



Spiritual Competence and the Great Commission: A Reflection on Matthew 28:19-20 in the Pedagogical Practice of SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar

Sri Rohani Saragi^{1*}, Elisamark Sitopu²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: srirohanisaragi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores how Christian teachers at SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar understand and embody spiritual competence in relation to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19–20 within the context of Indonesia’s pluralistic public education system. While the Great Commission is traditionally associated with evangelistic and ecclesial ministry, this research examines how its theological and ethical imperatives inform the vocational identity and pedagogical practices of Christian educators working in secular settings. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving seven Christian teachers with a minimum of three years of teaching experience. Thematic analysis revealed four core findings. First, spiritual competence is perceived primarily as an inner transformation that shapes teachers’ professional character, ethical decisions, and relational engagement with students. Second, teachers express missional consciousness not through explicit religious instruction but through compassionate, value-based, and relationally attentive practices that promote students’ moral and emotional development. Third, teachers navigate the boundaries of public education by integrating Christian virtues within nationally mandated character education, demonstrating both cultural sensitivity and professional integrity. Fourth, participants interpret Matthew 28:19–20 as a framework for ethical pedagogy, emphasizing discipleship as mentorship in virtues rather than conversion, and drawing strength from the promise of Christ’s continual presence. These findings contribute to broader discussions on Christian vocation in secular institutions and illustrate how faith-informed professionalism can coexist with Indonesia’s educational principles of tolerance, inclusivity, and mutual respect. The study suggests that spiritually competent teachers embody mission through character, care, and ethical consistency, thereby enriching the holistic development of students.

Keywords: *Spiritual Competence, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Practice*

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating complexity of contemporary educational settings requires teachers to demonstrate more than cognitive and instructional competence; they must embody a form of spiritual maturity capable of nurturing holistic learning within diverse and rapidly changing classroom contexts. In Indonesia-particularly in schools located in regions where cultural plurality intersects with fluctuating socio-economic realities-Christian teachers face the unique challenge of integrating their professional identity with their theological commitments. SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar, located in a heterogeneous suburban environment of Simalungun Regency, presents such a landscape. Here, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers are not only facilitators of knowledge but also agents of spiritual formation whose vocation resonates with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. This passage, historically interpreted as the foundational mandate for Christian mission, provides a theological framework that can shape the spiritual competence of teachers as they engage students in character formation, relational guidance, and ethical discernment. Matthew 28:19-20, traditionally understood within ecclesial and missionary contexts, gains new relevance when read through an educational lens. Jesus' injunction to "*make disciples... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" illuminates teaching not merely as the transmission of religious content but as an invitation to cultivate transformative learning grounded in obedience, relational engagement, and ethical responsibility. The inclusion of the promise "*I am with you always*" underscores a pedagogical spirituality in which divine presence empowers human action. In the context of CRE teachers, this becomes a theological anchor that informs their daily interactions, their approach to discipline, and their capacity to respond to the emotional, moral, and intellectual needs of students. Spiritual competence, therefore, is not an abstract religiosity but a dynamic integration of faith, wisdom, reflective practice, and the ability to translate biblical values into pedagogical models that promote human flourishing.

Within SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar, Christian teachers navigate classrooms characterized by varied religious affiliations, shifting emotional climates, and the increasing influence of digital culture on students' worldview and behavior. These conditions compel teachers to exercise spiritual discernment-evaluating when to encourage, when to correct, and how to cultivate learning environments marked by respect, empathy, and hope. Spiritual competence becomes crucial for addressing student issues such as anxiety, social fragmentation, lack of motivation, and challenges in moral decision-making. By embodying the spirit of the Great Commission, CRE teachers are called to model integrity, compassion, dialogical openness, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Their role expands beyond instructional delivery into relational mentoring and ethical leadership. At the theoretical level, scholarship in Christian pedagogy emphasizes that teaching is fundamentally a moral and spiritual practice shaped by the teacher's identity, worldview, and commitments. When teachers perceive their vocation as participating in God's mission, their pedagogical orientation shifts from functional competence to transformational engagement. The Great Commission offers a narrative framework through which teachers interpret their daily work-not as compartmentalized professional tasks but as acts of discipleship, witness, and service. This study situates Matthew 28:19-20 within the pedagogical practice of a public elementary school, highlighting how scriptural imperatives can inform professional

conduct while respecting Indonesia's pluralistic educational ethos. This research is significant for two reasons. First, it contributes to the academic discourse on spiritual competence as an essential dimension of teacher professionalism, especially in multi-faith Indonesian classrooms. Second, it demonstrates how biblical texts, when interpreted contextually, can offer valuable insights for shaping the ethical and relational dimensions of education. By examining the lived practices of Christian teachers at SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar, this study seeks to illuminate how the Great Commission can inspire authentic, compassionate, and spiritually grounded pedagogy.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how Christian teachers at SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar demonstrate spiritual competence in relation to the missional imperatives of Matthew 28:19-20. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of meanings, experiences, and spiritual practices that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement. The goal of this methodology is to illuminate the lived realities of teachers as they integrate theological convictions with pedagogical responsibilities in a pluralistic school environment. The study was conducted at SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar, a public elementary school in Simalungun Regency characterized by religious and cultural diversity. The school was selected through purposive sampling due to its demographic heterogeneity, which provides a rich context for understanding the intersection of Christian spirituality and educational practice. Participants consisted of five Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and three classroom teachers who self-identified as Christians. The inclusion of both CRE and general teachers ensured that data captured broader pedagogical practices beyond formal religious instruction. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participating teachers to explore their understanding of spiritual competence, their interpretation of Matthew 28:19–20, and how these influence their pedagogical choices. Interview questions were open-ended to allow teachers to articulate their experiences freely while giving the researcher the flexibility to probe deeper into emerging themes. Classroom observations were carried out over a six-week period to examine how spiritual competence manifested in daily interactions, decision-making, and instructional strategies. Observations focused on teacher–student communication, handling of disciplinary moments, incorporation of values in instruction, and relational attitudes that reflected compassion, patience, or moral intentionality. Field notes were recorded immediately following each observation to ensure accuracy and richness of detail. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and writing. The coding process combined inductive and deductive techniques. Deductive codes were informed by the conceptual framework of spiritual competence and missional pedagogy, whereas inductive codes emerged naturally from participants' narratives and observable behaviors. Themes were cross-verified across data sources to ensure coherence and credibility. Participants were provided with informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, methods of data collection, confidentiality assurances, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant identity, and all data were stored securely. As the research took place in a public school setting, special care

was taken to respect religious diversity and avoid imposing theological interpretations on participants. Member checking ensured that participants could review and confirm interview transcripts and thematic interpretations. Reflexive notes helped the researcher remain aware of personal biases during analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study regarding how Christian teachers at SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar understand and embody spiritual competence in relation to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. The themes emerged through thematic analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and school documents. Four major themes were identified: spiritual competence as an inner transformation shaping pedagogical identity, missional consciousness expressed through daily relational practices, negotiating faith expression within the boundaries of public education, and The Great Commission as a framework for ethical and value-based teaching. These themes are discussed below, integrating empirical insights with scholarly and theological perspectives. A prominent theme appearing across participant narratives is the perception of spiritual competence not merely as a set of professional skills but as the expression of an inner life shaped by prayer, biblical meditation, and ongoing character formation. Teachers consistently emphasized that their ability to guide students and create nurturing environments stems from a deeply personal and spiritual journey. One of the CRE teachers described spiritual competence as *"the character that comes out from your faith, not something you perform for people, but something that shapes how you see your students."* Teachers pointed to the significance of maintaining a disciplined spiritual life-regular devotion, worship, and scriptural reflection-to remain grounded in their vocation. Several teachers referenced Matthew 28:19-20 not simply as a missionary mandate but as a reminder of Christ's continual presence, which strengthens them in the challenges of teaching in a diverse setting. This consciousness nurtures resilience, humility, and patience-qualities that directly inform teaching behaviors. During classroom observations, teachers demonstrated calm responsiveness when dealing with classroom disruptions or student conflict. Rather than reacting with punitive measures, they practiced restorative approaches such as empathetic dialogue, reflective questioning, and invitation to personal responsibility. These responses correspond with literature asserting that spiritually grounded teachers tend to engage in relationally sensitive pedagogies (Hill 2016), reflecting values embedded in Christian spiritual formation. Participants also expressed that Matthew 28:19-20 functions as a formative text shaping their identity as educators. For them, the command "to teach everything I have commanded you" resonates with pedagogical purpose: to embody ethical and life-oriented teaching that guides students toward maturity. While they acknowledge the impossibility of overt theological instruction in a public school context, the teachers interpret "teaching" in this text as modeling Christ-like virtues-honesty, fairness, compassion, diligence-within their everyday conduct. This interpretation aligns with Holmes' view that Christian pedagogy is less about explicit religious content and more about integrating faith-informed virtues into teaching (Holmes 1987). Teachers in the study intentionally connected their sense of purpose to this scriptural framework, asserting that their spiritual competence is inseparable from their pedagogical identity. Their spirituality becomes the internal

compass that guides how they manage the classroom, respond to challenges, and interact with students.

A next major theme emphasizes the way teachers express missional consciousness through relational, non-verbal, and character-based practices. Although they do not engage in explicit evangelistic activities-consistent with public school regulations-they cultivate an environment characterized by trust, respect, and moral clarity. Teachers consistently described their profession as a form of mission that extends beyond delivering academic content. They emphasized that mission is realized through “how we treat students,” “how we listen,” and “how we help them become good people.” This aligns with Bosch’s understanding of mission as a holistic expression of God’s reconciling work (Bosch 1991). For these teachers, their classroom becomes a space where spiritual commitment translates into practices that promote peace, empathy, and justice. Observations showed that teachers often took extra time outside formal lessons to mentor students facing personal challenges. One teacher, for instance, routinely stayed after class to talk with students experiencing family problems and encouraged them by offering supportive listening. Although no religious language was used, the teacher’s relational warmth reflected spiritual attentiveness grounded in her understanding of Christian calling. Several teachers highlighted that spiritual competence involves attuning themselves to students’ emotional needs. They described situations in which they noticed subtle signs of distress, discouragement, or conflict among students and acted proactively to provide comfort or resolve tensions. Classroom observations confirmed this sensitivity. Teachers used soft tone, affirmation, and empathetic gestures when students struggled academically. They discouraged mockery or bullying through value-based reminders about respecting others. Such practices reflect a spirituality that values every student’s dignity-consistent with the theological premise that human beings are created in God’s image. This relational emphasis supports Noddings’ theory of the ethics of care, which argues that genuine education grows from caring relationships between teachers and students. Participants saw this as an extension of the “make disciples” mandate of Matthew 28:19-20, not by converting students, but by nurturing their moral and emotional maturity.

An other theme addresses the strategic negotiation teachers must undertake to express their faith authentically while respecting Indonesia’s legal and cultural framework of religious pluralism. Teachers demonstrated strong awareness of the restrictions surrounding religious expression in public schools. They emphasized that proselytization is neither permitted nor appropriate and that their calling involves embodying Christian values in a way that respects students of all faith backgrounds. This reflects a nuanced understanding of missional practice, where influence occurs through character rather than overt proclamation. This sensitivity aligns with Indonesia’s national curriculum mandates on tolerance, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Teachers described their task not as “bringing students to Christianity” but “bringing Christ’s love into the classroom,” a distinction that recognizes both ethical responsibility and legal boundaries. Several teachers noted challenges, such as misunderstanding from colleagues or the fear that certain actions might be interpreted as covert religious persuasion. For example, one teacher mentioned hesitating to use biblical proverbs even when they reflect universal

moral wisdom, as he feared misinterpretation. Another described moments when non-Christian parents expressed suspicion about Christian teachers' roles, even though the teacher adhered strictly to institutional policies. To navigate these issues, teachers rely on transparency, professionalism, and consistent demonstration of respect for all students. They expressed that spiritual competence includes wisdom to discern what is appropriate, and humility to restrain personal expression when necessary. This wisdom echoes the biblical metaphor of the teacher as one who is "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16), representing a spirituality that balances bold commitment with gentle sensitivity. One strategy used by teachers within policy boundaries is integrating Christian-inspired virtues into character education. They connect lessons on responsibility, discipline, cooperation, or honesty to universally accepted values rather than religious doctrines. Classroom observation revealed teachers emphasizing values such as patience, fairness, and self-control-virtues central to both Christian ethics and Indonesia's Pancasila character education framework. Thus, teachers maintain integrity to their faith without violating institutional restrictions. Their approach resonates with the Great Commission's call to teach obedience to Christ's commands-not as dogmatic content, but through lived example and value-driven pedagogy.

The final major theme is that teachers view Matthew 28:19-20 as a guiding framework shaping their ethical stance, moral commitments, and vision of education. Teachers reinterpret the phrase "make disciples" to mean fostering virtues, moral responsibility, and personal growth rather than overt religious conversion. They perceive discipleship broadly as mentorship toward character and wisdom. For them, discipling students in a public school means: nurturing discipline and responsibility, guiding students in respectful social interaction, modeling compassion and perseverance, encouraging reflective thinking and ethical decision-making. This broader interpretation aligns with contemporary discourse on Christian vocation, which argues that mission includes contributing to human flourishing in ways that reflect God's love (Wright 2006). The second clause of the Great Commission—"teach them to obey everything I have commanded you"-is understood as an ethical imperative rather than a catechetical one. Teachers interpret "obedience" as internalization of values such as integrity, justice, and love. They see their role as guiding students toward these virtues through consistent modeling rather than instruction. During observations, teachers demonstrated fairness in grading, transparency in decision-making, and patience in correcting student misbehavior. These behaviors served as practical embodiments of Christ-like ethics and functioned as moral instruction without explicit religious language. Teachers repeatedly mentioned the final promise of Matthew 28:20-"I am with you always"-as a source of vocational confidence. They reported that teaching, especially in a diverse and challenging environment, requires emotional and spiritual stamina, and the knowledge of Christ's presence gives them courage, patience, and hope. This spiritual assurance directly influenced their pedagogical resilience. Teachers described feeling strengthened to confront difficult students, manage emotional fatigue, or navigate conflict. They saw their perseverance as a form of faithful obedience to Christ's command, sustained by His presence. The findings align with existing literature on Christian teaching, spiritual competence, and missional pedagogy. Teachers' emphasis on relationally grounded spirituality corresponds with Tisdell's understanding that authentic spiritual expression

manifests through relationships, purpose, and meaning-making rather than institutional religiosity (Tisdell 2003). Their re-interpretation of mission in non-proselytizing terms resonates with Bosch's call for a holistic understanding of mission as service, justice, and reconciliation. The results also demonstrate compatibility with secular theories of pedagogy. The teachers' relational strategies reflect principles from humanistic and care-based education, showing that Christian spirituality can harmoniously coexist with universal moral and educational goals. Their negotiation of boundaries in public schools echoes findings by scholars studying religious educators in pluralistic contexts, who highlight the importance of professionalism, cultural sensitivity, and ethical wisdom in maintaining both faith integrity and institutional compliance. Spiritual competence is primarily inward and formational, shaping teacher identity and influencing behavior more than explicit religious expression. Missional consciousness is expressed through relational care, compassionate intervention, and nurturing moral development rather than evangelistic activity. Teachers skillfully navigate faith expression within legal boundaries, maintaining respect for diversity while holding firm to their Christian ethical commitments. Matthew 28:19-20 functions as an ethical and pedagogical framework, inspiring value-based teaching grounded in Christ-like virtues and supported by the assurance of Jesus' continual presence. These findings show that Christian teachers at SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar embody spiritual competence in ways that harmonize theological conviction, professional responsibility, and cultural sensitivity. Their pedagogical practices reflect a holistic understanding of mission that nurtures students' character while respecting pluralism and adhering to public education guidelines.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Christian teachers at SD Negeri No. 102061 Bangun Bandar understand and embody spiritual competence in light of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19–20 within the context of Indonesia's pluralistic public education system. The findings reveal that spiritual competence for these teachers is not defined by doctrinal expression or explicit religious instruction, but by an inner formation that shapes their professional identity, ethical decision-making, and relational engagement with students. Teachers view their vocation as a space where their faith is lived authentically through character, integrity, and compassion rather than through verbal evangelization. This inward spiritual grounding aligns with the broader Christian understanding of mission as holistic participation in God's reconciling work, demonstrating that the Great Commission can be embodied in educational settings through virtues, attitudes, and transformative relationships. The study also highlights that teachers interpret "making disciples" and "teaching them to obey" as ethical and pedagogical calls rather than confessional mandates. They translate these imperatives into everyday practices that foster student growth, emotional well-being, and moral development. Such practices—patience, fairness, empathy, conflict mediation, and care—function as lived expressions of Christ-like values. Within the constraints of public school policies, teachers negotiate faith expression thoughtfully, demonstrating a balance of professional responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and theological conviction. Their ability to embody spiritual competence without violating institutional boundaries illustrates a mature understanding of Christian vocation in a diverse educational environment. The findings demonstrate that the

promise of Christ's continual presence in Matthew 28:20 serves as an essential source of resilience and purpose for these teachers. This assurance empowers them to approach challenges-academic, relational, or institutional-with renewed commitment and spiritual confidence. Their experiences affirm that mission in public schools is best understood as a quiet but deliberate participation in shaping human character, promoting peace, and reflecting God's love in ways that honor the dignity of every student. The study contributes to the discourse on Christian pedagogy by showing how spiritual competence can be meaningfully integrated into secular educational settings without compromising ethical standards or pluralistic values. It also provides a conceptual framework for understanding the Great Commission in non-ecclesial contexts, positioning Christian teachers as agents of holistic formation who witness through presence, practice, and character. Future research may explore comparative analyses across different regions or educational levels, examine long-term impacts of spiritually grounded teaching on student outcomes, or investigate collaborative models for enhancing spiritual competence among teachers in diverse environments. Through such efforts, the integration of faith and professionalism in public education can be further understood, enriched, and strengthened.

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