



The Professional Teacher as a Kingdom Scribe: Interpreting Matthew 13:52 in the Pedagogical Practice of SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo-Dairi

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the concept of the professional teacher as a “Kingdom Scribe” (Matthew 13:52) and its pedagogical relevance for Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo, Kabupaten Dairi. In Matthew 13:52, Jesus describes the grammateus-the scribe trained for the Kingdom-as one who brings out “treasures old and new,” symbolizing the integration of inherited wisdom with fresh, contextually relevant insights. This theological metaphor offers a powerful framework for understanding the professional identity, instructional competence, and spiritual mission of Christian teachers in contemporary vocational schools. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study involved observations of classroom practices, semi-structured interviews with five CRE teachers, and document analysis of lesson plans and school documentation. The results indicate that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo demonstrate strong mastery of scriptural content but face challenges in consistently connecting timeless biblical truths with students’ vocational realities. Teachers who embraced the “Kingdom Scribe” paradigm showed higher levels of reflective praxis, contextualized lesson delivery, and student engagement, particularly in areas of character formation, ethical reasoning, and responsible decision-making. The findings further highlight that the integration of traditional Christian values with innovative pedagogical strategies is essential for enhancing both spiritual and academic outcomes. The discussion underscores that being a “Kingdom Scribe” involves three core competencies: hermeneutical depth, pedagogical creativity, and contextual sensitivity. Overall, this study concludes that the metaphor of the Kingdom Scribe provides an effective theological-pedagogical lens for shaping professional Christian teaching practice, empowering educators to transform classrooms into spaces of wisdom, relevance, and transformative learning.

Keywords: Professional Teacher, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Practice

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational discourse, the role of teachers extends far beyond the transmission of academic knowledge; it encompasses moral formation, cultural

mediation, and the cultivation of wisdom necessary for navigating an increasingly complex society. Within Christian pedagogical perspectives, this expanded role resonates profoundly with Jesus' description of the "scribe of the Kingdom" in Matthew 13:52. The verse portrays a teacher trained in the Kingdom of Heaven as one who "*brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old*," a metaphor that encapsulates the dynamic integration of tradition and innovation within the learning process. Biblical scholars such as Craig Keener emphasize that Jesus' metaphor positions the ideal teacher as a steward of divine wisdom, capable of interpreting timeless truths while addressing contemporary realities (Keener 1993). For Christian educators in public school settings, this imagery offers a rich framework for understanding professional identity and pedagogical responsibility in holistic and transformative ways. The relevance of Matthew 13:52 becomes particularly striking when applied to the pedagogical context of SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo in Dairi Regency, a vocational high school situated within a culturally diverse community in North Sumatra. Teachers in this institution operate within Indonesia's pluralistic educational framework, which upholds religious freedom, multicultural respect, and character-based learning as national priorities. While public schools do not explicitly promote religious instruction, Christian teachers nonetheless have opportunities to express their vocational identity through ethical character, professional integrity, and value-oriented educational practices. As Holmes argues, the integration of faith and learning is not dependent on overt religious content but emerges through the embodiment of Christian virtues in the teaching process (Holmes 1987). Thus, the metaphor of the Kingdom Scribe becomes a valuable interpretive lens through which to understand how Christian teachers negotiate their missional identity within secular educational environments. Interpreting Matthew 13:52 in an educational context highlights the continuity between ancient wisdom and contemporary pedagogical demands. The "old treasure" may refer to foundational Christian virtues such as humility, compassion, and justice, while the "new treasure" reflects adaptive strategies, modern competencies, and learner-centered teaching required in 21st-century classrooms. According to France, Jesus' parabolic teaching consistently affirms that discipleship involves both preserving tradition and embracing renewal (France 2007). In the teaching profession, this dual responsibility manifests in the ability to maintain moral clarity while engaging with technological developments, diverse learning styles, and rapidly shifting social expectations. By embodying this balance, the Christian teacher at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo becomes not only an academic instructor but also a moral guide whose presence contributes to the holistic development of students.

The vocational high school context adds further layers of complexity. Students in vocational education are trained for practical skills and direct entry into the workforce, often facing economic pressures, family expectations, and societal challenges. The professional teacher functioning as a Kingdom Scribe must therefore navigate not only the academic curriculum but also the moral and emotional needs of learners who are preparing for adult responsibilities. Bosch notes that Christian mission is fundamentally about participation in God's holistic renewal of human life, expressed through relational engagement and service-oriented action (Bosch 1991). This participatory dimension is evident when teachers cultivate supportive learning environments, model responsible citizenship, and encourage students to develop ethical work habits that reflect human

dignity and social responsibility. Within this framework, the teacher's professional competence becomes inseparable from spiritual purpose. The Kingdom Scribe metaphor challenges Christian teachers to move beyond technical proficiency toward wisdom-oriented pedagogy—one that bridges eternal values with present realities. At SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo, where students come from diverse backgrounds, such pedagogical wisdom reinforces harmony, respect, and mutual understanding, aligning with national educational goals while remaining rooted in a distinct Christian vocation. This study examines how teachers interpret Matthew 13:52 and embody its principles in their pedagogical practices, offering insights into the transformative potential of integrating biblical wisdom with contemporary professional teaching.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how Christian teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo interpret and enact their professional roles through the metaphor of the “Kingdom Scribe” found in Matthew 13:52. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows the researcher to investigate participants’ lived experiences, subjective interpretations, and personal reflections on faith-informed pedagogy within the pluralistic educational context of an Indonesian public vocational school. As Creswell notes, qualitative methods are appropriate for examining complex human dynamics, particularly when the goal is to understand meaning-making processes rather than measure variables (Creswell 2013). The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo, a vocational high school located in Dairi Regency, North Sumatra. The school serves students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and adheres to Indonesia’s national education standards emphasizing neutrality, character development, and inclusivity. This setting provides a meaningful environment for studying Christian teachers who must balance professional responsibilities with faith-inspired values. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of teachers who identify as Christian, have at least three years of teaching experience at the school, and are willing to articulate their understanding of Matthew 13:52 as it relates to their professional identity. A total of eight teachers participated in the study, representing different teaching subjects including vocational skills, general education, and character education. This variety allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of how the Kingdom Scribe metaphor is embodied across disciplinary contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews served as the main data source because they provide flexibility to explore both predetermined themes and emerging insights. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and focused on three core areas: teachers’ interpretations of Matthew 13:52, their perceived roles as Kingdom Scribes in the contemporary classroom, and practical expressions of faith-integrated professionalism within a public-school framework. Interview questions were open-ended to encourage narrative depth and allow teachers to describe personal experiences in their own terms. Classroom observations were conducted to corroborate interview data and to examine how teachers’ articulated beliefs were reflected in their interactions, teaching methods, communication style, and classroom management. The researcher used an observation protocol focusing on behaviors associated with the Kingdom Scribe metaphor, such as value modeling, inclusive communication, conflict mediation, and the integration of ethical reflections

into learning activities. School documents-including teacher handbooks, character education guidelines, and the school's pedagogical framework-were reviewed to understand the institutional expectations shaping teacher behavior. Document analysis contextualized teachers' practices within the broader educational structure of SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model, which involves six phases: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Initial coding was conducted manually to maintain close engagement with the data. Codes were generated inductively from interview transcripts and observation notes, while secondary cycles refined these codes into broader themes representing theological insights, pedagogical practices, and professional identity formation. Themes such as "Integrating Old and New Wisdom," "Modeling Kingdom Values," and "Navigating Pluralistic Boundaries" emerged through iterative analysis. Ethical protocols were followed to protect participant confidentiality and ensure voluntary participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The study also received administrative approval from the school leadership at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Christian teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo embody the metaphor of the "Kingdom Scribe" from Matthew 13:52 in diverse and contextually nuanced ways. Their interpretations of the text, their pedagogical decisions, and their daily professional interactions demonstrate a dynamic integration of spiritual identity and pedagogical responsibility. While the teachers operate within a secular vocational school governed by national education policies requiring religious neutrality, they nonetheless find meaningful ways to live out the values and character associated with their Christian faith. The results are presented alongside an integrated discussion of their significance, showing how the metaphor of the Kingdom Scribe provides a framework for understanding the unique role of Christian teachers in pluralistic educational spaces. Interviews revealed that participants viewed Matthew 13:52 as a call to integrate "the old" and "the new" in their professional and personal identity. Nearly all teachers interpreted "the old" as referring to timeless Christian virtues-wisdom, integrity, compassion, humility, and justice-rooted in Scripture and Christian tradition. Meanwhile, "the new" was understood as contemporary knowledge, modern pedagogy, technological skills, and the evolving demands of vocational education in the 21st century. One teacher described the metaphor as a reminder that "a Christian educator must carry both heritage and relevance," asserting that a Kingdom Scribe cannot neglect either. This interpretation aligns with France's reading of the passage, where Jesus emphasizes the continuity and renewal inherent in discipleship-drawing from the deep well of tradition while engaging the needs of the present world. The teachers' emphasis on balance suggests that they view their professional identities not as separate from their spiritual commitments but as extensions of them. Several teachers also interpreted the verse as a commissioning to steward knowledge responsibly. They believed that their position provides them with influence-intellectual, moral, and relational-which must be exercised with wisdom. This sense of stewardship echoes Keener's understanding of the scribe in the biblical world as someone who interprets wisdom for the community. The teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo

expressed that their role requires discernment in sharing knowledge that contributes to student growth, moral formation, and social responsibility. For them, teaching is not merely the transfer of information but a transformative engagement akin to the biblical scribe's duty. These findings demonstrate that teachers at this school internalize the metaphor deeply, viewing it as a guiding principle that shapes their identity. This interpretation becomes the foundation for their practical actions in the classroom, influencing how they communicate, mentor, and support students from diverse backgrounds.

Embodying Old and New Wisdom: Pedagogical Practices as an Expression of Missional Identity

Classroom observations revealed that teachers regularly incorporate both "old" and "new" treasures into their teaching practices. The "old" manifested in the consistent modeling of virtues such as patience, fairness, respect, and empathy. The teachers demonstrated an ethic of care that shaped the classroom atmosphere, creating spaces where students felt safe, affirmed, and motivated to learn. Many employed gentle language, attentive listening, and restorative approaches to conflict, reflecting their commitment to embody Christ-like attitudes without explicitly invoking religious terminology. At the same time, "the new" was visible in teachers' adoption of innovative instructional methods—project-based learning, digital tools, problem-solving modules, and competency-based approaches tailored to vocational education. For instance, one teacher designing a practical lesson in automotive engineering incorporated character-oriented reflection by asking students to evaluate how good work habits, responsibility, and teamwork affect long-term career success. Although explicitly secular, such approaches implicitly reflect the values of the Kingdom Scribe, where moral wisdom is not separated from technical skill. The integration of old and new wisdom also appeared in how teachers approached discipline. Rather than punitive responses, teachers often used conversations aimed at helping students understand the consequences of their actions and encouraging self-reflection. This practice resonates with the biblical idea of wisdom formation, where correction is framed as a form of loving guidance rather than authoritarian control. Teachers also demonstrated skill in contextualizing values within a pluralistic environment. They avoided terminology that could be interpreted as proselytizing but used universal moral language such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and respect. This practice shows how Christian teachers can live out their faith in a public-school environment without violating professional boundaries. It also supports Holmes' argument that Christian pedagogy involves embodying virtues rather than overt religious instruction. The teachers' pedagogical practices suggest that the Kingdom Scribe metaphor can harmoniously coexist with secular educational standards, enriching rather than conflicting with them.

A recurring theme in teachers' narratives was the complexity of working within a religiously diverse context. SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo includes Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and indigenous Batak belief systems, requiring teachers to interact with sensitivity and cultural awareness. Several teachers noted that although they could not explicitly teach Christian doctrine, they could embody values consistent with Matthew 13:52 through relational conduct. The teachers emphasized respect for all students and colleagues

regardless of religious affiliation. They viewed this respect not merely as professional courtesy but as an expression of their Christian calling. One participant explained that “being a Kingdom Scribe means being a bridge, not a barrier,” suggesting that Christian identity should foster peace, unity, and understanding within the school. This aligns with Bosch’s understanding of mission as participation in God’s reconciling work, where presence and relationships carry as much weight as proclamation. Teachers described efforts to foster inclusive classroom environments where all students feel valued. This included affirming students’ cultural expressions, allowing them to share experiences from their own religious backgrounds, and emphasizing dialogue rather than division. Teachers used various strategies to prevent religious conflicts, such as assigning diverse group tasks, mediating misunderstandings, and emphasizing shared human values. The teachers’ ability to navigate pluralism without compromising their identity reflects the essential dynamic of the Kingdom Scribe—holding old and new treasures together. Their faith informs their inclusivity, and inclusivity expresses their faith. Instead of creating tension between religious identity and professional obligation, these teachers demonstrate how the two can coexist productively, offering a model for Christian educators in similar contexts.

Professional Integrity and Ethical Formation: The Kingdom Scribe as Moral Example

Another significant finding is the teachers’ strong emphasis on ethical professionalism. Participants consistently described integrity, honesty, punctuality, preparedness, and fairness as core components of their vocation. They viewed professional excellence as an expression of their Christian witness, suggesting that the Kingdom Scribe embodied through excellence is more powerful than verbal messaging. Teachers often referenced the importance of consistency between personal values and professional behavior. One teacher noted, “Students watch more than they listen,” implying that modeling ethical conduct is a silent but influential means of teaching. This view is supported by the observation data, where teachers’ consistency in attitude created an atmosphere of trust. Students appeared more cooperative in classrooms where teachers demonstrated patience and fairness. Teachers also described specific ways they maintain integrity within institutional boundaries. This included avoiding favoritism, preparing lessons diligently, grading objectively, and maintaining transparency in assessment. Such behaviors showcase not only compliance with educational regulations but also a deeper commitment grounded in spiritual conviction. This professional integrity aligns with the biblical concept of the scribe as a custodian of truth. In the ancient context, scribes preserved sacred texts faithfully; in this modern educational setting, teachers serve as custodians of moral truth within their professional sphere. Their integrity becomes a form of witness that communicates Christian values in ways that honor students’ religious diversity while maintaining personal coherence.

Teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo frequently expressed that their role extends beyond academic instruction to include emotional support and relational mentoring. Many students in vocational education face personal challenges such as economic hardship, family instability, or uncertainty about future employment. Teachers noted that responding with empathy and active listening is part of their calling as Kingdom Scribes.

Observations confirmed that teachers engaged in informal counseling, offering encouragement and helping students navigate personal struggles. While this care was not framed explicitly in theological language, it reflects pastoral qualities consistent with Christian understandings of teaching as ministry. Teachers described moments of praying privately for students, even though such practices were not disclosed in the classroom. They viewed this spiritual intercessory role as part of their unseen contribution to the school's moral fabric. This relational dimension aligns with Bosch's emphasis on mission as relational and holistic rather than merely cognitive. By caring for the emotional needs of students, teachers become instruments of healing and encouragement—a modern expression of the biblical scribe's role in guiding the community toward wisdom. One challenge is the limitation imposed by the public-school structure, where overt religious expressions are restricted. Teachers sometimes struggled to balance their desire to share spiritual insights with their responsibility to uphold institutional neutrality. However, they generally viewed these constraints as opportunities to demonstrate faith through actions rather than explicit evangelism. Another challenge is the moral condition of some students, which teachers described as influenced by social media, peer pressure, and shifting societal values. Teachers noted that instilling discipline, responsibility, and respect requires patience and creativity. They saw this moral complexity as an invitation to bring out “new treasures”—innovative strategies that connect ancient wisdom to modern challenges. Christian teachers sometimes face misunderstandings or suspicion from colleagues who assume that religious identity might compromise professional impartiality. Yet the teachers in this study emphasized that demonstrating consistent professionalism helps counter such assumptions and strengthens trust. These challenges highlight the tension inherent in the metaphor of the Kingdom Scribe, where tradition and relevance must be held in dynamic balance. Teachers recognized that their mission is not easy, but they also identified these difficulties as formative, strengthening their reliance on divine wisdom.

The findings indicate that Christian teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo perceive their role not merely as educators but as agents of transformation. This transformative dimension is expressed in their influence on students' character, work ethic, relational skills, and worldview. Teachers described deep satisfaction when observing students develop confidence, discipline, and compassion—qualities they attribute partly to the moral atmosphere cultivated in the classroom. Teachers also recognized their impact on the broader school culture. Their presence contributes to an environment where respect, cooperation, and mutual care are nurtured. Their consistent demonstration of ethical conduct encourages colleagues to uphold similar standards, reinforcing the school's commitment to character-based education. The transformational impact observed in this study aligns with the biblical role of the scribe as a community influencer and interpreter of wisdom. In this vocational school context, the Christian teacher becomes a source of moral clarity, cultural enrichment, and relational stability. Their witness is not loud but steady, shaping the school through daily faithfulness.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Christian teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sitinjo embody the metaphor of the “Kingdom Scribe” in Matthew 13:52 through a dynamic integration of

spiritual identity, professional integrity, and pedagogical wisdom. Although they work within a public vocational school that mandates religious neutrality, these teachers develop meaningful ways of living out their calling by drawing from both “old” and “new” treasures—timeless Christian virtues and contemporary educational competencies. Their interpretation of the text reveals a sophisticated theological and pedagogical awareness: they view the “old” as moral grounding derived from Scripture and tradition, while the “new” represents innovative instructional strategies, technological literacy, and adaptive practices required in today’s pluralistic and rapidly evolving educational landscape. The teachers’ everyday practices reflect this dual commitment. They model virtues such as patience, compassion, fairness, and humility; they integrate character-building into their instructional methods; and they cultivate classrooms marked by respect, inclusivity, and emotional care. Their professional ethics—seen in punctuality, transparency, consistency, and dedication—serve as quiet but powerful expressions of their faith. By embodying such virtues, the teachers reflect the ancient role of the biblical scribe as a custodian of wisdom, but in a contemporary form appropriate to vocational education. At the same time, the findings highlight the challenges these teachers encounter. Navigating Indonesia’s pluralistic environment requires sensitivity, self-awareness, and intentionality. Teachers must balance faith-based identity with institutional norms, resisting both the temptation to impose religious content and the pressure to silence their convictions. Despite these constraints, they interpret the challenges as opportunities to demonstrate Christ-like character through relational wisdom and ethical excellence. Their ability to sustain this balance illustrates that the Kingdom Scribe metaphor is not merely symbolic but provides practical guidance for Christian educators working in secular contexts. The study shows that Christian teachers can function as transformative agents within public schools. Their influence extends beyond academic achievement to the formation of character, values, and interpersonal skills among students. Through their professional and relational presence, they contribute to an educational culture grounded in dignity, justice, and mutual respect. In this sense, they fulfill the mission envisioned in Matthew 13:52: bringing forth treasures old and new for the enrichment of the community. The vocation of the Christian teacher, therefore, remains a vital and constructive force within Indonesia’s diverse educational landscape.

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