curriculum model, but a conceptual horizon. It offers a new lens for understanding learning outcomes that are spiritually honest, pedagogically reflective, and contextually relevant. It challenges Christian educators to embrace both structure and spirit, not as opposites but as mutually enriching elements. In OBFF, the aim of education is not merely to produce Christians who “know,” but to form faithful disciples whose lives serve as living testimonies of hope, love, and justice in a complex world.

CONCLUSION

The convergence between Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and Christian Religious Education (CRE) opens a reflective space for formulating a learning approach that is more relevant to the needs of faith formation in today’s era. OBE, with its orientation toward measurable and structured learning outcomes, initially seems distant from the aims of CRE, which emphasize character formation and spiritual maturity. However, through a contextual theological approach, the core principles of OBE can be reread and interpreted in the light of Christian faith. The result of this reflection is the emergence of Outcome-Based Faith Formation (OBFF), a conceptual framework that bridges the clarity of learning outcomes with the deep longing for the spiritual transformation of learners.

OBFF is not a ready-made curriculum model, but rather a pedagogical horizon that encourages educators to design Christian Religious Education learning in more transformative, relational, and contextually grounded ways. OBE principles such as clarity of focus, backward design, high expectations, and expanded opportunity, when interpreted theologically, can enrich the direction of Christian

faith education, transitioning from mere knowledge transfer to life formation. In OBFF, learning outcomes are not only understood as cognitive skills, but as manifestations of Christlike character: love, integrity, forgiveness, justice, and humility. Thus, this paper contributes to the development of pedagogical discourse in CRE in Indonesia by positioning OBFF as a creative and reflective middle ground. It does not view OBE as a threat to spirituality, but as an opportunity to cultivate faith education strategies that are holistic, dynamic, and relevant for both the present and future generations.

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