



Teacher Humility as a Transformative Spiritual Competence: Insights from Matthew 18:4 at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines humility as a transformative spiritual competence in the teaching ministry of the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan, using Matthew 18:4 as the theological and conceptual foundation. Anchored in a qualitative research design, the study integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), an exegetical analysis of the biblical text, and semi-structured interviews with the PAK teacher and six Christian students. The research investigates how the teacher's embodiment of spiritual humility influences classroom relationships, learning behavior, and the moral and spiritual formation of the school's fifty-six Christian students. The findings reveal that humility, characterized by sincerity, teachability, emotional moderation, gentleness, and relational warmth, significantly shapes the dynamics of the classroom. When the teacher practices humility through attentive listening, patient guidance, and servant-like leadership, students experience greater emotional safety, trust, and motivation. This relational climate fosters increased empathy, cooperation, and moral reflection, demonstrating that humility is not merely a private virtue but a pedagogical force with observable impact. The study also shows that humility strengthens the teacher's spiritual identity, supported by prayer and scriptural reflection, enabling consistent Christlike responses even in challenging situations. The research highlights that students perceive humble behaviors, such as fairness, willingness to admit mistakes, and compassion, as authentic expressions of Christian character, which they naturally emulate. In this way, humility becomes a lived curriculum that shapes students' values and interpersonal conduct. The study concludes that humility is essential for Christian educators, framing teaching as a ministry grounded in Christlike servanthood. It recommends greater emphasis on spiritual formation, character training, and humility-based pedagogical approaches within Christian education.

Keywords: *Teacher Humility, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Humility has long been recognized as a foundational virtue in the Christian tradition, shaping not only personal spirituality but also the way believers engage in ministry and

service. Within the context of Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen/PAK*), humility becomes an essential spiritual competence that influences how teachers relate to students, interpret Scripture, and embody the values they seek to cultivate. The teaching ministry is not merely a transfer of knowledge but a relational and transformative vocation in which character, attitude, and spiritual posture matter as deeply as pedagogical skill. The words of Jesus in Matthew 18:4, “*Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,*” offer a profound theological framework for understanding humility as a virtue that empowers educators to teach not from authority alone, but from sincerity, gentleness, and Christlike disposition. At SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan, located in the highlands of Toba, one Christian Religious Education teacher serves 56 Christian students across several grade levels. The cultural context of Toba, known for its communal values, respect for elders, and strong family ties, provides both opportunities and challenges for shaping an educational environment grounded in spiritual humility. While students inherit cultural virtues such as respect, cooperation, and community responsibility, they are also exposed to contemporary influences, competition, academic pressure, and digital individualism, that may hinder the development of humility as a lived spiritual value. In such a setting, the humility of the teacher becomes a transformative force that models a Christ-centered character, demonstrating that leadership and influence are exercised not through dominance, but through service, openness, and moral integrity. Current educational discourse increasingly emphasizes the importance of teacher character, emotional intelligence, and relational competence. However, studies often overlook humility as a distinct spiritual competence that shapes teacher-student interactions and supports moral development. Research in character education highlights that teachers significantly influence students’ internalization of virtues through modeling and consistent behavior. When teachers embody humility, showing patience, acknowledging limitations, being willing to learn, and treating all students with dignity, they create a more humanizing, equitable, and spiritually resonant learning environment. Humility in teaching encourages students to value collaboration over competition, empathy over self-centeredness, and gratitude over entitlement. These values align with Christian character and positively impact classroom atmosphere, conflict resolution, and student well-being. From a biblical perspective, humility in Matthew 18:4 is not weakness or passivity but a conscious posture of dependence on God and openness to others. Jesus presents a child as the model of true greatness, emphasizing qualities such as sincerity, trust, teachability, and absence of self-exaltation. For PAK teachers, embodying this kind of humility means approaching teaching as a form of ministry shaped by prayer, discernment, and self-reflection. It also requires resisting the temptation to derive authority solely from position or academic attainment, instead choosing to lead with compassion, listening, and grace. In the context of SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan, where the PAK teacher interacts with children in their formative years, humility becomes a means of shaping not only their knowledge of Scripture but also their identity, interpersonal skills, and moral imagination. This study aims to explore how teacher humility functions as a transformative spiritual competence in the Christian education practiced at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan. Through exegetical reflection on Matthew 18:4 and analysis of pedagogical practices observed in the school context, the research examines how humility is embodied, communicated, and lived out in daily interactions. The focus lies on understanding the theological foundation,

pedagogical implications, and spiritual impact of humility on students' character formation. By highlighting the significance of humility as a core dimension of Christian teaching ministry, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions on teacher spirituality, faith-based pedagogy, and virtue-centered educational practices.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the primary methodological approach, complemented by light semi-structured interviews with the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher and several students at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan. This combined strategy was selected to ensure a strong theoretical foundation while simultaneously capturing contextual insights that reflect the lived reality of humility expressed in the teaching ministry. The central aim of this study is to understand how humility, as articulated in Matthew 18:4, functions as a transformative spiritual competence when embodied by the PAK teacher in daily interactions with the school's 56 Christian students. The SLR was conducted to synthesize existing scholarship on spiritual humility, teacher character, virtue ethics, Christian educational practice, and biblical interpretations related to humility. Following established protocols, relevant publications from academic databases were identified, screened according to inclusion criteria (2014-2024, relevance to teacher character, spiritual formation, humility, or exegetical insights into Matthew 18), assessed for eligibility, and synthesized thematically. This process yielded a conceptual framework demonstrating that humility in Christian teaching involves authenticity, dependence on God, a willingness to listen, and prioritizing students' development ahead of personal status; these insights subsequently guided the interpretation of interview data. To enrich the findings derived from literature, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the PAK teacher and six purposively selected Christian students representing both upper and lower grade levels. The interviews explored the teacher's understanding and practice of humility, students' perceptions of the teacher's character and relational qualities, and the influence of teacher humility on students' learning behavior, emotional security, and spiritual growth. Because humility is the theological center of this study, a brief exegetical analysis of Matthew 18:4 was incorporated, drawing on academic commentaries, Greek lexical tools, and recent biblical scholarship. Special attention was given to the Greek term *tapeinōsei* (ταπεινώσει), meaning "to humble oneself," which conveys the idea of voluntary lowering, teachability, trust, and sincerity, traits that reflect the disposition of a child as presented by Jesus. This exegetical insight provided a biblical lens through which the teacher's attitudes and practices could be interpreted. Data from the SLR, interview transcripts, and exegetical reflections were analyzed using thematic coding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that teacher humility, understood as a transformative spiritual competence shaped by Matthew 18:4, has a profound influence on the moral, spiritual, and relational development of Christian students at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan, where one Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher ministers to fifty-six Christian learners. Drawing from a systematic literature review complemented by a brief interview with the teacher, the findings indicate that humility is not merely a theological

virtue but a pedagogical force that shapes classroom culture, instructional dynamics, character formation, and spiritual awareness. In the context of public schooling in Indonesia, where Christian students often navigate complex interpersonal and religious dynamics, the teacher's embodiment of humility becomes a stabilizing moral presence and a transformative educational influence. Matthew 18:4, which proclaims that greatness in God's kingdom belongs to the one who humbles himself like a child, provides a theological foundation for understanding humility as simplicity, sincerity, teachability, honesty, and dependence on God. These qualities, when translated into classroom practice, create a learning environment characterized by trust, respect, gentleness, and openness. The data show that the teacher at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan displays a form of relational humility that significantly shapes students' perceptions of safety and belonging. Students feel that the teacher listens attentively, treats them respectfully, acknowledges mistakes, apologizes when necessary, and expresses warmth in daily interactions. These seemingly simple behaviors serve as profound pedagogical actions that redefine the teacher-student power dynamic. Rather than exerting authority through dominance or fear, the teacher's presence communicates acceptance and approachability. The literature affirms that humble educators cultivate strong relational bonds that foster engagement, participation, and moral learning. The interview data show that students experience greater comfort in asking questions, expressing confusion, and sharing personal concerns because the teacher's relational posture reduces anxiety and fear of judgment. This dynamic aligns with biblical interpretations of Matthew 18:4, where humility entails lowering oneself to uplift others. The teacher's relational humility effectively removes hierarchical barriers and enables relational closeness, which is essential for meaningful moral and spiritual formation.

Another important result concerns the modeling effect of humility. Students observe and imitate humble behaviors demonstrated by the teacher, such as speaking gently, sharing responsibilities, showing patience during mistakes, returning lost items, and applying polite language when faced with conflict. The PAK teacher becomes a living curriculum whose actions communicate the virtues being taught. This finding echoes educational frameworks stating that character formation in children occurs largely through modeling rather than direct instruction. When students witness their teacher apologizing openly or listening attentively, they learn that humility is not weakness but moral strength. In this school context, incidents of bullying and verbal aggression decreased as students adopted more empathetic and respectful forms of interaction. This outcome reinforces the theological conviction that humility lies at the heart of discipleship, as Christ demonstrated through servanthood and self-emptying love in Philippians 2:5-8. Thus, the teacher's humility influences not only individual behavior but also collective classroom ethos, creating a culture of mutual respect and compassion. The findings also illustrate that humility in teaching is grounded in reflective self-awareness. The teacher frequently acknowledges personal limitations and describes dependence on God as central to teaching practice. This attitude reflects a theological understanding that humility begins with recognizing human finiteness and divine sovereignty. The teacher often frames the learning process as a shared journey, expressing to students that teaching requires God's guidance and that the classroom is a space of mutual growth. Students perceive this sincerity as authenticity, which enhances their trust and engagement. The literature on

reflective pedagogy suggests that educators who are aware of their own limitations are more open to student input, more adaptable to classroom needs, and more empathetic in responding to diverse learning challenges. This was evident at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan, where the teacher's reflective humility resulted in more patient support for struggling learners and more compassionate responses to emotional difficulties faced by students. When a student entered class visibly distressed due to family issues, the teacher paused the lesson, spoke privately with the student, and offered prayerful support. Such gestures demonstrate that humility fosters moral sensitivity, enabling the teacher to prioritize relationships over rigid instructional routines.

Spiritual discipline also emerges as a significant factor in sustaining the teacher's humility. The teacher reported that daily prayer, Bible reflection, and intentional meditation on Scripture, especially passages like Matthew 18:4, shape emotional readiness for teaching. These practices help the teacher remain calm, patient, and gentle even in challenging situations. Students observe these qualities, and they described the teacher as "calm," "not easily angry," and "patient even when we make mistakes." These descriptions suggest that humble teaching is not accidental but cultivated through consistent spiritual formation. The literature confirms that humility in Christian education is inseparable from the teacher's devotional life, as spiritual practices nurture a heart posture aligned with Christ's example. The results further show that humility significantly influences classroom pedagogy. Rather than exercising authority in a dominating manner, the teacher practices what may be called non-dominating authority, authority grounded in guidance rather than coercion. The teacher establishes expectations but avoids harsh discipline, instead using restorative dialogue to address misbehavior. When conflicts arise, students are encouraged to reflect on their actions, express apologies, and reconcile relationships. This practice not only promotes peaceful classroom interactions but also internalizes biblical values of forgiveness, reconciliation, and patience. Students reported appreciating the teacher's approach because it made them feel respected and helped them learn to resolve conflicts peacefully. Such findings align with research demonstrating that humility reduces defensive reactions and enhances cooperative learning environments. Humility also influences instructional inclusivity. The teacher pays particular attention to students who struggle academically or emotionally, providing additional explanations or encouragement without humiliating them publicly. In group activities, the teacher intentionally includes quieter or marginalized students, demonstrating humility through the willingness to accommodate diverse needs. Students with lower confidence levels reported increased motivation and willingness to participate because they felt accepted and valued. Educational literature suggests that humble teachers foster inclusive classrooms because they do not elevate themselves above students and do not show favoritism. This dynamic was clearly observed at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan, where students described the learning environment as "comfortable," "safe," and "not scary."

Another major finding is that humility contributes to students' growth in Christian character. Students demonstrated increased empathy, patience, politeness, honesty, and willingness to apologize. These changes reflect the powerful role of moral modeling and relational encouragement. The moral development observed in the students is consistent with theological interpretations of humility as the foundation of virtues such as

gentleness, patience, and compassion. The PAK teacher's practice of combining biblical lessons with relational humility reinforced the internalization of Christian values. Students were not merely memorizing verses about humility; they were observing humility embodied before them daily. This experiential learning produced outcomes such as reduced bullying, increased cooperation, and enhanced respect among peers. The data also indicate that humility enhances student motivation and engagement. Students described feeling more excited and more confident participating in PAK lessons because the teacher's humble demeanor fostered a safe atmosphere. They felt that the teacher treated their opinions with value, encouraged questions, and respected their struggles. As a result, students were more active in discussions, more willing to pray aloud, more engaged in group activities, and more committed to completing assignments. This aligns with research showing that humble teachers create psychologically safe environments that encourage curiosity and reduce fear of failure. When students sense that the teacher is not judgmental or harsh, they feel free to explore ideas, admit confusion, and take academic risks.

Another significant outcome is the deepening of students' spiritual understanding. The teacher interprets Matthew 18:4 not as a call for childishness but for childlike humility, openness, simplicity, sincerity, and dependence on God. Students reported understanding humility not as being passive or weak but as having a pure heart, being honest, and being willing to follow God with sincerity. They began practicing spiritual reflection, asking questions about biblical teachings, and showing interest in devotional activities. The teacher's humble posture made spiritual lessons feel authentic and relatable, thus enhancing their spiritual growth. The theological integration of humility and pedagogy is a major discussion point emerging from the findings. Matthew 18:4 teaches that true greatness is found in humility, and the teacher embodies this principle by lowering ego, serving students, and prioritizing their growth. The teacher's gestures of humility, apologizing, listening, praying, guiding gently, serve as concrete expressions of Jesus' teaching. The classroom becomes a space where theological truth is practiced, not just explained. Humility transforms pedagogy from a transmission of knowledge to a ministry of spiritual formation. This aligns with the Christian educational view that teaching is not merely cognitive but deeply spiritual, relational, and moral. Transformative education theory further supports the argument that humility contributes to deep learning. Students engage in critical reflection, evaluate their behavior, and consider the spiritual implications of their actions. The teacher's humble guidance encourages students to examine motives, resolve conflicts with empathy, and practice self-discipline. Humility thus becomes a catalyst for transformative learning, where students internalize values and change their perspectives.

The findings also reveal challenges. The teacher sometimes finds it difficult to balance humility with assertiveness, particularly when handling persistent misbehavior. Some school staff or parents may interpret humility as softness, leading to misunderstandings about the teacher's authority. Additionally, managing fifty-six students with diverse needs requires emotional labor, and humility-based approaches can be draining without adequate institutional support. Despite these challenges, the teacher persists in practicing humility because of a strong conviction that humility reflects Christ's teaching

and effectively shapes student character. The results have practical implications for Christian Religious Education. Teacher training programs should incorporate spiritual formation, emotional intelligence, reflective practices, and servant-leadership development. Humility is not merely a personal trait but a competency that requires intentional cultivation. Curricular frameworks should embed humility as both a content area and a learning disposition. Schools should adopt policies that promote compassionate discipline and relational respect, aligning with humble pedagogical approaches. The results demonstrate that humility, grounded in Christ's teaching in Matthew 18:4, is a transformative spiritual competence that significantly shapes the learning environment, student character, and spiritual development at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan. The humble posture of the PAK teacher fosters trust, motivation, inclusivity, and moral growth, demonstrating that humility is a powerful educational force. Humility transforms teaching from mere instruction into spiritual mentorship, making the classroom a living space where Christian virtues are embodied, observed, and internalized.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that humility, as articulated in Matthew 18:4, serves as a transformative spiritual competence that profoundly shapes the teaching ministry of the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher at SD Negeri 173580 Pargaolan. Through an integration of Systematic Literature Review (SLR), exegetical reflection, and interview-based insights, the findings reveal that humility is not merely a personal virtue but a pedagogical force that influences classroom climate, moral development, and spiritual formation. The teacher's embodiment of childlike humility, marked by sincerity, teachability, gentleness, relational warmth, and dependence on God, creates an atmosphere of trust, emotional safety, and mutual respect among the school's fifty-six Christian students. Such an environment becomes fertile ground for the internalization of Christian values, the cultivation of empathy, and the strengthening of students' moral and spiritual identity. The results demonstrate that humility transforms teacher-student relationships by replacing authoritarian dominance with servant-hearted guidance. Students feel heard, valued, and respected, which enhances their motivation, confidence, and willingness to engage in learning. Moreover, the teacher's modeling of humble behaviors, such as admitting mistakes, listening attentively, and responding with patience, becomes a powerful moral curriculum that students naturally imitate. As a consequence, improvements in peer relationships, reductions in conflict, and heightened levels of kindness and cooperation become visible in the classroom culture. Humility, therefore, functions not only as a theological ideal but as an active, lived practice that shapes students' character development in practical, observable ways. The study also highlights the role of spiritual disciplines in sustaining teacher humility. Through prayer, biblical reflection, and personal spiritual discipline, the teacher maintains emotional stability and cultivates a Christlike disposition essential for navigating the complexities of classroom life. This reinforces the theological insight that humility is not innate but cultivated through constant spiritual formation. Humility enables the teacher to adopt inclusive pedagogical practices that support struggling learners, encourage weaker voices, and ensure that every student feels seen and valued. Such practices closely align with

Christian conceptions of education as a ministry of compassion, justice, and relational restoration. The research acknowledges challenges associated with humility-based teaching, including misunderstandings from stakeholders who may perceive humility as weakness and the emotional labor required to sustain gentle, compassionate engagement in a large, diverse classroom. The teacher's commitment to humility reflects deep theological conviction and highlights the need for institutional structures that support spiritually informed pedagogy. This study affirms that humility is indispensable to Christian education. It reframes teaching not as an exercise of authority but as a vocation grounded in Christlike servanthood. In light of Matthew 18:4, the teacher who "humbles himself like a child" becomes a transformative presence whose influence extends beyond academic instruction into the spiritual and moral shaping of students. For Christian educators, humility must therefore be embraced as a foundational professional and spiritual competence, one that enriches pedagogy, nurtures character, and fosters communities of grace and mutual respect. This study recommends that future research further explore humility as a core dimension of teacher formation and as a guiding principle for school culture, curriculum design, and leadership development within Christian educational settings.

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