

A Socio-Economic Empowerment-Based Christian Religious Education Model for Congregational Poverty Alleviation in GMIT Kupang City

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Abstract

Poverty among church congregations is a multidimensional issue that involves not only economic limitations but also restricted access to education, human capacity development, employment opportunities, and social participation. This study aims to analyze the socio-economic conditions of congregations, examine Christian Religious Education (CRE) practices, identify socio-economic empowerment needs, and develop a contextual CRE model based on socio-economic empowerment for alleviating congregational poverty in the Evangelical Christian Church in Timor (GMIT), Kupang City Classis. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving eight church leaders selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis and validated through source and methodological triangulation. The findings reveal that congregational poverty is characterized by informal employment, unstable income, limited economic opportunities, and restricted human resource capacity, while congregations also possess social capital through fellowship, mutual assistance, and collective responsibility. CRE practices remain primarily focused on spiritual formation, whereas socio-economic empowerment has not yet been systematically integrated into congregational education. This study proposes a contextual CRE model integrating faith formation, mindset transformation, capacity development, productive economic empowerment, continuous mentoring, partnership development, and monitoring and evaluation. The study contributes theoretically by expanding the role of CRE as a transformative educational practice and practically by providing a framework for churches to develop sustainable strategies for strengthening congregational independence and poverty alleviation.

Keywords: christian education; congregational poverty; evangelical christian church in timor; socio-economic empowerment; transformative education



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INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains one of the fundamental social problems affecting human development, including within religious communities. Poverty is not merely associated with limited economic resources but also involves restricted access to education, human capacity development, employment opportunities, family welfare, and social participation. In the context of church communities, economic vulnerability may influence not only the ability of congregants to fulfill daily needs but also their involvement in church activities, Christian education, and the development of their personal potential. Therefore, poverty alleviation requires a holistic approach that not only provides economic assistance but also strengthens human capacity and community empowerment.

East Nusa Tenggara Province (NTT), including Kupang City, continues to face significant socio-economic challenges. According to Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, 2024), the poverty rate in NTT reached 19.96% in March 2024, the highest among all provinces in Indonesia, with approximately 1.19 million people classified as poor. In Kupang City specifically, the poverty rate stood at 8.17%, with approximately 65,000 residents living below the poverty line (BPS Kupang City, 2024). Although Kupang City serves as the center of government and economic activity in NTT, many families still depend on informal employment sectors with unstable income

conditions. This situation affects household resilience and creates challenges for communities in improving their quality of life. In the context of the church, economic limitations may influence congregational participation, access to education, and the ability of members to develop their potential.

The Evangelical Christian Church in Timor (GMIT) has an important role as both a spiritual and social institution in responding to these realities. Christian Religious Education (CRE) is fundamentally not limited to transmitting religious knowledge but also functions as a means of transforming human life holistically. Groome (2010) argues that CRE should encourage the integration between faith reflection and concrete human experiences. Thus, CRE has the potential to contribute to social transformation, including responding to socio-economic problems experienced by congregations.

However, CRE within church contexts has generally remained focused on spiritual formation, worship, catechesis, and moral development, while socio-economic empowerment has not yet become an integrated component of congregational education. Preliminary interviews with church leaders in Kupang (personal communication, 2026) revealed that many congregational members still experience economic difficulties and that empowerment programs have not yet been implemented optimally and sustainably, while congregational development activities have mainly emphasized spiritual aspects.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of education and empowerment in improving community capacity. Research on empowerment-based education indicates that strengthening knowledge, skills, and self-capacity can create opportunities for individuals and communities to improve their socio-economic conditions (Andrian, 2024). In the field of CRE, several studies have emphasized that it contributes to character formation, spiritual growth, and social responsibility (Tafonao & Zega, 2022). Furthermore, studies on church-based social ministry show that churches can become agents of social transformation when spiritual ministry is integrated with responses to community needs (Zega, 2021; Setiawan, 2021). Sianipar (2017) explains that liberative education seeks to develop critical awareness, strengthen individual capacity, and encourage concrete actions that enable people to overcome conditions of limitation.

Nevertheless, a theoretical gap exists: research on CRE has predominantly focused on spiritual formation while the socio-economic dimension has received limited attention, and studies on economic empowerment have generally not integrated Christian education as a transformative framework. A practical gap also remains, as church-based poverty alleviation programs often emphasize short-term assistance rather than sustainable empowerment models. Although GMIT has implemented various forms of social ministry, research specifically examining a contextual CRE model based on socio-economic empowerment within GMIT Kupang City Classis remains limited.

This study offers novelty by developing a CRE model based on socio-economic empowerment that integrates faith formation, capacity building, economic empowerment, mentoring, and holistic church ministry. Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to analyze the socio-economic conditions of congregations, identify existing CRE practices, explore congregational empowerment needs, and formulate a contextual CRE model based on socio-economic empowerment for GMIT Kupang City Classis. Theoretically, this research contributes to CRE studies by expanding its role as a transformative educational practice. Practically, it provides a contextual framework for churches in designing sustainable empowerment strategies to strengthen congregational independence and support poverty alleviation.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aimed to explore and understand the experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities of congregations regarding socio-economic conditions, CRE practices, and the development of a socio-economic empowerment model. Qualitative research is appropriate when researchers seek to understand meanings, experiences, and social phenomena within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted in the congregational environment of GMIT, Kupang City Classis, in 2026. The research focused on three main aspects: congregational socio-economic conditions, CRE practices, and the components required to develop a contextual empowerment-based CRE model. The research procedure involved several systematic stages: problem identification, preliminary observation, data collection, data analysis, synthesis of findings, conceptual model formulation, and model validation. The overall research flow is presented in Figure 1.

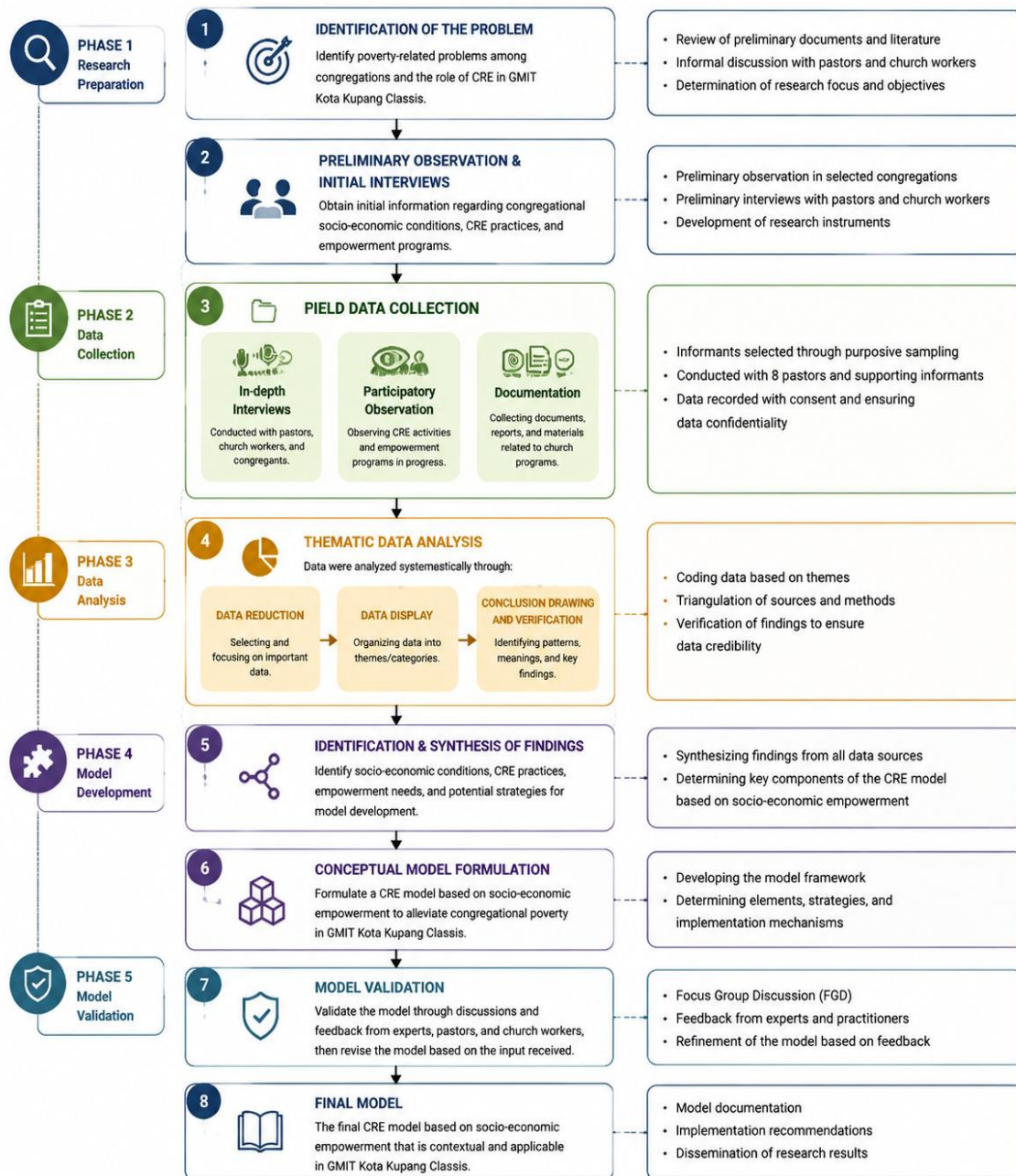


Figure 1. Research Procedure for Developing a Christian Religious Education Model Based on Socio-Economic Empowerment (Figure 1 depicts a sequential flowchart: Problem Identification → Preliminary Observation → Data Collection [interviews, observation, documentation] → Thematic Analysis → Synthesis of Findings → Conceptual Model Formulation → Model Validation [expert FGD] → Final Contextual CRE Model.)

The participants were selected using purposive sampling because qualitative research requires information-rich participants who have relevant knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2022). The participants consisted of eight church leaders serving in different GMIT congregations within Kupang City. Selection criteria included direct involvement in congregational services, understanding of congregational conditions, and experience in implementing church development programs.

Note: This study employed participant codes (I1–I8) in reporting all findings to protect participant identities, consistent with the study's ethical commitments. Table 1 presents participant characteristics using codes only.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Code	Position/Role	Congregation
I1	Congregational Leader	GMIT Gunung Sinai Naikolan
I2	Pastor/Vice Chair of Congregational Council	GMIT Imanuel Oepura
I3	Vice Chair of Congregational Council	GMIT Agape Kupang
I4	Congregational Leader	GMIT Filipi Batuplat
I5	Congregational Leader	GMIT Karmel Fatululi
I6	Congregational Leader	GMIT Bahtera Hayat Osmok
I7	Congregational Leader	GMIT Bethlehem Penkase Oeleta
I8	Congregational Leader	GMIT Theodosius Bonik

Source: Research data (2026).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The research instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the study's objectives, which provides a balance between structured inquiry and flexibility (Lune & Berg, 2017). The interview questions covered congregational socio-economic conditions, forms of CRE implementation, existing empowerment programs, challenges, and elements needed in developing a socio-economic empowerment-based CRE model.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018), which enables researchers to identify, organize, and interpret patterns or themes within qualitative data systematically (Kurata et al., 2025). The analysis process involved data familiarization, coding, theme identification, review and refinement of themes, and interpretation of findings. This study did not employ dedicated qualitative data analysis software; all coding and thematic identification were performed manually by the research team through systematic reading and categorization of interview transcripts. The credibility of findings was maintained through source triangulation (comparing information across participants) and methodological triangulation (comparing interview results, observations, and documentation). Trustworthiness criteria, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, were applied as guidelines (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The conceptual model was validated through a focus group discussion (FGD) involving three academic validators with expertise in Christian religious education and community development. The validation process assessed three criteria: (1) theoretical coherence, whether model components are grounded in relevant educational and empowerment theory; (2) contextual relevance, whether the model reflects the socio-economic realities of GMIT Kupang City Classis; and (3) practical feasibility, whether the model is implementable within church settings. Following the FGD, the model was revised to strengthen the integration between faith formation and economic empowerment components and to clarify the role of monitoring and evaluation in sustaining program outcomes. The validators affirmed that the model is theoretically sound and contextually appropriate.

Ethical procedures were applied throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of information provided. Participant identities were protected in reporting using codes (I1–I8). This study was conducted within the institutional research framework of Politeknik Negeri Kupang. In accordance with the institutional research regulations applicable at the time, formal ethical review by an external ethics committee was not mandated for qualitative

social research of this type at the authors' institution; the study adhered to the ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and participant protection.

It should be acknowledged explicitly that all eight participants were church leaders (pastors and ministry workers). Ordinary congregation members, those who directly experience poverty, were not included in data collection. This represents a potential elite bias in which the perspectives of those who experience poverty firsthand are not directly represented. The findings and the proposed model are thus primarily based on leaders' observations and perceptions rather than on the lived experiences of congregants themselves. Future research should incorporate the perspectives of ordinary congregation members to strengthen the model's contextual validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Realities of Congregations in GMIT Kupang City Classis

The findings indicate that the socio-economic realities of congregations in GMIT Kupang City Classis are characterized by diverse economic conditions and varying levels of vulnerability. The socio-economic condition of congregations cannot be understood merely from income limitations but must be examined through broader dimensions, including employment stability, educational background, human resource capacity, access to economic opportunities, and social support systems.

Thematic analysis of interview data identified three major dimensions: (1) economic vulnerability among congregational members, (2) factors influencing socio-economic conditions, and (3) social capital as a potential foundation for empowerment. The coding process is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Coding of Congregational Socio-Economic Realities

Initial Findings	Sub-themes	Main Themes
Small traders, daily laborers, farmers, craftsmen, tailors, scavengers, online motorcycle taxi drivers, and temporary workers	Dominance of informal employment	Congregational economic vulnerability
Unstable income, seasonal employment, and dependence on daily work opportunities	Income uncertainty	Congregational economic vulnerability
Limited employment opportunities and limited productive assets	Structural barriers	Factors influencing socio-economic conditions
Limited education and human resource capacity	Capacity limitations	Factors influencing socio-economic conditions
Mindset, motivation, discipline, and participation in empowerment programs	Internal factors influencing empowerment	Factors influencing socio-economic conditions
Fellowship, mutual assistance, kinship, and cooperation	Social capital	Congregational potential
Work schedules affecting worship participation and church activities	Economic pressure on church involvement	Impact on congregational life

Source: Research data analysis (2026).

In GMIT Gunung Sinai Naikolan, approximately 75% of congregational members belong to the lower-middle economic category, working in informal sectors including selling vegetables, fish, and cakes, managing small kiosks, weaving, and taking temporary jobs (I1, 2026). A similar pattern was identified in GMIT Bahtera Hayat Osmok, where members work in farming, small businesses, scavenging, daily labor, and online transportation, with unstable income prevalent (I6, 2026).

These findings demonstrate that congregational poverty in GMIT Kupang City Classis is a multidimensional condition. Poverty is not simply a consequence of low income but is also associated with limited access to employment, education, skills development, and productive resources. This finding is consistent with Sen's (1999) capability approach, which explains that poverty fundamentally reflects limitations

in people's capabilities and freedoms to achieve a meaningful quality of life — not merely income deficits. The NTT provincial poverty data (BPS, 2024) contextualizes this: NTT's 19.96% poverty rate indicates that the economic vulnerability found among GMIT congregations reflects broader structural challenges, not merely individual circumstances.

Critically, what distinguishes this study from previous church-based poverty research (e.g., Nugroho, 2019; Pattiasina, 2021) is its location in an urban classis setting (Kupang City) rather than a rural community. Despite Kupang's urban character, informal employment and economic precarity persist, suggesting that urbanization alone does not resolve structural poverty. This implies that empowerment models designed for rural contexts may require significant adaptation to address the specific vulnerabilities of urban-poor congregations — a dimension underexplored in the existing literature.

Another important finding is the existence of strong social capital within congregational communities. Despite economic challenges, congregations maintain strong relationships of mutual assistance, fellowship, and collective responsibility: "The fellowship among members is strong, and the bonds of brotherhood are strong. They support one another and care for each other" (I1, 2026). These social resources represent important strengths that can support sustainable empowerment programs, consistent with the role of bonding social capital in community development (Likumahwa et al., 2020).

Christian Religious Education Practices in Congregational Life

The findings of this study indicate that Christian Religious Education (CRE) practices within GMIT Kupang City Classis are primarily oriented toward spiritual formation, faith development, and strengthening congregational fellowship. However, the findings also reveal that CRE has not yet been fully developed as an educational process that systematically integrates socio-economic empowerment. Thematic analysis identified three main dimensions related to CRE practices: (1) spiritual and faith-oriented education, (2) contextual educational practices within congregational life, and (3) limitations in integrating CRE with socio-economic empowerment. The thematic coding results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Thematic Coding of Christian Religious Education Practices in Congregational Life

Initial Findings	Sub-themes	Main Themes
Worship services, sermons, Bible study, catechism, pastoral visits, family worship	Spiritual formation and faith development	Spiritual-oriented CRE practices
Christian values, character formation, moral guidance, fellowship strengthening	Formation of Christian identity	Spiritual-oriented CRE practices
Pastoral assistance, social ministry, congregational mentoring	Contextual implementation of CRE	Contextual CRE practices
Productive diaconia, business assistance, economic support programs	Early integration of empowerment initiatives	CRE and socio-economic empowerment
Limited economic education, lack of systematic empowerment curriculum	Limited integration between faith education and economic development	Challenges of CRE implementation

Source: Research data analysis (2026).

The findings show that CRE within GMIT congregations is primarily implemented through conventional church activities such as worship services, sermons, Bible studies, catechism, pastoral visits, and categorical ministry activities. These activities function as important means for strengthening faith, building Christian character, and maintaining fellowship among congregational members.

One informant explained that CRE activities in the congregation are mainly carried out through spiritual guidance, Bible teaching, worship, and pastoral accompaniment. The main objective of these activities is to strengthen members' faith and encourage Christian values in daily life (I2, 2026). Similarly, other informants explained that church education activities emphasize spiritual growth, moral formation, and strengthening

relationships among members (I3; I5, 2026).

One informant stated: “The educational process within the congregation is mainly directed toward strengthening faith, understanding God’s Word, and shaping the character of believers in everyday life.” (I2, 2026, translated from Indonesian)

This finding indicates that CRE in GMIT Kupang City Classis has maintained its fundamental role as a means of faith formation. This is consistent with the understanding of Christian education as a process that seeks to nurture individuals spiritually, morally, and communally. (Groome, 2014) explains that Christian Religious Education is not merely a process of transferring religious knowledge but a shared process of reflecting on faith and connecting it with human experiences.

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of CRE remains predominantly focused on spiritual dimensions and has not yet systematically addressed socio-economic challenges experienced by congregations. Several informants acknowledged that although the church provides pastoral support and social assistance, economic empowerment has not become an integrated component of CRE planning and implementation.

One informant explained: “The church has provided spiritual guidance and assistance, but programs related to economic strengthening and improving congregational skills still need to be developed further.” (I6, 2026, translated from Indonesian)

This condition shows a gap between the holistic nature of Christian education and its current implementation. In a broader perspective, CRE has the potential to address social realities because Christian faith is closely connected with responsibility toward others and efforts to transform human life. According to (Pazmino, 2008), Christian education should not only focus on individual spiritual growth but also encourage believers to participate actively in responding to social realities.

Previous studies have similarly emphasized that Christian education has a transformative dimension. (Tafonao & Zega, 2022) explain that Christian education contributes not only to spiritual maturity but also to the formation of attitudes, values, and social responsibility. However, their study primarily focuses on educational and spiritual formation aspects, while the connection between CRE and socio-economic empowerment remains less explored.

Within GMIT Kupang City Classis, some forms of contextual CRE practices have already emerged through church social ministries. Several congregations have developed activities such as productive diaconia, business assistance, economic support, and community-based programs. These initiatives demonstrate that the church has begun to respond to socio-economic realities beyond traditional spiritual services.

For example, informants described that some congregations provide assistance through productive programs aimed at helping members develop economic activities. These programs include small business support, assistance for productive activities, and social services for vulnerable members (I1; I4; I7, 2026). However, these initiatives are generally implemented as separate church programs and have not yet been integrated into a structured CRE framework.

This finding is important because it indicates that the challenge is not the absence of church concern toward economic issues, but rather the absence of an integrated educational framework connecting faith formation, empowerment, and economic transformation. Previous research on church-based empowerment programs shows that churches have significant potential as agents of social transformation through economic assistance and community development initiatives (Zega, 2021);(Nugroho, 2019). However, these studies generally examine empowerment programs as social ministries rather than as part of Christian Religious Education.

The findings of this study therefore extend previous research by positioning socio-economic empowerment as an educational dimension within CRE. Instead of viewing economic empowerment only as a diaconal responsibility, this study argues that empowerment can become part of the educational mission of the church because it involves developing knowledge, attitudes, skills, responsibility, and transformative action

among believers.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that congregational members require a form of education that connects Christian faith with practical life challenges. Several informants emphasized that congregations need guidance not only in spiritual matters but also in developing independence, skills, and the ability to manage economic resources effectively (I4; I6, 2026).

This finding aligns with the concept of holistic Christian education, which views human beings as integrated entities involving spiritual, social, intellectual, and practical dimensions. Christian education that separates spiritual growth from social and economic realities risks becoming disconnected from the lived experiences of congregational members.

Compared with previous studies, this research contributes by expanding the scope of CRE from spiritual formation toward transformative education that responds to socio-economic realities. While previous research has emphasized the role of Christian education in faith formation and character development (Keriapy, 2020);(Sianipar et al., 2022), this study demonstrates the need to integrate empowerment dimensions into CRE practices, particularly in contexts where congregations experience economic vulnerability.

Therefore, the practice of CRE in GMIT Kupang City Classis can be understood as having two important characteristics. First, CRE remains strong in spiritual formation and congregational identity development. Second, CRE requires further development toward a contextual and transformative approach that integrates faith, social responsibility, and socio-economic empowerment. These findings become the foundation for formulating a CRE model based on socio-economic empowerment.

Existing Socio-Economic Empowerment Initiatives and Their Challenges

The findings of this study indicate that GMIT Kupang City Classis has implemented several initiatives related to socio-economic empowerment as part of its ministry response to congregational needs. These initiatives demonstrate that the church does not only focus on spiritual services but also attempts to respond to economic difficulties experienced by congregational members. However, the findings also reveal that existing empowerment programs still face several challenges, particularly related to sustainability, mentoring, management capacity, and systematic integration with Christian Religious Education.

The thematic analysis identified three main dimensions related to existing socio-economic empowerment initiatives: (1) church-based empowerment programs, (2) the contribution of empowerment initiatives to congregational welfare, and (3) challenges in developing sustainable empowerment. The thematic coding results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Thematic Coding of Existing Socio-Economic Empowerment Initiatives

Initial Findings	Sub-themes	Main Themes
Productive diaconia, business assistance, social assistance, economic support programs	Church-based empowerment initiatives	Existing empowerment practices
Small business support, productive activities, assistance for vulnerable members	Strengthening economic capacity	Contribution of empowerment programs
Limited mentoring, lack of program continuity, limited management capacity	Sustainability challenges	Challenges of empowerment implementation
Dependence on assistance, limited participation, lack of follow-up evaluation	Weaknesses of empowerment programs	Challenges of empowerment implementation
Cooperation with external institutions and community networks	Partnership opportunities	Development potential

Source: Research data analysis (2026).

The findings show that several GMIT congregations have developed socio-economic empowerment initiatives through church ministries. These initiatives include productive diaconia, assistance for small

businesses, economic support programs, and social services for congregational members experiencing economic difficulties. These programs demonstrate that the church has attempted to move beyond a purely charitable approach toward efforts that encourage economic independence.

One informant explained that the church provides assistance not only in the form of direct social support but also through programs intended to help members develop productive activities: “The church tries to provide assistance according to the needs of the congregation, including supporting small businesses and helping members develop productive activities.” (I1, 2026, translated from Indonesian)

Similar experiences were found in several other congregations. Informants explained that empowerment programs were implemented through business assistance, support for vulnerable families, and efforts to strengthen members’ economic capacity (I3; I6; I7, 2026).

These findings indicate that GMIT already has an initial foundation for developing socio-economic empowerment. The church possesses institutional structures, relational networks, and theological motivations that can support empowerment efforts. This condition is consistent with previous studies showing that religious institutions have an important role in community development because they possess social trust, organizational networks, and moral influence within communities (Supriyanto, 2015).

However, the findings also reveal that existing empowerment initiatives have not yet developed into a systematic and sustainable model. Several informants explained that some programs still depend on limited funding, short-term assistance, and the initiative of certain individuals or church units. As a result, some empowerment activities have not continued optimally after initial assistance was provided.

One informant stated: “Some programs have been carried out, but the challenge is maintaining continuity. Without regular mentoring, some members experience difficulties in developing their businesses.” (I6, 2026, translated from Indonesian)

This finding indicates that economic assistance alone is insufficient to create sustainable transformation. Congregational members require continuous support through education, mentoring, skills development, and evaluation. Empowerment is not only about providing resources but also about strengthening the capacity of individuals and communities to manage and utilize those resources effectively.

This finding is consistent with the concept of empowerment proposed by (Zimmerman, 2000), which emphasizes that empowerment involves increasing individuals’ ability to control their lives, develop competencies, and participate actively in decision-making processes. Therefore, empowerment programs need to move beyond assistance provision toward capacity-building processes.

Previous research on church-based poverty alleviation also highlights similar challenges. (Pattiasina, 2021) found that churches in Kupang contribute to poverty reduction through social services and economic assistance programs. However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on sustainability, community participation, and institutional management. Similarly, (Wibowo, 2020) found that GMIT economic empowerment programs through productive initiatives have potential benefits for congregational welfare but still require stronger management systems and continuous development.

The findings of this study extend these previous studies by emphasizing that the challenge of church-based empowerment is not only related to economic resources but also to educational processes. Existing programs often operate separately from Christian Religious Education, even though empowerment requires changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, and behavior. Therefore, socio-economic empowerment should be integrated into CRE as a process of forming responsible, independent, and transformative believers.

Another important finding is the role of church networks and partnerships in supporting empowerment programs. Several informants mentioned that collaboration with external institutions, community organizations, and government programs can strengthen church empowerment initiatives (I4; I8, 2026). Such partnerships provide opportunities for expanding training, improving access to resources, and developing sustainable economic activities.

This finding supports the perspective that community empowerment requires collaboration among multiple actors. According to (Likumahwa et al., 2020), sustainable empowerment depends on participation, local capacity, and partnerships that enable communities to become active subjects of development rather than passive recipients of assistance.

Nevertheless, the findings show that existing empowerment initiatives in GMIT Kupang City Classis still require a more integrated framework. The current programs demonstrate the church's commitment to addressing socio-economic issues, but they have not yet been systematically connected with educational processes that strengthen faith, awareness, skills, and economic independence.

Compared with previous studies, this research contributes by identifying the need to reposition church empowerment programs within the framework of Christian Religious Education. Previous research has generally examined church economic programs as social ministry initiatives (Zega, 2021);(Nehe, 2020), whereas this study argues that empowerment should become part of a holistic educational process within the church.

Therefore, existing socio-economic empowerment initiatives in GMIT Kupang City Classis provide an important foundation for developing a more comprehensive model. The church already possesses programs, social networks, and community trust; however, these resources require integration with systematic education, mentoring, and evaluation mechanisms. These findings become the basis for identifying the needs required in developing a Christian Religious Education model based on socio-economic empowerment.

Congregational Needs for a Socio-Economic Empowerment-Based CRE Model

The findings of this study indicate that the development of a Christian Religious Education (CRE) model based on socio-economic empowerment requires an understanding of the actual needs of congregations. Based on interviews with church leaders, congregational needs are not limited to economic assistance but include broader aspects such as capacity development, mindset transformation, skills improvement, continuous mentoring, and partnership support. These findings demonstrate that sustainable empowerment requires an educational process that strengthens both spiritual and socio-economic dimensions of congregational life.

The thematic analysis identified four main dimensions of congregational needs: (1) transformation of mindset and awareness, (2) development of skills and human capacity, (3) sustainable mentoring and assistance, and (4) partnership and institutional support. The thematic coding results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Thematic Coding of Congregational Needs for a Socio-Economic Empowerment-Based CRE Model

Initial Findings	Sub-themes	Main Themes
Need for awareness, motivation, discipline, and responsibility	Mindset transformation	Capacity development needs
Need for entrepreneurship, skills training, and economic literacy	Skills and human resource development	Capacity development needs
Need for continuous guidance and follow-up programs	Sustainable mentoring	Empowerment support needs
Need for cooperation with government, private sector, and other institutions	Partnership networks	Institutional support needs
Need to connect faith values with economic responsibility	Integration of faith and daily life	Contextual CRE needs

Source: Research data analysis (2026).

The first identified need is the transformation of congregational mindset and awareness. The findings indicate that economic empowerment cannot be achieved only through financial assistance or material support. Several informants emphasized that changes in attitudes, motivation, discipline, and responsibility are important foundations for improving congregational economic conditions.

One informant explained: “The congregation needs not only assistance but also encouragement to change their mindset, develop responsibility, and become more independent in managing their lives.” (I4, 2026, translated from Indonesian)

This finding indicates that empowerment requires an educational process that enables congregational members to become active subjects of transformation rather than passive recipients of assistance. In this context, CRE has an important role because education within the church can shape values, attitudes, and awareness that influence everyday behavior.

This finding is consistent with (Freire, 2020) concept of transformative education, which emphasizes that education should develop critical awareness and empower individuals to understand and transform their reality. Although Freire’s framework originated from broader educational contexts, its principle is relevant for CRE because Christian education also seeks to encourage believers to respond actively to social realities.

The second need identified in this study is the development of skills and human resource capacity. Informants highlighted that many congregational members require practical skills, entrepreneurship knowledge, financial management ability, and guidance in developing productive activities. Economic limitations are often connected with limited opportunities to improve capacity.

One informant stated: “Many members have potential, but they need guidance, training, and opportunities so that their abilities can be developed into productive activities.” (I6, 2026, translated from Indonesian)

This finding demonstrates that empowerment should not be understood merely as providing capital but as strengthening human capabilities. (Fitri et al., 2020) argues that development should focus on expanding people's capabilities so that they can achieve greater freedom and opportunities. Therefore, socio-economic empowerment within the church requires educational strategies that develop knowledge, skills, and confidence among congregational members.

Previous studies on community empowerment also emphasize the importance of capacity building. (Zega, 2021) found that church involvement in poverty alleviation becomes more meaningful when programs are directed toward strengthening community capacity rather than only providing short-term assistance. Similarly, (Maxi Lakapu et al., 2023) found that economic empowerment initiatives within GMIT require continuous development and management support to improve sustainability.

The third need identified is continuous mentoring. The findings show that several empowerment programs face challenges because assistance is often provided without sufficient follow-up support. Congregational members may receive initial assistance but experience difficulties in managing, developing, and sustaining their economic activities.

One informant explained: “Providing assistance is important, but it needs to be followed by guidance and evaluation so that members can continue developing their businesses.” (I7, 2026, translated from Indonesian)

This finding highlights that mentoring is a crucial component of empowerment. Empowerment is a long-term process requiring accompaniment, reflection, evaluation, and adaptation. Within the context of CRE, mentoring also reflects the pastoral dimension of education, where learning occurs through relationships and continuous accompaniment.

This perspective is supported by (Groome, 2010), who emphasizes that Christian education is a shared process involving dialogue, reflection, and connection between faith and life experiences. Therefore, mentoring in empowerment programs is not merely technical assistance but also an educational relationship that supports personal and communal transformation.

The fourth need identified is the development of partnerships and institutional support. Informants indicated that church-based empowerment requires cooperation with external institutions, including government agencies, educational institutions, business communities, and other organizations. Partnerships are needed to strengthen access to training, resources, markets, and economic opportunities.

One informant stated: “The church cannot work alone. Cooperation with other institutions is needed so that empowerment programs can develop and provide greater benefits for congregations.” (I8, 2026, translated

from Indonesian)

This finding corresponds with the perspective of (Likumahwa et al., 2020), who argues that sustainable development requires participation, collaboration, and strengthening local capacities. In the context of GMIT, partnerships can expand the capacity of churches to respond to socio-economic challenges while maintaining their theological and educational identity.

Another important finding is the need to integrate faith values with economic responsibility. Informants emphasized that economic empowerment should not be separated from Christian values such as responsibility, honesty, stewardship, service, and concern for others. Economic development within the church should therefore be understood as part of holistic Christian formation.

This finding strengthens previous studies on Christian education, which emphasize that CRE should connect faith with real-life experiences. (Zega & Tafonao, 2025) explain that Christian education has a role in shaping individuals who are not only spiritually mature but also capable of contributing positively to society.

Compared with previous research, this study contributes by identifying specific needs required for integrating socio-economic empowerment into CRE. Previous studies have discussed church empowerment programs and Christian education separately; however, this research demonstrates that effective empowerment requires an educational framework that combines spiritual formation, capacity development, mentoring, and partnership networks.

Therefore, the needs identified in GMIT Kupang City Classis indicate that a socio-economic empowerment-based CRE model should not be designed as a simple economic assistance program. Instead, it should function as a holistic educational process that transforms knowledge, attitudes, skills, relationships, and economic practices. These findings provide the conceptual foundation for developing the proposed Christian Religious Education model presented in the next section.

Development of a Contextual Christian Religious Education Model Based on Socio-Economic Empowerment

The findings of this study demonstrate that poverty alleviation among congregations requires an integrated approach that connects spiritual formation, socio-economic empowerment, and community transformation. Based on the analysis of congregational socio-economic realities, existing Christian Religious Education (CRE) practices, empowerment initiatives, and congregational needs, this study proposes a contextual Christian Religious Education model based on socio-economic empowerment for GMIT Kupang City Classis.

The proposed model is developed from the understanding that Christian Religious Education should not only function as a process of faith transmission but also as a transformative educational process that equips believers to respond to real-life challenges. The model integrates spiritual formation with capacity development, economic empowerment, mentoring, and partnership networks. The components of the proposed model are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Components of the Christian Religious Education Model Based on Socio-Economic Empowerment

Model Components	Description
Contextual identification of congregational conditions	Identifying socio-economic realities, needs, and potentials of congregational members
Faith formation and theological reflection	Strengthening Christian values, responsibility, stewardship, and social concern
Mindset transformation	Developing awareness, motivation, discipline, and responsibility among congregational members
Capacity and skills development	Providing training, entrepreneurship education, financial literacy, and practical skills
Productive economic empowerment	Supporting productive activities through business assistance and resource development

Continuous mentoring	Providing accompaniment, evaluation, and follow-up support
Partnership development	Building cooperation with government, educational institutions, businesses, and other organizations
Monitoring and evaluation	Assessing program sustainability and improvement

Source: Research synthesis (2026).

The first component of the model is contextual identification of congregational conditions. The findings of this study indicate that empowerment programs cannot be developed without understanding the actual socio-economic realities of congregations. Economic vulnerability, employment conditions, educational background, and existing social capital must become the starting point of Christian educational planning.

This approach distinguishes the proposed model from empowerment programs that begin with predetermined assistance without sufficient understanding of community needs. Rahardjo, (2020) argues that sustainable empowerment requires development approaches that begin with people's realities, experiences, and existing capacities. In the context of GMIT, this means that CRE should begin by listening to congregational experiences and identifying both challenges and potentials.

The second component is the integration of faith formation and theological reflection with socio-economic empowerment. The findings demonstrate that CRE practices in GMIT have been strong in spiritual formation but require broader contextual development. Therefore, the proposed model does not replace the spiritual dimension of CRE but expands it by connecting faith with social responsibility and economic life.

Groome, (2010) explains that Christian education involves reflection on faith within human experiences. Based on this perspective, economic challenges experienced by congregations should become part of educational reflection because faith is lived within concrete social realities. Thus, economic empowerment becomes not merely a development program but also a form of Christian discipleship expressed through responsibility, stewardship, and service.

The third component is mindset transformation. The findings indicate that economic empowerment requires changes in awareness, motivation, discipline, and responsibility. Assistance programs without changes in mindset may not produce sustainable results because members remain dependent on external support.

This component aligns with Freire, (2020) concept of transformative education, which emphasizes developing critical awareness so individuals can understand and transform their circumstances. Within CRE, mindset transformation is developed through faith reflection, dialogue, and practical learning experiences.

The fourth component is capacity and skills development. The findings show that many congregational members possess economic potential but require support in developing skills, entrepreneurship abilities, and economic literacy. Therefore, the model incorporates training and educational processes that enable members to improve their capabilities.

This component is consistent with Likumahwa et al., (2020) capability approach, which emphasizes that development should expand people's capabilities and opportunities. In this perspective, empowerment is not simply providing resources but enabling people to utilize resources effectively.

The fifth component is productive economic empowerment. The model emphasizes that economic support should move beyond charitable assistance toward productive activities that encourage independence. This component includes support for small businesses, development of local economic potential, and strengthening productive initiatives among congregational members.

Previous studies on church-based empowerment have shown that productive programs can contribute to improving community welfare when supported by proper management and sustainability mechanisms (Zega, 2021);(Likumahwa et al., 2020). However, this study extends previous findings by placing productive empowerment within the framework of CRE rather than viewing it solely as a social ministry activity.

The sixth component is continuous mentoring. The findings reveal that one of the weaknesses of existing empowerment initiatives is the limited availability of follow-up assistance. Therefore, mentoring becomes a central element of the proposed model. Mentoring allows the church to accompany members throughout the

empowerment process, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and problem-solving.

This approach reflects the pastoral dimension of Christian education, where learning occurs through relationships and continuous accompaniment. Christian education is therefore understood not only as classroom-based instruction but as a relational process within the life of the community.

The seventh component is partnership development. The proposed model recognizes that churches cannot address socio-economic challenges independently. Cooperation with government institutions, educational organizations, business sectors, and community networks is needed to expand access to resources, training, and opportunities.

This finding supports previous research emphasizing the importance of collaboration in community empowerment. Sustainable transformation requires networks that combine internal community strengths with external resources.

The final component is monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation is needed to ensure that empowerment programs do not stop at short-term interventions but continue to develop according to congregational needs. Through evaluation, churches can identify program effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Based on these components, the proposed model positions Christian Religious Education as a transformative process consisting of three interconnected dimensions: spiritual transformation, personal capacity development, and social-economic transformation. The relationship between these dimensions is illustrated in Figure 2.

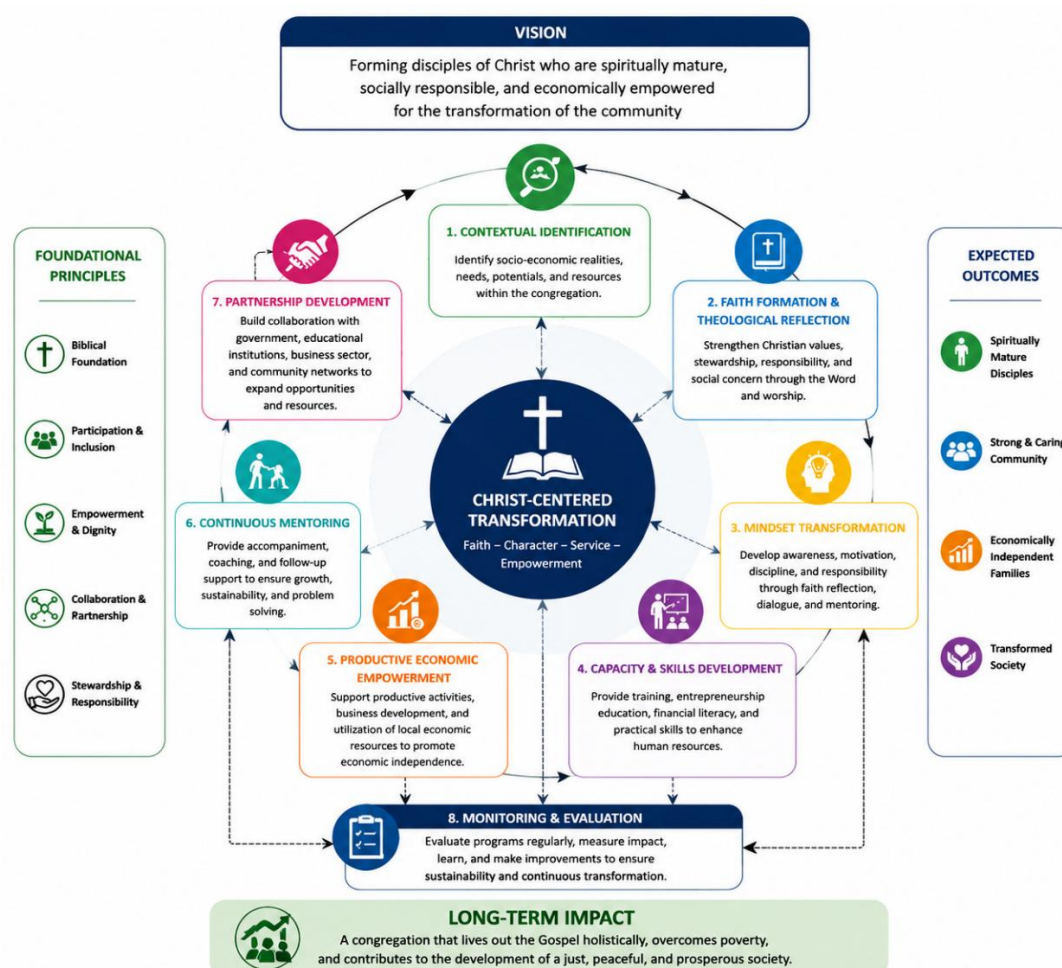


Figure 2. Contextual Christian Religious Education Model Based on Socio-Economic Empowerment

The model proposed in this study provides a new perspective on the role of CRE in addressing congregational poverty. Previous studies have generally examined Christian education from the perspective of faith formation and character development, while studies on church empowerment have focused mainly on social programs and economic assistance. This research contributes by integrating both perspectives into a single educational framework.

The novelty of this model lies in positioning socio-economic empowerment as an integral dimension of Christian Religious Education. In this perspective, poverty alleviation is not only a social responsibility of the church but also part of the educational mission of forming believers who are spiritually mature, socially responsible, and economically capable.

Practically, this model provides a framework for GMIT Kupang City Classis and other churches in developing more holistic ministry strategies. The model can serve as a reference for designing congregational programs that combine faith education, empowerment, mentoring, and partnerships. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Christian Religious Education studies by expanding its scope from spiritual formation toward contextual and transformative education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the socio-economic conditions of congregations in GMIT Kupang City Classis represent a multidimensional reality involving economic vulnerability, limited employment opportunities, human resource constraints, and unequal access to productive resources. However, these challenges coexist with strong social capital within congregational communities, fellowship, mutual assistance, and collective responsibility, which provide important foundations for empowerment.

CRE practices within GMIT have primarily emphasized spiritual formation, faith development, and strengthening congregational identity. Although several socio-economic empowerment initiatives have been implemented through church ministries, these programs have not yet been fully integrated into a systematic educational framework.

The main contribution of this research is the development of a contextual CRE model based on socio-economic empowerment, integrating contextual identification, faith formation, mindset transformation, capacity development, productive economic empowerment, continuous mentoring, partnership development, and monitoring and evaluation as interconnected processes toward congregational transformation. Theoretically, this study expands the scope of CRE from spiritual formation toward transformative and contextual education that responds to socio-economic realities. Practically, the model provides a framework for churches, particularly GMIT congregations, to design more holistic ministry strategies that strengthen faith, develop congregational capacities, and encourage economic independence.

This study is limited by its qualitative approach, its exclusive focus on church leaders as participants (without the voices of ordinary congregation members), and its location within GMIT Kupang City Classis alone. Future studies should incorporate perspectives from ordinary congregation members, conduct broader empirical testing, implement and evaluate the model in different contexts, and assess its transferability to other ecclesiastical and regional settings.

Overall, this research demonstrates that Christian Religious Education has the potential to become a transformative instrument that bridges spiritual growth and social-economic development, enabling congregations to participate actively in overcoming poverty and building empowered communities. The contextual CRE model proposed in this study offers a replicable, theoretically grounded framework that advances both academic understanding of faith-based transformative education and the practical capacity of churches across Indonesia and beyond to respond holistically to the socio-economic needs of their communities, thereby contributing meaningfully to broader national and global efforts in faith-integrated community development.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the leadership of Politeknik Negeri Kupang, the Center for Research and Community Service, the Evangelical Christian Church in Timor (GMT) Kupang City Classis, and all participants who contributed their time, experiences, and valuable insights during the data collection process. Their support and cooperation were essential to the completion of this study.

Funding

This research was funded by the Basic Research Grant from DIPA Politeknik Negeri Kupang for the 2026 fiscal year (Contract Number: 172cr/PL23.PPK.2/PL/2026).

Author Contributions

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Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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