



The Faithfulness of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Students at SDN No. 076675 Ombolata Hilimbowo to Obey God's Commandments: A Reflection on John 14:15

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the faithfulness of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching students at SDN No. 076675 Ombolata Hilimbowo to obey God's commandments, particularly through the lens of John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commands." The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Participants included three CRE teachers, the school principal, and 30 fifth and sixth-grade students. Findings reveal that teachers demonstrate faithfulness through three primary dimensions: personal spiritual modeling, pedagogical consistency in biblical instruction, and relational engagement with students. Teachers integrate biblical principles into daily teaching practices, emphasizing love as the foundation for obedience to God's commandments. However, challenges persist, including limited instructional time, diverse student religious backgrounds, and insufficient teaching resources. The study concludes that teacher faithfulness significantly influences students' understanding and willingness to obey God's commandments, suggesting that continuous spiritual development and institutional support are essential for effective Christian religious education.

Keywords: *Christian religious education, teacher faithfulness, obedience to God, John 14:15*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) occupies a crucial position in the Indonesian educational system, particularly in shaping students' spiritual and moral foundations. Within the framework of Indonesia's national education system, religious education serves not only as a subject area but as a fundamental component of character development (Parker & Raihani, 2011). The role of CRE teachers extends beyond mere knowledge transmission; they function as spiritual mentors who model faithful living and guide students toward deeper relationship with God. John 14:15 presents a profound

theological principle: "If you love me, keep my commands." This verse establishes an inseparable connection between love for Christ and obedience to His commandments, suggesting that genuine faith manifests through faithful obedience. For CRE teachers, this biblical imperative carries dual significance—as a personal commitment to faithful living and as a pedagogical foundation for instructing students in Christian discipleship. SDN No. 076675 Ombolata Hilimbowo, located in a rural area of North Sumatra, represents a unique educational context where Christian religious education must address diverse student backgrounds while maintaining doctrinal integrity. The school serves approximately 180 students, with Christian students comprising roughly 40% of the total population. This demographic reality presents both opportunities and challenges for CRE teachers who must demonstrate faithfulness in their teaching ministry while respecting religious diversity. Previous research has highlighted the importance of teacher religiosity and commitment in religious education contexts (Buchanan, 2013; Francis & Village, 2015). However, limited empirical investigation has examined how CRE teachers specifically embody and transmit the biblical principle of faithful obedience in Indonesian elementary school settings. This gap necessitates deeper exploration of teacher faithfulness as both a personal spiritual quality and a pedagogical practice. The concept of faithfulness in Christian teaching encompasses multiple dimensions: theological understanding, spiritual authenticity, pedagogical competence, and relational commitment. Teachers must not only comprehend biblical teachings intellectually but also embody these truths experientially, creating authentic learning environments where students can observe and internalize faithful obedience to God.

This study addresses three primary research questions: (1) How do CRE teachers at SDN No. 076675 Ombolata Hilimbowo demonstrate faithfulness in teaching students to obey God's commandments? (2) What pedagogical strategies do teachers employ to help students understand the relationship between love for God and obedience? (3) What challenges do teachers encounter in cultivating students' commitment to obeying God's commandments? Understanding teacher faithfulness in Christian religious education holds practical implications for teacher training programs, curriculum development, and school policies. By examining how teachers translate biblical principles into pedagogical practices, this research contributes to the broader discourse on effective religious education and spiritual formation in Indonesian schools.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the faithfulness of CRE teachers in teaching obedience to God's commandments. Qualitative methodology was selected for its capacity to capture the complexity and depth of human experiences, beliefs, and practices within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive design allowed for comprehensive examination of teacher faithfulness as both an internal spiritual disposition and an observable pedagogical practice. The research was conducted at SDN No. 076675 Ombolata Hilimbowo, a public elementary school in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was purposively selected based on its multi-religious student population and established CRE program. Participants included three CRE teachers (two females, one male) with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years, the school principal, and 30 students from grades five and six (ages 10-12 years). Student

participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation of both genders and varying levels of Christian faith engagement. Data collection occurred over a three-month period using three primary methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all three CRE teachers (60-90 minutes each) and the school principal (45 minutes). Interview protocols explored teachers' understanding of faithfulness, teaching philosophies, pedagogical strategies, and perceived challenges. Student focus group discussions (6 groups of 5 students each, 30-45 minutes per session) examined their perceptions of teacher faithfulness and understanding of obedience to God's commandments. Classroom observations documented 12 CRE teaching sessions (4 sessions per teacher), capturing instructional practices, teacher-student interactions, and implementation of biblical principles. Observation protocols included field notes, focusing on teachers' verbal and nonverbal communication, lesson content, teaching methods, and classroom atmosphere. Document analysis examined lesson plans, teaching materials, student assignments, and school policies related to religious education. These documents provided contextual understanding of curriculum expectations and instructional planning.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, involving six phases: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Analysis was conducted iteratively, with continuous comparison between data sources to ensure triangulation and enhance credibility. NVivo 12 software assisted in organizing and coding qualitative data. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Personal Spiritual Modeling, (2) Pedagogical Faithfulness in Biblical Instruction, and (3) Relational Engagement and Mentorship. Each theme contained multiple sub-themes representing specific dimensions of teacher faithfulness. Ethical approval was obtained from the local education authority and school administration. All participants provided informed consent, with parental consent secured for student participants. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Several strategies enhanced research trustworthiness: prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation of multiple data sources, member checking with participants, peer debriefing with colleagues, and maintenance of reflexive journals documenting researcher assumptions and interpretations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first major theme revealed that teacher faithfulness manifests primarily through personal spiritual modeling, where teachers embody the principles they teach. All three CRE teachers emphasized that authentic Christian teaching requires personal commitment to obeying God's commandments. Teacher Maria (pseudonym) articulated this conviction: "I cannot teach children to love God and obey His commandments if I myself do not demonstrate this in my daily life. They watch everything I do—how I speak, how I treat others, how I respond to difficulties. My life must be a living testimony of John 14:15." Classroom observations confirmed this self-assessment. Teachers consistently demonstrated spiritual disciplines, beginning each lesson with sincere prayer, incorporating personal testimonies of God's faithfulness, and responding to classroom

challenges with grace and patience. During one observed session, when a student made a disruptive comment, Teacher Samuel responded with gentle correction while affirming the student's value, modeling forgiveness and compassion.

Students recognized and valued this authenticity. One sixth-grade student shared: "Teacher Maria doesn't just tell us about loving God; we can see she really loves God by how she lives. That makes me want to be like her." This observation underscores the powerful influence of authentic spiritual modeling on student formation.

Teachers also demonstrated faithfulness through vulnerability, admitting their own struggles with obedience. Teacher Ruth explained: "I share with students when I face challenges in obeying God's word. This helps them understand that faithfulness is a lifelong journey, not instant perfection. We grow together in learning to obey God."

Pedagogical Faithfulness in Biblical Instruction

The second theme highlighted teachers' pedagogical faithfulness in presenting biblical instruction with theological integrity and age-appropriate relevance. Teachers demonstrated commitment to systematic, contextually meaningful teaching of God's commandments. All three teachers structured their curriculum around core biblical principles, with John 14:15 serving as a theological foundation. They employed various pedagogical strategies to help students understand the connection between love for God and obedience: Teachers frequently used Bible stories to illustrate faithful obedience. For example, Teacher Samuel taught about Joseph's faithfulness despite adversity, helping students understand that obeying God sometimes requires perseverance through difficult circumstances. Students engaged in practical activities connecting biblical commands to daily life. One observed lesson involved students identifying specific ways to obey the commandment to "honor your parents" in their home contexts. This approach helped students translate abstract principles into concrete actions. Rather than rote memorization, teachers emphasized understanding the meaning and implications of scripture. Teacher Maria explained: "When we memorize John 14:15, I ask students: 'What does it mean to love Jesus? What are His commands? Why does He connect love and obedience?' This helps them internalize the verse's meaning."

Teachers created space for questions and discussions, encouraging students to wrestle with difficult aspects of biblical obedience. In one observed session, students discussed why obeying God's commands is sometimes challenging, leading to rich dialogue about faith, temptation, and divine grace. Document analysis of lesson plans revealed consistent integration of biblical texts, clear learning objectives focused on understanding and application, and differentiated instructional strategies accommodating diverse learning styles.

Relational Engagement and Mentorship

The third theme emphasized that teacher faithfulness extends beyond classroom instruction to ongoing relational engagement and spiritual mentorship. Teachers viewed their role as encompassing holistic spiritual formation rather than mere content delivery. All three teachers maintained relationships with students beyond formal class time. Teacher Ruth described her approach: "I make time to talk individually with students about their spiritual lives. Some face challenges at home or struggle with specific sins. I

want them to know they can come to me, that I care about their spiritual growth, not just their test scores."

Observations revealed various expressions of relational engagement: teachers arriving early to interact with students before class, staying after to counsel students facing difficulties, attending school events to support students, and following up on previous conversations about spiritual matters. Students affirmed the significance of these relationships. One fifth-grade student shared: "Teacher Samuel remembers things I tell him about my family and my problems. He prays for me. This shows he really cares, not just about teaching but about me." Such testimonies illustrate how relational faithfulness strengthens teachers' spiritual influence.

Teachers also demonstrated faithfulness by maintaining relationships with students' families. Two teachers regularly communicated with parents about students' spiritual development and collaborated with families in reinforcing biblical values. Teacher Maria explained: "Christian education is not complete in the classroom. I work together with parents so that what we teach in school is reinforced at home."

Challenges to Teacher Faithfulness

With only two 45-minute periods per week for CRE, teachers struggled to provide comprehensive biblical instruction. Teacher Samuel lamented: "We have so much to teach—the whole counsel of God—but so little time. I often feel we only scratch the surface." Teaching in a multi-religious school required sensitivity to non-Christian students while maintaining doctrinal integrity. Teachers expressed tension between respecting religious diversity and faithfully proclaiming Christian truth. Teacher Ruth noted: "I must be faithful to Christian teaching while being respectful to students of other faiths. Finding this balance is not always easy." : Teachers identified limited access to age-appropriate teaching materials, audio-visual resources, and biblical reference tools. This resource scarcity hindered their ability to employ diverse pedagogical strategies and engage students effectively.

Some students come from nominally Christian families with minimal spiritual engagement, making it difficult to reinforce biblical values outside school. Teacher Maria observed: "Some children hear about obeying God only in my class. At home, there is no spiritual support. This makes lasting transformation challenging." Teachers acknowledged the challenge of maintaining their own spiritual vitality amid heavy workloads and personal pressures. Teacher Samuel admitted: "Sometimes I am so busy with teaching responsibilities that I neglect my own spiritual disciplines. Yet I know I cannot give what I do not have."

This study reveals that teacher faithfulness in Christian religious education is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing personal spiritual authenticity, pedagogical integrity, and relational commitment. The findings align with previous research emphasizing the critical importance of teacher religiosity and spiritual modeling in religious education contexts (Buchanan, 2013; Cooling, 2010).

The centrality of personal spiritual modeling identified in this study resonates with social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn through observation of role models. In religious education contexts, teachers function as primary spiritual exemplars whose lived faith significantly influences students' religious development. The students'

recognition and valuation of teacher authenticity suggests that credible spiritual modeling may be more influential than formal instruction alone.

The pedagogical strategies employed by teachers—narrative-based learning, application exercises, memorization with understanding, and dialogical teaching—reflect best practices in religious education literature (Estep et al., 2008). These approaches honor both the cognitive and affective dimensions of spiritual formation, addressing students' developmental needs while maintaining theological integrity. The emphasis on understanding rather than mere rote learning suggests that teachers conceptualize faith formation as involving deep comprehension and personal appropriation of biblical truth. The relational dimension of teacher faithfulness highlighted in this study parallels research on mentoring relationships in Christian education (Dean, 2010). Teachers who invest in ongoing, caring relationships with students create environments conducive to spiritual formation. Such relationships provide contexts for authentic dialogue, personal application of biblical principles, and sustained spiritual guidance. The integration of family collaboration further reflects holistic approaches to Christian education that recognize the interconnectedness of home, church, and school in spiritual formation.

The challenges identified—limited time, religious diversity, insufficient resources, cultural influences, and personal spiritual maintenance—are not unique to this context but reflect broader tensions in religious education worldwide (Parker & Freathy, 2011). These challenges raise important questions about institutional support for religious education, teacher training and ongoing development, and the cultivation of home-school-church partnerships in spiritual formation.

The study's focus on John 14:15 as a theological foundation for teaching obedience proves significant. This verse encapsulates the essential biblical relationship between love and obedience, presenting obedience not as legalistic duty but as loving response to God's grace. Teachers who ground their instruction in this principle help students develop intrinsically motivated faithfulness rather than mere external compliance. This theological orientation aligns with research on spiritual motivation, which distinguishes between extrinsic religious conformity and intrinsic spiritual commitment.

However, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The study's small sample size and single-site focus limit generalizability. The three-month data collection period, while sufficient for this descriptive study, may not capture long-term patterns of teacher faithfulness or seasonal variations in teaching practices. Additionally, the research relied primarily on self-reported data from teachers and students, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research employing longitudinal designs, multiple sites, and diverse methodological approaches would enhance understanding of teacher faithfulness in Christian education contexts.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes valuable insights into the nature and practice of teacher faithfulness in Christian religious education. The findings suggest that effective Christian teaching requires more than pedagogical competence; it demands authentic spiritual commitment, theological integrity, and relational investment. Teacher faithfulness, when understood as encompassing these multiple dimensions, becomes a powerful catalyst for students' spiritual formation and growth in obedience to God's commandments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the faithfulness of Christian Religious Education teachers in teaching students at SDN No. 076675 Ombolata Hilimbowo to obey God's commandments, with particular attention to the biblical principle articulated in John 14:15. The research reveals that teacher faithfulness manifests through three primary dimensions: personal spiritual modeling, pedagogical faithfulness in biblical instruction, and relational engagement and mentorship. Teachers demonstrate faithfulness by embodying the principles they teach, presenting biblical instruction with theological integrity and contextual relevance, and investing in ongoing relationships that support students' spiritual formation. Their commitment to faithful teaching is rooted in personal spiritual conviction and expressed through diverse pedagogical strategies that help students understand and embrace the connection between love for God and obedience to His commandments.

However, teachers face significant challenges, including limited instructional time, the complexity of teaching in religiously diverse contexts, insufficient resources, varying family support for spiritual formation, and the demanding work of maintaining personal spiritual vitality while serving others. These challenges highlight the need for institutional support, enhanced teacher development, adequate resources, and collaborative partnerships between schools, families, and churches.

The study's findings carry several practical implications. First, teacher training programs should emphasize spiritual formation alongside pedagogical preparation, recognizing that authentic Christian teaching flows from teachers' own spiritual vitality. Second, schools should provide adequate time, resources, and support for religious education, acknowledging its critical role in holistic student development. Third, intentional partnerships between schools and families should be cultivated to ensure consistency in spiritual formation across contexts. Fourth, ongoing professional and spiritual development opportunities should be made available to sustain teachers' faithfulness over time. Future research should explore the long-term impact of teacher faithfulness on students' spiritual development, examining how early formation influences sustained commitment to Christian discipleship. Comparative studies across diverse school contexts would illuminate how cultural, institutional, and demographic factors shape the expression and effectiveness of teacher faithfulness. Additionally, investigation of specific pedagogical interventions designed to enhance teacher faithfulness and student spiritual formation would contribute to the development of evidence-based practices in Christian education. In conclusion, the faithfulness of Christian Religious Education teachers represents a vital factor in students' spiritual formation and understanding of obedience to God's commandments. When teachers embody authentic spiritual commitment, maintain pedagogical integrity, and invest in caring relationships, they create environments where students can encounter the transformative reality of God's love and respond with faithful obedience. As John 14:15 reminds us, love for Christ naturally expresses itself in obedience to His commands—a truth that faithful teachers both exemplify and impart to the next generation.

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