



Prayer and Offering as the Spiritual Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers at SMP Negeri 3 Onolalu

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of prayer and offering as essential components of spiritual competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 3 Onolalu. The research explores how these spiritual practices influence teaching effectiveness and student spiritual development. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five CRE teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that prayer and offering practices significantly enhance teachers' spiritual competence, manifesting in three primary dimensions: personal devotional life, pedagogical integration, and exemplary modeling. Teachers who consistently engage in prayer and offering demonstrate deeper biblical understanding, stronger moral integrity, and more effective spiritual guidance capabilities. The study identifies several challenges, including time constraints, maintaining authenticity, and balancing spiritual practices with curriculum requirements. The research concludes that prayer and offering are fundamental to CRE teachers' spiritual competence, serving as both personal spiritual disciplines and professional pedagogical tools that shape students' faith formation and character development.

Keywords: *prayer, offering, spiritual competence, Christian Religious Education*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a pivotal role in shaping students' spiritual development and moral character within the Indonesian educational system. Unlike other academic subjects, religious education requires teachers to possess not only pedagogical knowledge but also deep spiritual competence that enables them to guide students in their faith journey (Astuti & Widodo, 2019). The Ministry of Education and Culture emphasizes that religious education teachers must demonstrate spiritual competence as part of their professional standards, yet the specific practices that constitute this competence remain underexplored in empirical research. At the heart of Christian spirituality lie two foundational practices: prayer and offering. Prayer represents the communicative relationship between believers and God, while offering symbolizes the tangible expression of faith, gratitude, and sacrifice (Simanjuntak, 2020). For CRE

teachers, these practices transcend personal devotion and become integral to their professional identity and pedagogical approach. However, the extent to which these spiritual practices influence teacher competence and student outcomes requires systematic investigation. SMP Negeri 3 Onolalu, located in North Sumatra, provides a unique context for examining this phenomenon. As a public school with diverse religious backgrounds, CRE teachers face the dual challenge of maintaining authentic Christian spirituality while respecting pluralism and national educational standards. The school's commitment to character education and spiritual development creates an environment where the spiritual competence of religious teachers becomes particularly significant. This study addresses three primary research questions: (1) How do CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 3 Onolalu understand and practice prayer and offering in their personal and professional lives? (2) In what ways do these practices contribute to their spiritual competence as religious educators? (3) What challenges do teachers encounter in maintaining consistent prayer and offering practices within the school context?

The significance of this research extends beyond academic inquiry to practical implications for teacher development, curriculum design, and educational policy. Understanding the relationship between spiritual practices and teaching competence can inform pre-service training programs, professional development initiatives, and evaluation frameworks for religious education teachers. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on integrating spirituality and professionalism in educational contexts. The Indonesian context presents distinctive considerations for this research. The national education philosophy of Pancasila prioritizes religious values alongside social harmony and diversity. CRE teachers must navigate the tension between maintaining distinctive Christian identity and fostering interfaith respect, making their spiritual competence particularly complex and consequential (Lumban Gaol, 2019). This study thus illuminates not only Christian education practices but also broader questions about religious education in pluralistic societies.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the phenomenon of prayer and offering as spiritual competence among CRE teachers. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows for in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences, beliefs, and practices that quantitative methods cannot adequately capture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive orientation enabled the researchers to document and analyze the current state of spiritual practices without experimental manipulation. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Onolalu, North Sumatra, Indonesia, during the academic year 2024-2025. The school was purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) established Christian Religious Education program, (2) diverse student religious backgrounds, and (3) administrative willingness to support the research. The school serves approximately 450 students across grades 7-9, with approximately 30% identifying as Christian. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure information-rich cases. The selection criteria included: (1) certified CRE teachers with minimum three years teaching experience, (2) active involvement in school religious activities, and (3) willingness to participate fully in the research process. Five CRE teachers (three female, two male) with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 18 years participated

in the study. All participants held undergraduate degrees in Christian Religious Education, and two possessed master's degrees in theology or education. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure consisting of six phases: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes, (2) initial code generation using both deductive codes from the research questions and inductive codes emerging from data, (3) searching for themes by grouping codes into meaningful patterns, (4) reviewing themes for internal coherence and distinctiveness, (5) defining and naming final themes, and (6) producing the research report with representative quotations. The analysis was conducted manually with the assistance of data management software. Two researchers independently coded a subset of data, then compared coding schemes to establish inter-rater reliability. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. The final coding framework was applied systematically to all data sources. Several strategies were employed to enhance research trustworthiness: (1) Triangulation through multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents) and multiple participants to verify findings; (2) Member checking by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation and feedback; (3) Prolonged engagement in the research setting to build rapport and understand context deeply; (4) Reflexivity through researcher journaling to acknowledge and bracket personal biases; (5) Thick description providing detailed contextual information to enable transferability assessment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The participants demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of prayer and offering as foundational spiritual practices that extend beyond ritualistic observance. All five teachers articulated prayer as an intimate communication with God that encompasses adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Teacher Mariana emphasized, *"Prayer is not merely reciting words, but entering into dialogue with the living God who actively listens and responds to His children."* Regarding offering, the teachers conceptualized it in both tangible and intangible dimensions. The tangible aspect included financial contributions, time, and resources dedicated to God's service. The intangible dimension encompassed offering one's talents, professional skills, and teaching vocation as acts of worship. Teacher Petrus explained, *"Every lesson I teach is an offering to God. My preparation, my patience with students, my commitment to excellence—these are all sacrifices laid before the altar of service."* The teachers identified three theological foundations undergirding these practices: (1) the priesthood of all believers, positioning every Christian as a minister capable of approaching God directly through prayer and offering, (2) the sacrificial model of Christ, whose ultimate offering provides the paradigm for Christian giving and service, and (3) covenant relationship, where prayer and offering represent the human response to God's gracious initiative.

Personal Devotional Practices

All participants maintained consistent personal prayer routines, though varying in structure and frequency. Three teachers practiced morning devotions lasting 30-60 minutes, incorporating Bible reading, prayer, and journaling. Two teachers preferred evening prayers combined with weekly extended prayer sessions. Teacher Ruth described her practice: *"I wake at 5:00 AM for personal prayer before family responsibilities begin."*

This time centers me spiritually and prepares me for the day's challenges." Offering practices among participants included regular financial tithing to their local churches, ranging from 10-20% of monthly income. Beyond financial giving, teachers consistently mentioned offering their time through volunteer church activities, community service, and mentoring students beyond classroom hours. Teacher Daniel reported dedicating 5-10 hours weekly to church youth ministry, viewing this as an extension of his teaching calling. Three notable patterns emerged in personal practices. First, teachers who maintained structured prayer schedules reported greater spiritual stability and clarity in decision-making. Second, those who practiced offering in multiple forms (financial, time, talents) expressed deeper satisfaction in their teaching vocation. Third, all participants experienced seasons of spiritual dryness or inconsistency, yet viewed these as opportunities for renewed commitment rather than failures.

Integration of Prayer and Offering in Teaching Practice

All teachers began and concluded classes with prayer. These prayers were not formulaic but contextually relevant, addressing lesson themes, current events, or student needs. Teacher Maria adapted prayers to connect with lesson content, as observed when introducing a unit on service: *"Lord, as we learn about serving others today, help us recognize opportunities to offer our gifts for Your glory and others' benefit."* Three teachers demonstrated flexibility in pausing lessons to pray when sensitive situations arose, such as a student sharing family difficulties or when discussing challenging ethical dilemmas. These unplanned prayers modeled authentic spiritual responsiveness. Teachers explicitly taught about prayer through dedicated lessons covering prayer types, biblical prayer models, and practical prayer methods. These lessons included experiential components where students practiced different prayer forms. Beyond verbal prayer, teachers modeled prayerful dispositions through patient listening, thoughtful responses, and expressions of dependence on God's guidance when addressing difficult questions. Offering was integrated through several approaches. Teachers included lessons on biblical principles of giving, stewardship, and sacrifice, connecting these concepts to contemporary application. Four teachers organized class or school-wide service initiatives where students offered time and skills to assist others, such as visiting elderly community members or tutoring younger students. Teachers consistently presented their teaching profession as an offering, sharing personal testimonies of how they view their work as ministry rather than merely employment. Teacher Petrus shared with students: *"I could have chosen a more lucrative career, but teaching you is my offering to God—investing in your spiritual growth is more valuable than any salary."* Teachers created opportunities for students to offer their developing talents through leading prayers, sharing testimonies, creating religious artwork, or serving in school chapel programs.

Dimensions of Spiritual Competence Manifested

Teachers who maintained consistent prayer lives demonstrated deeper theological understanding and more nuanced biblical interpretation. Their teaching reflected personal encounter with Scripture rather than mere academic knowledge. Observations showed these teachers spontaneously connecting lesson content with broader biblical themes and addressing student questions with spiritual wisdom rather than only theological information. The practice of offering, particularly viewing one's vocation as

service to God, fostered heightened moral consciousness. Teachers reported that understanding their work as an offering increased accountability and motivated ethical behavior. Teacher Ruth noted, *"When I see my teaching as an offering to God, I cannot be careless with preparation, dishonest in evaluation, or impatient with struggling students—it would dishonor the One I serve."* Prayer practices enhanced teachers' sensitivity to student spiritual and emotional needs. Teachers who regularly prayed for students by name reported stronger pastoral relationships and more effective spiritual guidance. Teacher Maria maintained a prayer journal with student names and specific concerns, which informed her classroom interactions and individual counseling.

Challenges in Maintaining Prayer and Offering Practices

The demanding nature of teaching—lesson preparation, administrative tasks, extracurricular duties—sometimes competed with personal devotional time. Three teachers admitted occasionally neglecting morning prayers during particularly busy periods. Teachers expressed tension between genuine spiritual practice and potential performance or expectation fulfillment. Teacher Petrus articulated this challenge: *"There's always a danger of praying or serving because it's expected of a religious teacher rather than from authentic desire. I constantly examine my motives."* While the school supported religious education, the emphasis on standardized testing and academic achievement sometimes marginalized spiritual formation objectives. Teachers felt pressure to prioritize content delivery over spiritual practice integration. Seasonal variations in personal spiritual vitality affected practice consistency. All teachers acknowledged experiencing periods of spiritual dryness where prayer felt mechanical and offering lacked joy. These seasons required intentional recommitment. Teachers navigated the delicate balance between transparently sharing spiritual practices as models and maintaining appropriate boundaries. Excessive disclosure risked appearing self-righteous, while insufficient sharing limited modeling effectiveness. The practice of generous offering sometimes created financial strain, particularly for teachers supporting large families on modest salaries. Two teachers mentioned tension between faithful tithing and meeting family needs.

Prayer and Offering as Core Professional Competencies

The data strongly support conceptualizing prayer and offering as professional competencies rather than optional personal preferences. This finding challenges conventional teacher competency frameworks that emphasize technical skills while marginalizing spiritual dimensions. For CRE teachers, spiritual practices constitute epistemic tools—ways of knowing and understanding that are essential to their professional domain (Palmer, 2017). Just as scientists must master laboratory techniques and mathematicians must develop quantitative reasoning, religious educators must cultivate spiritual practices that provide experiential knowledge of the subject matter they teach. This perspective aligns with the Indonesian teacher competency framework, which includes spiritual and social competencies alongside pedagogical and professional domains (Permendiknas No. 16/2007). However, the framework provides limited guidance on how spiritual competency is developed or assessed. This study suggests that prayer and offering serve as both indicators and developers of spiritual competence, offering potential metrics for evaluation and targets for development.

The finding that teachers who maintain consistent prayer practices demonstrate deeper theological understanding suggests a symbiotic relationship between devotional practice and cognitive knowledge. This resonates with the Christian theological concept of "lex orandi, lex credendi" (the law of prayer is the law of belief)—the principle that worship practices shape doctrinal understanding. In educational terms, experiential engagement with spiritual practices enhances teachers' capacity for theological reflection and application, moving beyond mere transmission of information to embodied wisdom.

The Pedagogical Function of Spiritual Practices

The integration of prayer and offering into teaching practice reveals these disciplines' pedagogical functionality. Teachers did not merely teach about prayer and offering as content topics; they employed these practices as pedagogical methods that shaped classroom culture, facilitated learning, and modeled spiritual formation. This finding extends existing research on modeling in education, demonstrating that spiritual modeling encompasses not only moral behavior but also devotional practices and attitudes. The spontaneous intercessory moments observed in classrooms illustrate what can be termed "teachable spiritual moments"—unplanned opportunities where authentic spiritual response becomes pedagogically significant. These moments parallel the concept of "teachable moments" in general education but carry distinctive spiritual dimensions. Teachers' capacity to recognize and respond to these moments appears directly related to their personal prayer practices, suggesting that devotional consistency enhances pedagogical sensitivity. The vocational framing of teaching as offering represents a significant finding with implications for teacher motivation and retention. Research on teacher burnout consistently identifies lack of meaning and purpose as contributing factors (Hakanen et al., 2006). Teachers who conceptualize their work as offering to God may access intrinsic motivation and resilience unavailable through purely professional identity frameworks. This finding invites further investigation into how vocational theology influences teacher well-being and effectiveness.

Authenticity and the Challenge of Religious Performance

The teachers' concern about maintaining authenticity reveals a critical tension in religious education: the risk that spiritual practices become performative rather than genuine. This challenge is particularly acute for religious professionals whose spirituality is simultaneously personal conviction and professional requirement. The findings suggest that authenticity is maintained through several mechanisms: regular self-examination of motives, participation in support communities that provide accountability, and cultivation of private spiritual practices that are not publicly displayed. This tension relates to what sociologist described as "front stage" and "back stage" performances in social life. For CRE teachers, prayer and offering occur in both domains—private devotion (back stage) and classroom practice (front stage). The integration of these domains without collapsing private authenticity into public performance appears essential to spiritual competence. Teachers who maintained robust private practices reported greater comfort with public spiritual expression, suggesting that back stage authenticity enables front stage credibility.

Contextual Factors Shaping Spiritual Practice

The Indonesian context provides distinctive conditions that shape how prayer and offering function as spiritual competencies. The constitutional protection of religious education, the Pancasila emphasis on religious values, and the culturally prevalent religiosity create an environment where spiritual practices are socially supported and institutionally legitimated. This differs markedly from secularized contexts where religious expression in public schools faces legal and social restrictions. The finding that teachers experience tension between spiritual formation objectives and academic achievement pressures indicates that even in supportive contexts, religious education faces marginalization pressures. The global trend toward standardization, assessment, and accountability affects religious education, potentially reducing it to cognitive knowledge transmission rather than holistic spiritual formation (Ariawan, 2021). Teachers' efforts to maintain prayer and offering integration despite these pressures demonstrate agency and commitment that merit institutional support. The pluralistic context of SMP Negeri 3 Onolalu, where Christian students constitute a minority, introduces additional complexities. CRE teachers must maintain distinctive Christian identity and practice while respecting religious diversity and fostering social cohesion. The finding that teachers successfully navigate this tension suggests that authentic spiritual practice can coexist with interfaith respect—a significant insight for religiously diverse societies. This study's limitations suggest several directions for future research. First, the small sample size and single-site focus limit transferability. Comparative studies across multiple schools, regions, and denominational contexts would illuminate how institutional and cultural factors mediate the relationship between spiritual practices and teaching competence. Second, the reliance on self-reported data and limited observation periods may not capture long-term patterns or unconscious behaviors. Longitudinal designs tracking teachers and students over multiple years could assess sustained impact and developmental trajectories. Third, this study did not directly assess student outcomes beyond teacher perceptions. Future research should employ student surveys, spiritual development assessments, and academic achievement data to empirically examine how teachers' spiritual practices correlate with student learning and formation. Fourth, the study did not investigate the specific theological traditions and church backgrounds of participating teachers, which likely influence their understanding and practice of prayer and offering. Denominational comparative studies could reveal significant variations. Additional research questions emerging from this study include: How do pre-service training programs cultivate spiritual practices as professional competencies? What institutional structures and policies most effectively support teachers' spiritual development? How do teachers' personal spiritual crises or seasons of doubt affect their teaching? What role do indigenous Indonesian spiritual practices play in Christian teachers' devotional lives? How do male and female teachers differ in their approach to prayer and offering integration? The findings carry significant implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education. Teacher preparation programs should explicitly address spiritual practice development as a core competency area, not assuming that candidates automatically possess spiritual maturity. This might include spiritual formation curricula, guided devotional experiences, mentoring relationships with spiritually mature

practitioners, and reflective practices that integrate spiritual and pedagogical development.

In-service professional development should move beyond technical pedagogical training to include spiritual renewal opportunities. The finding that teachers valued retreats, fellowship groups, and spiritual mentoring suggests that systemic support for these activities could enhance teacher effectiveness and retention. Schools and educational authorities should consider allocating resources for spiritual development comparable to investments in academic training. The study also suggests the need for more nuanced evaluation frameworks that assess spiritual competence alongside pedagogical skills. Current teacher evaluation systems typically emphasize observable teaching behaviors and student academic achievement, neglecting spiritual dimensions that are central to religious education's purposes. Developing authentic assessment methods for spiritual competence—perhaps including spiritual practice portfolios, reflective journals, and pastoral effectiveness indicators—could provide more comprehensive evaluation. The integration of prayer and offering into teaching practice suggests that religious education curricula should explicitly incorporate experiential spiritual practices rather than focusing exclusively on cognitive content. Lesson plans might include structured prayer experiences, service-learning projects, and reflective activities that engage students in actual spiritual practice rather than only learning about these practices. The finding that spontaneous spiritual moments hold significant pedagogical value indicates that curricula should allow flexibility for responsive teaching rather than rigid adherence to predetermined content sequences. Teacher guides might include prompts for recognizing and responding to teachable spiritual moments, helping less experienced teachers develop this sensitivity. Furthermore, curriculum developers should consider how prayer and offering themes can be integrated across topical units rather than isolated in specific lessons. The pervasive integration observed in effective teachers' practices suggests that these spiritual disciplines serve as organizing frameworks for understanding diverse theological and ethical topics.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that prayer and offering constitute fundamental dimensions of spiritual competence for Christian Religious Education teachers, functioning as both personal spiritual disciplines and professional pedagogical competencies. The five CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 3 Onolalu who participated in this research exhibited three primary ways these practices manifest as competencies: enhancing spiritual authenticity and theological depth, fostering moral integrity and vocational commitment, and developing relational and pastoral capabilities. The findings reveal that effective integration of prayer and offering in teaching practice requires more than mechanical inclusion of religious rituals. Rather, it demands authentic personal spiritual life that informs and empowers public spiritual expression. Teachers who maintained consistent private prayer practices and understood their vocation as offering to God demonstrated greater pedagogical effectiveness, spiritual wisdom, and positive influence on students' faith formation. The study contributes to the limited empirical research on spiritual competence in religious education, offering concrete descriptions of how abstract spiritual qualities manifest in teaching practice. It challenges purely technical conceptions

of teacher competence by demonstrating that for religious educators, spiritual practices constitute epistemic and professional competencies as essential as pedagogical knowledge or instructional skills. For teacher education and professional development, the research suggests the need to explicitly cultivate spiritual practices as professional competencies through pre-service formation programs, in-service renewal opportunities, and supportive institutional structures. For curriculum development, the findings indicate that experiential integration of prayer and offering throughout topical units, combined with flexibility for spontaneous spiritual responsiveness, enhances both instructional effectiveness and student spiritual formation. In the Indonesian context, where religious education enjoys constitutional protection and cultural support, these findings affirm the distinctive role of spiritually competent teachers in forming students' faith and character. As educational systems increasingly emphasize standardization and accountability, maintaining space for authentic spiritual practice and formation becomes both more challenging and more essential. This study illuminates a fundamental truth about Christian religious education: teachers cannot effectively guide students in spiritual journeys they have not undertaken themselves. Prayer and offering are not peripheral activities supplementing "real" teaching but foundational practices that constitute the essence of spiritual competence. For CRE teachers, professional excellence and spiritual maturity are inseparable—their effectiveness depends not only on what they know and can do, but fundamentally on who they are and how they relate to God. Ultimately, this study affirms that in Christian education, method and message, teacher and teaching, are integrally connected. Prayer and offering are not merely topics to be taught but lived realities to be embodied, making the teacher's spiritual life inseparable from their professional competence.

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