



Implementation of Christian Religious Education Teachers' Competence in Fostering Students' Spiritual Awareness (A Case Study at SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Christian Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen, or PAK) teachers implement their professional competencies to nurture students' spiritual awareness within a vocational education context, specifically at SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research explores the pedagogical, professional, personal, and social dimensions of teacher competence that collectively shape the moral and spiritual formation of students. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis to capture the lived experiences of both teacher and learners. The findings reveal that the PAK teacher's pedagogical creativity-through dialogical learning, reflection, and contextual application of Scripture-effectively bridges the gap between religious cognition and lived spirituality. Professional competence, marked by theological depth and contextual interpretation, enhanced students' engagement and understanding of faith as a practical, relational commitment. The teacher's personal integrity and social empathy further embodied Christian virtues, establishing a classroom atmosphere rooted in care, trust, and authenticity. Students reported increased awareness of God's presence, moral responsibility, and relational compassion, indicating that spirituality was not merely taught but experienced. The study concludes that the effectiveness of Christian education depends significantly on the teacher's holistic competence and authenticity of faith. PAK teachers who integrate theology with empathy and pedagogy with discipleship transform classrooms into communities of grace and growth. These insights highlight the need for Christian teacher education programs to intentionally develop both professional skills and spiritual maturity as inseparable dimensions of the educator's vocation.

Keywords: Teacher, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen, or PAK*) plays a strategic and irreplaceable role in shaping the character and spirituality of students, particularly amid

the currents of globalization and modernization that often erode moral and spiritual values (Naibaho, 2020). In the context of vocational secondary education such as *Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK)*, the challenge of nurturing students' spirituality becomes increasingly complex. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by identity formation, where individuals are especially vulnerable to external influences from social environments, technology, and secular ideologies. Within this reality, the presence of competent PAK teachers becomes the cornerstone for cultivating students' spiritual awareness in ways that are contextually grounded and responsive to the challenges of the contemporary world. The competence of PAK teachers, therefore, extends beyond mastery of theological content. It encompasses personal integrity, pedagogical skill, social empathy, and spiritual depth (Astika, 2017). These dimensions integrate professional expertise with spiritual calling, positioning the teacher not merely as an instructor but as a mentor and living witness of faith who facilitates students in experiencing, internalizing, and applying Christian values in everyday life. Spirituality, in this sense, transcends cognitive knowledge of religion; it refers to a personal awareness of God's presence, a deep relational connection with Him, and a moral commitment to live according to Christ's teachings. This aligns with the vision of Christian education as a transformative process aimed at holistic life formation rather than academic attainment alone. Empirical realities in many educational institutions reveal a persistent gap between the religious knowledge taught in classrooms and the lived moral behavior of students. Many learners demonstrate a strong grasp of Christian doctrine at the cognitive level but fail to embody the values of faith, compassion, and integrity in daily interactions. This dissonance suggests that spiritual education has often remained confined to intellectual instruction without penetrating the affective and volitional dimensions of the learner. Within this context, the role of the PAK teacher becomes pivotal in bridging the gap between belief and behavior through relational and holistic pedagogy (Pasaribu, 2023). Prior research consistently indicates that teacher competence significantly influences the effectiveness of the learning process, including in religious education. However, studies that specifically explore how the competence of PAK teachers contributes to students' spiritual growth-particularly in vocational school settings-remain limited. This gap in scholarship is concerning, given that spiritual formation within vocational education often competes with the demands of technical curricula and the utilitarian goals of workforce preparation. As a result, spiritual development programs are frequently marginalized, and religious teachers operate within restricted institutional support and time constraints (Tarigan, 2024). The present study seeks to address this issue by conducting a case study at SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita, a public vocational school located in a culturally diverse Batak Christian community. This school represents a distinctive sociocultural context where communal and spiritual values coexist within the pressures of modern education. The research focuses on how the PAK teacher implements various dimensions of professional competence-pedagogical, personal, social, and spiritual-in guiding students toward greater spiritual awareness. The study also investigates the enabling and constraining factors that shape the teacher's practice, such as institutional policy, peer collaboration, student receptivity, and community engagement. The underlying objective is to analyze the implementation of PAK teacher competence in fostering students' spiritual awareness in a holistic and transformative manner. This inquiry assumes that teacher competence in Christian education cannot be separated from spiritual integrity; both are intertwined

aspects of the educator's vocation. This research contributes to the growing discourse on Christian pedagogical praxis by emphasizing the inseparability of professional skill and spiritual formation. PAK teachers act as moral mediators who translate biblical principles into pedagogical practice, helping students experience faith not only as a set of doctrines but as a lived relationship with God and others. The effectiveness of this process depends heavily on the teacher's authenticity, empathy, and consistency between word and deed. As Noddings (2013) asserts, moral formation begins in caring relationships where the educator models genuine concern for the learner's moral and emotional growth. Similarly, Lickona (1991) highlights that virtues are best cultivated through lived experience within a community of care. In this light, the role of the PAK teacher is not merely to inform but to form-to nurture environments where spiritual awareness becomes a natural response to God's grace and presence in the learning process. This study also aims to provide meaningful implications for Christian education in Indonesia, particularly for strengthening teacher development programs and designing value-based learning models. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for continuous professional growth among PAK teachers and as guidance for educational policymakers seeking to integrate faith-based principles into the broader national curriculum. The study aspires to enrich scholarly literature in Christian pedagogy by offering empirical insights into the lived reality of spiritual formation within vocational schools-an area often overlooked in contemporary research. Through reflective and participatory inquiry, this study endeavors to portray the PAK teacher as both educator and spiritual shepherd, whose competence, integrity, and relational ministry foster an educational atmosphere of grace, empathy, and transformation. Ultimately, the integration of professional competence and spiritual awareness embodies the essence of Christian education-to educate the mind, touch the heart, and transform the soul in alignment with Christ's redemptive mission in the world.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain a deep and contextual understanding of how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers implement their competencies in fostering students' spiritual awareness at SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita. The qualitative case study was deemed appropriate because it allows the researcher to capture the complexity and authenticity of real-life educational experiences, focusing on the meanings that participants construct from their interactions and faith-based practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological choice enabled an in-depth exploration of pedagogical, relational, and spiritual dimensions that cannot be adequately represented through quantitative approaches. The participants consisted of one PAK teacher and ten eleventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling. This technique ensured that participants were chosen based on their active engagement in Christian learning activities and the diversity of their social, economic, and spiritual backgrounds. Such selection provided rich, reflective, and contextually grounded data to address the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow flexibility in exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding the role of PAK in shaping spirituality. Observations were carried out during classroom instruction and extracurricular activities, focusing on teacher-student interactions, communication styles, and moments of spiritual formation. These combined methods

provided a comprehensive understanding of how the teacher's competencies were enacted in daily practice. In the reduction phase, data were organized and coded thematically to highlight recurring patterns related to pedagogical competence, faith integration, and student spiritual development. The data display phase involved synthesizing findings in narrative and thematic matrices, while conclusions were drawn inductively to generate interpretive insights about the implementation of teacher competence in spiritual education. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of three months, encompassing the stages of preparation, data collection, analysis, and reporting. From a theological standpoint, the use of a qualitative approach aligns with the Christian relational paradigm of education, which views teaching and research as dialogical and incarnational processes. This perspective underscores that understanding faith and spirituality emerges through lived relationships-reflecting the incarnational ministry of Christ, who engaged personally and contextually with those He taught.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers' competencies at SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita plays a pivotal role in nurturing students' spiritual awareness. The research highlights how pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies intertwine to form a holistic educational practice that shapes not only cognitive understanding but also the moral and spiritual fabric of students' lives. In the context of vocational education-where students face both technical demands and moral dilemmas-the teacher's role in cultivating spirituality becomes both timely and transformative. The PAK teacher demonstrated strong pedagogical competence through the use of diverse and contextually relevant teaching strategies such as group discussions, case studies, reflective journaling, and project-based learning. These approaches allowed students to engage actively with Christian values in concrete ways rather than perceiving them as abstract doctrines. Through dialogical learning, the teacher encouraged students to articulate their understanding of faith and relate it to everyday experiences, such as honesty in the workplace, humility in teamwork, and care for creation. This aligns with Lestari (2022), who emphasizes that pedagogical competence in religious education should integrate theological reflection with real-life applications to ensure that spiritual values are internalized, not merely memorized. Classroom observations showed that lessons were not limited to cognitive delivery but included space for spiritual reflection and prayer, where students could relate Scripture to their personal struggles and aspirations. For instance, during a discussion on "faith and perseverance," the teacher invited students to share experiences of failure and how they could see God's guidance amid challenges. This practice embodies what Freire (1970) calls education as dialogue, where the learner's lived reality becomes the text through which spiritual truth is discerned. The PAK teacher's ability to design such learning experiences reflects an understanding of education as formation of the heart, consistent with Knight's (2006) vision of Christian education as transformative discipleship rather than intellectual training.

The teacher's professional competence was evident in his mastery of theological content and his ability to interpret Christian doctrines in a manner accessible to vocational students. He demonstrated fluency in biblical interpretation, connecting Scripture to students' socio-cultural context and vocational identity. When teaching about stewardship, he drew parallels between Genesis 2:15-humans as caretakers of creation-and the students' responsibility to use their technical skills ethically in service of society. This capacity to link theology with real-world relevance not only enhanced engagement but also deepened students' sense of vocation as a calling (*vocatio*) rather than mere occupation. Interviews revealed that students appreciated the teacher's clarity and relevance in presenting religious materials. They noted that his explanations "make faith practical" and "help us understand how to live as Christians at school and at work." Such feedback reflects the professional competence described by Lestari (2022), where effective PAK teachers are able to bridge the gap between biblical truths and learners' contemporary experiences. The teacher consistently updated his pedagogical approaches by integrating digital media, contemporary Christian songs, and audiovisual aids, ensuring that lessons remained appealing to digital-native students. This responsiveness to educational technology without compromising theological integrity demonstrates a form of adaptive professionalism essential in modern Christian education. The integration of faith and life evident in the teacher's professional practice mirrors Holmes' (1987) concept of the integration of faith and learning, where every subject and teaching act becomes a means of expressing God's truth. Through this professional stance, the teacher functioned not only as an instructor but also as a theologian in practice-translating complex doctrines into life-giving principles accessible to adolescents in a pluralistic society.

The personal competence of the PAK teacher emerged as one of the most decisive factors in influencing students' spiritual growth. Students consistently described their teacher as "sincere," "humble," and "living what he teaches." His life exemplified Christian virtues such as love, patience, forgiveness, and faithfulness, making him a living testimony of the gospel message he delivered. This resonates with Sitorus (2019), who argues that a teacher's moral integrity and authenticity are vital in transmitting faith-based values effectively. Daily interactions confirmed that the teacher's behavior inside and outside the classroom consistently reflected the principles of Christian ethics. His attentiveness to students' emotional needs, his readiness to forgive minor misbehavior, and his constant encouragement to persevere reflected what Noddings (2005) defines as an ethic of care. Students reported feeling valued, listened to, and spiritually supported-a relational atmosphere that encouraged them to explore their own faith identity more deeply. This embodiment of virtue illustrates Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "*Imitate me, as I imitate Christ.*" The teacher's character served as a mirror of divine love, offering students a model of faith that is not performative but incarnational. His personal life communicated the reality that spirituality is not confined to religious rituals but is an ongoing relationship with God that transforms everyday behavior.

The study also found that social competence was a key dimension through which spiritual awareness was nurtured. The teacher cultivated empathetic and dialogical communication, fostering a classroom culture marked by trust, openness, and mutual respect. Students were encouraged to voice their thoughts freely, debate moral issues

respectfully, and pray for one another's needs. Through these interactions, the teacher transformed the classroom into a faith community—a microcosm of the church—where relationships were guided by love and reconciliation rather than competition or judgment (Simanjuntak, 2021). The teacher's ability to mediate conflicts among students, promote cooperation in group work, and celebrate diversity exemplified the social aspect of Christian pedagogy. This reflects Vygotsky's (1978) notion of social learning but within a theological framework: students internalized virtues like empathy and solidarity through shared faith experiences. Observations revealed that when misunderstandings arose, the teacher often invited the class to reflect on Colossians 3:14-15, reminding them that "love binds everything together in perfect unity." Social competence was also expressed through community-based learning. The teacher facilitated service-learning programs, such as charity visits and "Faith in Action" projects, where students participated in social outreach activities. Through these experiences, students learned that spirituality manifests not in isolation but through service and compassion toward others. One student stated, "When we visited children at the orphanage, I realized that faith means caring and doing something for others." This echoes Panggabean (2016), who asserts that authentic spirituality in Christian education is outward-looking and grounded in social responsibility.

Field observations showed that learning activities such as scripture meditation, prayer sessions, moral discussions, and community service functioned as integral tools for developing spiritual awareness. These practices moved beyond cognitive instruction and facilitated the formation of conscience and moral discernment. Students not only learned about Christianity but experienced what it means to live as Christians. Students engaged in a "Reflection Circle" after reading a passage from the Gospel of Matthew about loving one's neighbor. Each student shared personal insights and committed to a small act of kindness during the week. During follow-up discussions, many testified that these commitments had impacted their relationships at home and school. This reflective pedagogy aligns with Lickona's (1991) principle that moral character grows through deliberate practice and reflection within a caring community. The teacher's lesson plans (RPP) and reflective journals supported these observations. The documents revealed a well-structured curriculum with clear spiritual objectives and measurable affective outcomes. For instance, learning indicators included students' ability to "express their faith meaningfully in everyday life" or to "demonstrate forgiveness in conflict situations." Such goals exemplify what Eka (2021) terms faith-oriented planning, where learning success is evaluated not only by knowledge acquisition but by transformation in attitudes and behaviors. Interviews with the PAK teacher revealed a profound awareness of his spiritual vocation. He viewed teaching not merely as an instructional duty but as a faith journey shared with students. He stated, "Teaching PAK means walking with students in their spiritual growth—it's not about giving answers but helping them encounter God in their own experiences." This perspective aligns with Groome's (1998) model of shared praxis, where teacher and learner engage in mutual reflection on life in light of the gospel. The teacher recognized that spiritual growth cannot be imposed but must emerge from consistent relational experiences rooted in love and trust. His relational ministry mirrors Jesus' own approach to discipleship—guiding through example, conversation, and companionship. Students perceived this authenticity and responded with openness. They

began to see their teacher not as an authority figure but as a spiritual mentor, a companion who cared about their well-being and moral integrity. The teacher noted that spiritual mentoring often had to compete with the demands of academic and vocational subjects. Consequently, sustained faith formation activities outside regular class hours were difficult to maintain. Similar concerns have been reported in other Christian schools, where curriculum structures prioritize technical competencies over spiritual ones (Tarigan, 2024). Some students came from devout Christian families, while others had minimal exposure to faith practices at home. This heterogeneity required the teacher to design differentiated approaches that could meet varying spiritual needs. The teacher addressed these challenges creatively by integrating spiritual discussions across subjects and seizing informal moments—such as lunch breaks or school assemblies—to engage students in reflective conversations about faith. These gatherings provided a supportive space for spiritual reflection and community building. According to Hombing (2023), such informal spiritual activities serve as vital extensions of classroom instruction, enabling the continuity of faith experiences beyond formal learning settings. Through these adaptive strategies, the teacher demonstrated that spirituality can be nurtured even within institutional constraints, provided that the educator approaches teaching with creativity, intentionality, and faithfulness. His persistence embodies the Pauline vision of ministry in 2 Timothy 4:2—*“be prepared in season and out of season”*—to preach, teach, and nurture with patience and love.

Interviews and reflective journals from students indicated a noticeable growth in spiritual consciousness. They reported becoming more aware of God’s presence in their daily lives and more sensitive to moral and ethical issues. Many expressed newfound appreciation for prayer, forgiveness, and acts of service as integral expressions of their faith. Students also described a shift from viewing religion as a school subject to experiencing it as a way of life. This transformation was evident in their language: they began to use phrases like “living my faith,” “feeling God’s peace,” and “trying to love others more.” Such statements confirm the transition from cognitive religiosity to experiential spirituality, as conceptualized by Fowler (1981) in his stages of faith development. This deepened awareness was fostered by the teacher’s consistent integration of Scripture with real-life situations. When students discussed ethical dilemmas—such as dishonesty or peer pressure—the teacher guided them to discern moral responses rooted in Christian love rather than fear of punishment. This approach shifted moral reasoning from legalistic obedience to relational empathy, aligning with Noddings’ (2013) understanding of care ethics as the moral basis for educational practice. The results affirm that the PAK teacher’s competencies collectively function as a form of spiritual pedagogy, where teaching becomes a means of grace and formation. This reinforces Panggabean’s (2016) claim that Christian education must transcend ritual religiosity and lead students toward a holistic spirituality—one that integrates relationship with God, self, others, and creation. Spirituality here is understood as participation in the life of Christ, reflected in everyday relationships and actions. Education thus becomes a ministry of reconciliation, echoing Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:18. The PAK teacher, by embodying love and peace, acts as a co-laborer with God in restoring the divine image within students. This theological dimension distinguishes Christian education from secular moral instruction, grounding its transformative power in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The study underscores the

necessity of teacher formation programs that develop both professional skills and spiritual maturity. As Manurung (2018) notes, spiritual competence must be integrated intentionally into teacher education curricula to equip educators as authentic witnesses of faith. Teacher training institutions should emphasize reflective practice, emotional intelligence, and biblical integration as essential competencies for effective Christian teaching. Overall, the study confirms that the PAK teacher's holistic competence-pedagogical, professional, personal, and social-contributes significantly to the formation of students' spiritual identity. The teacher transformed the classroom into a living community of faith where learning and discipleship intersect. The findings echo the model of servant-leadership in Mark 10:45, where teaching becomes an act of service rather than authority. In this transformative environment, students not only learn biblical knowledge but also experience the reality of God's presence through relationships, empathy, and shared reflection. Spiritual awareness, therefore, is not transmitted but cultivated through interaction, imitation, and love. The PAK teacher at SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita exemplifies this incarnational pedagogy-a model urgently needed in today's educational landscape marked by moral uncertainty and secular influences. The spiritual formation of students is inseparable from the teacher's competence and authenticity. When PAK teachers teach with theological depth, live with integrity, communicate with empathy, and build relational trust, students encounter Christ not only in the Bible but also through their teacher's life. The case of SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita confirms that Christian education reaches its highest purpose when teaching becomes a ministry of love, service, and transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher competence at SMK Negeri Losida Siatasbarita serves as a decisive and transformative force in fostering students' spiritual awareness within a vocational education context. The findings demonstrate that pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies are not independent attributes but interwoven dimensions that collectively shape the moral and spiritual formation of learners. When a teacher integrates theological understanding with pedagogical creativity, faith with empathy, and doctrine with practice, the classroom becomes more than a site of instruction-it becomes a community of spiritual growth. The PAK teacher's use of dialogical and reflective learning strategies enabled students to engage with Christian teachings meaningfully and contextually. These methods helped bridge the long-standing gap between religious cognition and lived spirituality, encouraging learners to interpret faith as a dynamic relationship with God expressed through daily attitudes and moral choices. Professionally, the teacher's mastery of theological knowledge and his ability to connect biblical principles to students' social and vocational realities cultivated relevance and authenticity in learning. His capacity to integrate Scripture into the ethical dilemmas of modern youth reflects a faith-informed professionalism that redefines education as a ministry of truth and transformation. Personal and social competencies were equally crucial. The teacher's integrity, humility, and compassion provided a living model of Christian virtue, confirming that effective religious education depends more on who the teacher is than on what the teacher says. His empathetic engagement, fairness, and

patience established a climate of trust and belonging in which students could internalize the values of love, forgiveness, and service. This relational dynamic reflects Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3:14-15, where love and peace bind the community together in unity and reconciliation. The study also highlights several practical and theological implications. Spiritually grounded teacher competence must be viewed as an essential component of Christian education policy and teacher development programs. Institutions that prepare and support PAK teachers should nurture not only pedagogical skills but also reflective spirituality, emotional intelligence, and community engagement. Ultimately, this research affirms that the heart of Christian education lies in the authenticity of the educator's faith. When teachers embody the love of Christ and teach as servant-leaders, education becomes a redemptive act—a process that enlightens the mind, shapes the character, and transforms the soul toward the likeness of Christ.

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