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Parental Roles in Shaping Students' Social Character: A Christian Education Perspective within the Toba Batak Cultural Context

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of parental roles on students' social character formation and interprets the findings from the perspective of Christian education within the Toba Batak cultural context. A quantitative approach with a simple linear regression design was employed. The study involved 30 Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 1 Lintong Nihuta, Humbang Hasundutan Regency, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a 60-item questionnaire measuring parental roles and students' social character and were analyzed using descriptive statistics, simple linear regression, and a t-test. The results produced the regression equation $\hat{Y} = 50.24 + 0.43X$ and a t-value of 3.804, exceeding the critical value of 2.048, indicating a positive and statistically significant influence of parental roles on students' social character. Item-level analysis revealed that parental guidance based on Christ's teachings was strongest, whereas the habituation of concern for others was comparatively weaker. The findings are interpreted through the intersection of faith, family, and culture, with Dalihan Na Tolu providing a contextual framework for understanding relational values such as respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and care. Toba Batak culture is employed as an interpretive context rather than a statistically measured variable. The study highlights the importance of integrating Christian faith, parental practices, and local cultural wisdom in developing contextual Christian character education.

Keywords: parental roles; social character; Christian education; Toba Batak culture; Dalihan Na Tolu

Introduction

Education is not merely concerned with the development of students' academic competence but also with the formation of character that enables them to live responsibly within families, schools, and society. Social character is particularly important during adolescence because students increasingly encounter complex interpersonal relationships that require empathy, respect, responsibility, cooperation, self-control, and concern for others. Character formation, however, does not occur exclusively through formal education at school. It develops continuously through interactions between individuals and their social

environments, particularly within the family. Parents constitute children's earliest and most immediate educators, whose example, guidance, discipline, communication, and habituation contribute to the formation of attitudes and patterns of social behavior (Widiyanto & Nurfaizah, 2023). Studies of parental involvement in character education similarly emphasize that parents influence character through modeling, supervision, direction, discipline, and the cultivation of responsibility (Fitri et al., 2023; Ikhsaniyah & Wijaya, 2022; Permata, 2022). Thus, the family should be understood not merely as a private domestic environment but as a formative educational space in which children first learn how values are embodied in relationships.

Within Christian education, parental responsibility extends beyond meeting children's physical, emotional, and educational needs. Parents function as primary educators who introduce, model, and habituate Christian values in everyday life. This responsibility corresponds with the biblical principle expressed in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, which situates faith education within the ordinary rhythms of family life. Christian education in the family therefore encompasses more than verbal religious instruction. It involves parental example, guidance, discipline, communication, spiritual habituation, and opportunities for children to translate faith into relationships with others.

Empirical research strengthens this perspective. Ester et al. (2022) found that Christian religious education in the family and parenting patterns significantly contributed to the formation of Christlike character among adolescents. Purba (2021) likewise reported a significant relationship between Christian education in the family and adolescent character formation. More recently, Purba and Retno (2023) emphasized parental guidance, mentoring, and supervision as important dimensions of Christian family education amid the challenges faced by Generation Z in an increasingly digital environment. These studies suggest that Christian character formation cannot be separated from the quality of educational relationships experienced by adolescents within their families.

The formative role of parents becomes increasingly significant amid contemporary social and technological changes. Digital technology expands adolescents' access to information, communication, and social networks while simultaneously creating new environments in which values and identities are negotiated. Ngafifi (2014) notes that technological development has transformed lifestyles and patterns of social behavior. In this context, family education must operate alongside influences arising from peers, schools, digital media, and wider society. Purba and Retno (2023) particularly highlight the importance of parental guidance and supervision for Generation Z as technological development increasingly shapes children's everyday lives. ([Jurnal STTII Surabaya][2]) Parents therefore face a dual educational responsibility: preserving meaningful relationships with their children while equipping them to critically negotiate the values encountered beyond the family. Parental education, however, never occurs in a cultural vacuum. Families are embedded within particular cultural environments that provide values, symbols, relational patterns, social expectations, and inherited understandings of appropriate behavior. Culture consequently constitutes an important context in which children learn how relationships should be established and maintained. This perspective is especially relevant for students living within the Toba Batak sociocultural environment.

Toba Batak society possesses a strong kinship tradition in which relationships between individuals, families, and communities are organized through culturally inherited principles. One of its most significant relational frameworks is *Dalihan Na Tolu*, encompassing the relational positions of *hula-hula*, *dongan tubu*, and *boru*. Its educational significance extends beyond ceremonial practices because it embodies relational expectations concerning respect, reciprocity, responsibility, solidarity, and appropriate social conduct. Sitanggang et al. (2020) identify educational values within *Dalihan Na Tolu*, including respect, appreciation, courtesy, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and care. Other forms of Toba Batak cultural expression likewise demonstrate the potential of local wisdom as a resource for character education. Isman et al. (2022), for example, discuss character-forming values embedded in the traditional Batak Toba game *Margala*, illustrating that cultural practices can function as educational resources rather than merely as inherited traditions.

The contemporary relevance of this cultural framework is nevertheless accompanied by challenges of intergenerational transmission. Napitupulu et al. (2024) found that *Dalihan Na Tolu* continues to function as an important worldview for character formation in Toba Batak society, while also identifying differences in its understanding and implementation across generations. Such findings demonstrate that local cultural values cannot simply be assumed to pass automatically from parents to children. Families become crucial spaces in which inherited values are preserved, interpreted, negotiated, or gradually weakened. Sitorus et al. (2024) similarly identify *Dalihan Na Tolu*, *Hamoraon*, *Hagabeon*, and *Hasangapon* as Toba Batak cultural resources with potential relevance to character and multicultural education. This cultural perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, which was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Lintong Nihuta, Humbang Hasundutan Regency. Preliminary observations during a four-month field experience identified several social-character concerns among students, including limited empathy, insufficient responsibility, lack of concern for peers and others, and weaknesses in group cooperation. The students live at the intersection of family education, Christian values, peer relationships, technological change, and the Toba Batak cultural environment. Accordingly, parental roles in this study are understood through five dimensions: cultivating Christian faith through teaching and spiritual habituation, guiding children in making decisions based on Christian values, encouraging discipline and responsibility, developing character through consistent example and guidance, and directing children toward service to others. Students' social character is represented through love for others, respect, social concern, peaceful coexistence, and social responsibility. These dimensions reveal an important conceptual intersection between Christian education and the relational orientation embedded within Toba Batak culture.

Christian values and Toba Batak cultural values should not simply be equated. Contextual Christian education requires critical dialogue between faith and culture rather than uncritical adoption of every cultural practice. Christian education provides theological and ethical orientations centered on love, service, peace, responsibility, and concern for others, while Toba Batak cultural traditions provide historically embedded relational structures through which respect, reciprocity, responsibility, solidarity, and communal belonging can be practiced. Local wisdom can therefore function as a contextual educational resource when critically interpreted in dialogue with Christian faith. Previous studies have provided

important foundations for understanding these domains separately. Research has demonstrated the significance of parental involvement in character formation (Fitri et al., 2023; Ikhsaniyah & Wijaya, 2022; Permata, 2022; Widiyanto & Nurfaizah, 2023), the contribution of Christian family education to adolescent character formation (Ester et al., 2022; Purba, 2021; Purba & Retno, 2023), and the educational potential of Toba Batak local wisdom (Isman et al., 2022; Napitupulu et al., 2024; Sitanggang et al., 2020; Sitorus et al., 2024). However, comparatively less attention has been given to empirically examining parental roles in students' social character formation while simultaneously interpreting those findings through both Christian education and the Toba Batak relational context.

The novelty of this study therefore lies in bringing together three interconnected domains: parental formation, Christian education, and Toba Batak relational culture. Culture is not introduced as an additional statistical variable; rather, it serves as an interpretive context for understanding the empirical relationship between parental roles and students' social character. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the influence of parental roles on the social character formation of Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 1 Lintong Nihuta and to interpret the findings from the perspective of Christian education within the Toba Batak cultural context.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach with a simple linear regression design to examine the influence of parental roles on students' social character. The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Lintong Nihuta, Humbang Hasundutan Regency, during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The quantitative approach was used because the study focused on measuring the influence of parental roles as the independent variable (X) on students' social character as the dependent variable (Y) through numerical data and statistical analysis. The Toba Batak cultural context was not treated as an additional research variable; rather, it was employed as a contextual perspective in interpreting the empirical findings. This distinction was maintained because the original research instrument specifically measured parental roles and students' social character rather than cultural orientation or students' adherence to particular Toba Batak cultural practices. The research population consisted of 300 Grade XI students, distributed across ten classes from XI F1 to XI F10. A total of 30 students from Class XI F8 were selected as the research sample using purposive sampling. The selection of this class was based on preliminary observations conducted during a four-month field experience, which identified social-character issues corresponding to the focus of the study. These included limited empathy, responsibility, concern for peers and others, as well as weaknesses in group cooperation. Therefore, the sample was deliberately selected on the basis of characteristics relevant to the phenomenon being investigated rather than through random selection. Consequently, the findings are interpreted within the specific context of the participants involved and are not intended to statistically represent all Grade XI students beyond the research setting.

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of 60 statements, comprising 30 items for the parental role variable and 30 items for the social character variable. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale consisting of *Always* (4), *Often* (3), *Sometimes* (2), and *Never* (1). The data

collection process involved determining the respondents, distributing the questionnaire through Google Forms, assisting students during questionnaire completion, checking the completeness of their responses, and organizing the collected data for statistical analysis.

The parental role variable (X) was operationalized through five dimensions based on the framework used in the original research instrument: (1) instilling Christian faith through teaching and spiritual habituation, (2) guiding children in making decisions based on Christian values, (3) encouraging discipline and responsibility in everyday life, (4) forming character through consistent example and guidance, and (5) directing children toward serving others. These dimensions conceptualize parents as educators whose responsibilities encompass spiritual, moral, and social formation. The students' social character variable (Y) was measured through five dimensions: loving others, respecting others, demonstrating social concern, living peacefully with others, and demonstrating social responsibility.

Instrument quality was assessed through validity and reliability testing. The validity test showed that all 30 items measuring parental roles were valid, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.407 to 0.806, while all 30 items measuring students' social character were also valid, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.416 to 0.810. These coefficients exceeded the critical value of 0.361 applied in the original instrument testing. Reliability testing yielded coefficients of 0.935 for the parental role variable and 0.939 for the social character variable, indicating strong internal consistency for both instruments. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive analysis was used to identify response patterns across questionnaire items and to determine aspects of parental roles and social character that appeared more or less prominently among the respondents. Inferential analysis employed simple linear regression to examine the direction and magnitude of the influence of parental roles on students' social character. A *t-test* at a significance level of 5% was used to determine whether the observed influence was statistically significant. The research hypothesis proposed that parental roles have a positive and significant influence on the social character formation of Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 1 Lintong Nihuta. The source manuscript explicitly identifies simple linear regression and the *t-test* as the statistical procedures used in the study.

In accordance with the contextual orientation of this article, the quantitative results were subsequently interpreted through the perspectives of Christian education and Toba Batak culture. This interpretive stage did not introduce Toba Batak culture as a new statistical variable or claim a causal relationship between cultural values and students' social character. Instead, the empirical findings concerning parental roles and social character were brought into dialogue with relevant literature on Christian family education and Toba Batak relational values, particularly *Dalihan Na Tolu*. This approach allowed the statistical findings to be situated within the sociocultural environment in which the students live while preserving the methodological boundaries of the original quantitative study. Thus, the study combines an empirical analysis of the relationship between parental roles and social character with a contextual interpretation that considers the intersection of family, Christian education, and Toba Batak cultural values.

Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that parental roles make a positive contribution to students' social character formation. Simple linear regression produced the equation $\hat{Y} = 50.24 + 0.43X$. The positive regression coefficient indicates that every one-unit increase in the parental role variable is associated with an estimated 0.43-unit increase in students' social character scores. Hypothesis testing produced $t = 3.804$, exceeding the critical value of 2.048 at the 5% significance level with 28 degrees of freedom. Therefore, within this sample, parental roles had a statistically significant positive influence on students' social character. This finding is consistent with a broader body of literature positioning parents as significant agents of character formation. Widiyanto and Nurfaizah (2023) emphasize accompaniment, supervision, guidance, encouragement, and motivation as important expressions of parental involvement. Fitri et al. (2023) likewise identify parental example, discipline, responsibility, supervision, and direction as important components of family-based character education. Although studies involving younger children cannot be directly generalized to adolescents, they reinforce the broader educational principle that character develops through repeated relational experiences within the family.

Within Christian education, this relationship has particular significance. Ester et al. (2022) found that Christian religious education in the family significantly influenced Christlike character formation among adolescents and that parenting patterns also contributed significantly to such formation. Similarly, Purba (2021), in a quantitative study involving 30 respondents, reported a significant influence of Christian education in the family on adolescent character formation. The present findings therefore extend an existing line of evidence by focusing specifically on social character, including love, respect, social concern, peaceful coexistence, and responsibility.

From Christian Moral Instruction to Social Practice

A particularly important finding emerges at the item level. The highest parental-role score concerned parents guiding students to consider the teachings of Christ before acting ($M = 3.69$), whereas the lowest score concerned parents teaching children to care for others ($M = 2.10$). This contrast suggests that Christian formation among the participating families appears comparatively stronger in explicit moral orientation than in the habituation of concrete social concern. This distinction is significant because Christian character education cannot be reduced to cognitive knowledge of religious norms. Purba (2021) positions Christian education within the family as an important means of adolescent character formation, while Ester et al. (2022) demonstrate empirically that family-based Christian religious education contributes to Christlike character formation. Purba and Retno (2023) further emphasize parental guidance, mentoring, and supervision in responding to the character challenges experienced by Generation Z within a technologically saturated environment. Taken together, these studies support the need to understand Christian parenting as a process in which teaching, example, habituation, guidance, and practical experience operate together. The present findings add an important nuance to this discussion. Knowing Christian teachings and practicing Christian social ethics are related but not identical educational outcomes. Parents may successfully communicate what children ought to believe or consider when making

decisions, yet social concern requires repeated opportunities to transform those beliefs into action. Christian family education should therefore provide concrete experiences through which adolescents practice empathy, cooperation, reconciliation, responsibility, service, and concern for people beyond themselves.

Social Character within the Toba Batak Relational Context

The significance of these findings becomes more contextually visible when interpreted within Toba Batak relational culture. Methodologically, however, this study did not measure students' adherence to *Dalihan Na Tolu* or any other Toba Batak cultural construct. Consequently, culture cannot be presented as a statistically demonstrated cause of the observed social-character outcomes. In the research design, Toba Batak culture functions as an interpretive context. Within that interpretive boundary, meaningful intersections emerge. Sitanggang et al. (2020) identify respect, appreciation, courtesy, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and care within *Dalihan Na Tolu*. These values intersect conceptually with several dimensions measured in the present study, especially respect, social concern, peaceful coexistence, and social responsibility. Other Toba Batak cultural practices also contain educational possibilities. Isman et al. (2022), for example, position the traditional game *Margala* as a form of local wisdom relevant to students' character formation. Such scholarship suggests that Toba Batak culture contains multiple pedagogical resources through which relational values can be made meaningful to younger generations.

This convergence should not be interpreted as an equivalence between Christian theology and Toba Batak culture. Rather, it provides a point of contextual dialogue. Christian teachings concerning love, service, peace, respect, and responsibility can critically engage cultural practices emphasizing relational obligations, reciprocity, solidarity, and communal responsibility. The educational objective is therefore neither to Christianize every cultural practice uncritically nor to reduce Christian ethics to cultural conformity. Instead, contextual Christian education enables students to critically interpret cultural resources through theological and ethical discernment.

Intergenerational Transmission and Contemporary Change

The comparatively low score for parental teaching of concern for others becomes particularly noteworthy when considered alongside research concerning the intergenerational transmission of Toba Batak relational values. Napitupulu et al. (2024) document differences in the understanding and implementation of *Dalihan Na Tolu* across generations. The present study cannot claim that such cultural change caused the lower social-concern score; doing so would exceed the evidence generated by the research instrument. The two findings raise a relevant educational question: how can families maintain relational and communal values amid rapidly changing social environments?

This question becomes particularly significant because adolescents encounter multiple sources of identity and values. Technological development changes patterns of social interaction (Ngafifi, 2014), while contemporary Christian parenting must address the realities of digitally connected younger generations. Purba and Retno (2023) argue that parental guidance, mentoring, and supervision remain essential in the context of technological change

affecting Generation Z. Family-based character formation therefore cannot depend on passive cultural inheritance. Values must be communicated, modeled, discussed, practiced, and critically interpreted within the realities experienced by contemporary adolescents.

In this respect, parents may be understood as intergenerational mediators. They do not merely transfer Christian teaching and cultural traditions unchanged. They help adolescents interpret what these values mean in new social circumstances. This role becomes especially important when cultural practices are confronted with globalization, digital communication, changing patterns of social relationships, and increasingly plural environments.

Integrating Faith, Family, and Culture

The central theoretical contribution emerging from the findings can be expressed through the intersection of faith, family, and culture. Faith provides theological and ethical orientation; family provides the primary relational environment in which values are taught, modeled, negotiated, and practiced; and culture provides the social language and relational structures through which many values acquire contextual meaning. This three-dimensional interpretation is already implicit in the empirical and contextual structure of the study.

Recent Christian education scholarship reinforces the first two dimensions. Ester et al. (2022) demonstrate the importance of Christian religious education and parenting patterns in adolescent character formation, while Purba (2021) identifies Christian family education as significantly associated with adolescent character development. Purba and Retno (2023) extend this discussion into the technological context of Generation Z, emphasizing continued parental responsibility for education, guidance, and supervision. Meanwhile, research on Toba Batak local wisdom demonstrates that cultural practices and relational frameworks can provide resources for character education (Isman et al., 2022; Napitupulu et al., 2024; Sitanggang et al., 2020; Sitorus et al., 2024).

The distinctive contribution of the present study lies in placing these domains in dialogue rather than examining them independently. The positive statistical relationship between parental roles and students' social character provides the empirical foundation, while Christian education and Toba Batak relational culture provide interpretive frameworks for understanding how such formation can become both theologically grounded and culturally meaningful.

Implications for Contextual Christian Character Education

Several educational implications follow from these findings. First, parents need to be understood as active educational partners rather than merely supervisors of adolescent behavior. Character formation requires consistency between what parents teach and what adolescents experience in everyday family relationships. Second, the contrast between strong Christ-centered moral guidance and comparatively weaker teaching of social concern indicates the importance of moving from Christian moral instruction to Christian social practice. Adolescents require opportunities to practice empathy, cooperation, reconciliation, responsibility, and service rather than merely learning these concepts. Third, schools and families can strengthen collaboration in character education. Students move continuously between family, school, church, peer groups, digital environments, and the wider community.

Character education will consequently be more coherent when these formative environments are connected rather than operating independently. Fourth, Toba Batak local wisdom can be employed as a contextual pedagogical resource. *Dalihan Na Tolu*, for example, can provide culturally intelligible situations through which students critically explore respect, reciprocity, responsibility, care, and communal relationships. Finally, contextualization should remain both critical and inclusive. The purpose of incorporating Toba Batak local wisdom is not to restrict character formation to solidarity within one kinship or ethnic community. Christian education can broaden culturally embedded relational values toward an ethic of love, service, peace, dignity, and responsibility that extends across ethnic, religious, and social differences. In this sense, local culture functions as a pedagogical starting point rather than the final boundary of social responsibility.

Conclusion

This study concludes that parental roles have a positive and statistically significant influence on the social character formation of Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 1 Lintong Nihuta. The simple linear regression equation ($\hat{Y} = 50.24 + 0.43X$) indicates a positive relationship between parental roles and students' social character, while the hypothesis test ($t = 3.804 > 2.048$) confirms the statistical significance of this relationship within the sample. These findings support the understanding that the family constitutes an important formative environment in which adolescents learn social values through parental guidance, example, discipline, spiritual habituation, and everyday relational experiences. Beyond the overall statistical relationship, the item-level findings reveal an important tension within parental character formation. Parental guidance encouraging students to consider the teachings of Christ before acting obtained the highest score ($M = 3.69$), whereas parental teaching concerning care for others obtained the lowest score ($M = 2.10$). This contrast suggests that Christian formation within the family may be stronger in providing explicit moral and religious orientation than in habituating social concern through everyday practice. Therefore, Christian family education needs to move beyond the transmission of religious knowledge toward the embodiment of faith through empathy, responsibility, cooperation, peaceful relationships, service, and concrete concern for others. The principal contribution of this study is therefore the integration of faith, family, and culture as an interpretive framework for contextual Christian character education. Faith provides the theological orientation of character formation, the family serves as the primary relational environment in which values are modeled and practiced, and culture provides the social context through which relational values acquire concrete meaning. In this framework, parents function not merely as supervisors of adolescent behavior but as mediators who help students translate Christian values into socially responsible practices while critically engaging the relational wisdom of Toba Batak culture. Christian character education can consequently remain theologically grounded while becoming culturally contextual and socially transformative.

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