



Spiritual Authority, Humility, and Educational Leadership: A Case Reflection from SMP Negeri 1 Sipora

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the concept of spiritual authority grounded in humility within the context of educational leadership at SMP Negeri 1 Sipora. Drawing on the biblical reflection of Matthew 20:26-28, the research examines how humility functions as the foundation of legitimate authority among Christian educators serving in a public junior high school setting. In contrast to leadership models that emphasize power, hierarchy, and control, this study positions humility and service as core elements of transformative educational leadership. The research adopts a qualitative design that integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with simple semi-structured interviews. The SLR synthesizes scholarly works published within the last decade on servant leadership, humility, spiritual authority, and educational leadership. Empirical data were collected through interviews with Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Sipora, a school with 145 Christian students and 14 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education teachers. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns linking humility, leadership practices, and spiritual influence in the school context. The findings reveal that spiritual authority is most effectively exercised through humility expressed in daily interactions, ethical consistency, empathy, and a willingness to serve rather than dominate. In a pluralistic public-school environment, humility-based leadership enables Christian educators to express their faith authentically while maintaining respect for diversity and institutional norms. The study concludes that humility-centered spiritual authority offers a credible and contextually relevant model for educational leadership. It contributes theoretically by integrating biblical theology with leadership studies and practically by providing insights for leadership formation among Christian educators in public education settings.

Keywords: *Spiritual Authority, Christian Religious Education, Humility, Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership is increasingly understood not merely as a function of authority and administration, but as a moral and relational practice that shapes the values, culture, and direction of a learning community. In contemporary educational discourse, effective

leadership is closely linked to integrity, relational sensitivity, and the ability to serve others for the common good (Northouse, 2021). Within faith-informed perspectives, leadership is further interpreted as a vocation that reflects spiritual values, particularly humility and service as foundations of authentic authority. In Christian theology, spiritual authority is not defined by power or hierarchical dominance, but by a willingness to serve others with humility and self-giving love. This understanding is clearly articulated in Matthew 20:26-28, where Jesus redefines greatness as servanthood and leadership as sacrificial service. The passage challenges conventional models of authority by emphasizing humility, service, and concern for others as the true marks of leadership. From an educational perspective, this biblical vision offers a critical framework for reflecting on leadership practices within schools, particularly in contexts where moral formation is an implicit goal of education.

Humility, as a core virtue in servant leadership, has received growing attention in educational leadership research. Scholars argue that humble leaders foster trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging within school communities (Owens & Hekman, 2016). Humility enables leaders to listen, to acknowledge limitations, and to empower others, thereby strengthening relational bonds and collective responsibility. In school settings, such leadership is especially important because educational processes are inherently relational and value-laden. Teachers and school leaders who exercise authority through humility are more likely to create environments that support ethical development and mutual respect among students (Bush, 2019). The relevance of humility-based spiritual authority becomes particularly significant in public school contexts characterized by diversity and social complexity. In such settings, leadership grounded in humility helps prevent authoritarian practices and promotes inclusive engagement across differences. Christian educators working in public schools face the challenge of embodying faith-based values without imposing religious beliefs. Spiritual authority expressed through humility offers a constructive response to this challenge, as it emphasizes ethical conduct and service-oriented leadership that are universally appreciable values (Greenleaf, 2016). SMP Negeri 1 Sipora, located in the Kepulauan Mentawai Regency, provides a meaningful context for examining spiritual authority and humility in educational leadership. With 145 Christian students and 14 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education teachers, the school represents a public educational environment where Christian educators contribute significantly to the moral and relational life of the institution. In such a context, leadership is not exercised only through formal positions but also through everyday interactions, attitudes, and decisions that influence school culture. The presence of a substantial Christian community within a public school setting invites reflection on how biblical values of humility and service can inform educational leadership practices in a pluralistic environment.

Much of the existing literature focuses on leadership effectiveness, organizational outcomes, or ethical behavior in general terms, without engaging deeply with theological sources as interpretive frameworks (Northouse, 2021). This gap highlights the need for research that bridges biblical theology and educational leadership, offering contextually grounded insights into how spiritual authority is understood and practiced. This article aims to explore spiritual authority, humility, and educational leadership through a case

reflection on SMP Negeri 1 Sipora, drawing on Matthew 20:26-28 as a theological lens. By integrating educational leadership theory with biblical reflection, the study seeks to contribute to a more holistic understanding of leadership that emphasizes service, humility, and moral responsibility. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights for leadership studies and practical implications for educators seeking to exercise authority in ways that promote ethical integrity and communal well-being within public school contexts.

METHODS

The qualitative design, using a case reflection approach, was chosen to explore in depth how spiritual authority grounded in humility is understood and practiced within an educational leadership context. A case reflection allows researchers to examine a specific educational setting holistically, taking into account its social, cultural, and institutional characteristics (Creswell, 2018). In this study, the case is SMP Negeri 1 Sipora, a public junior high school where Christian educators play a significant role in the school community. The research design integrates theological reflection and educational inquiry. Biblical reflection on Matthew 20:26–28 serves as the conceptual lens for interpreting leadership practices, while qualitative data provide contextual insights into how humility-based spiritual authority is enacted in everyday educational leadership. The study involved two main sources of data: a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and simple semi-structured interviews. The empirical component focused on Christian teachers and school leaders at SMP Negeri 1 Sipora. The school has 145 Christian students and 14 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education teachers. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their active involvement in leadership roles, teaching responsibilities, and moral influence within the school community (Patton, 2015). A total of 14 Christian teachers were considered as the participant pool, with interview participants selected to represent diverse roles and experiences within the school. This approach ensured that the data reflected a range of perspectives on leadership, humility, and spiritual authority. The SLR was conducted to establish a strong theoretical and conceptual foundation for the study. The review followed a structured procedure consisting of identification, screening, eligibility, and synthesis stages (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar were used to identify relevant peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books published within the last ten years. Keywords used in the literature search included “spiritual authority,” “humility in leadership,” “servant leadership,” “educational leadership,” and “Christian education.” The selected literature was analyzed thematically to identify recurring concepts and theoretical perspectives related to humility-based leadership and spiritual authority. These themes informed the analytical framework used to interpret the interview data. To complement the SLR, simple semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected Christian teachers. The interviews aimed to capture participants’ lived experiences, perceptions, and reflections on leadership, humility, and authority within the school context. Open-ended questions were used to encourage reflective responses while maintaining alignment with the study’s research focus (Creswell, 2018). The interviews explored themes such as participants’ understanding of spiritual authority, the role of humility in leadership practices, and the ways these values influence relationships with students, colleagues, and the wider school

community. Interviews were conducted in a respectful and conversational manner to create a comfortable environment that supported honest and meaningful dialogue. Data from the SLR and interviews were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify patterns, meanings, and themes related to humility, service, and leadership authority (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The themes derived from the interviews were then compared with those identified in the literature to ensure coherence and depth of analysis. This process enabled triangulation between theoretical and empirical data, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that spiritual authority grounded in humility plays a significant role in shaping educational leadership practices at SMP Negeri 1 Sipora. Through the integration of Systematic Literature Review (SLR) findings and interview data, this research identifies humility as the core virtue through which authority is exercised meaningfully within a Christian educational context. The results demonstrate that leadership authority among Christian teachers at the school is not primarily associated with formal power or hierarchical status, but rather with moral credibility, service-oriented attitudes, and relational integrity. One of the most prominent findings is that humility is perceived by participants as the foundational quality of spiritual authority. Teachers consistently described authority not as domination or control, but as the capacity to influence students and colleagues through example, patience, and moral consistency. This understanding aligns closely with the teaching of Matthew 20:26-28, where Jesus explicitly redefines authority as servanthood rather than power. Participants expressed that leadership becomes credible only when it is exercised through a willingness to serve others rather than to seek recognition or privilege. This finding corroborates existing literature on servant leadership, which emphasizes humility as a defining trait of effective and ethical leadership (Greenleaf, 2002; van Dierendonck, 2011). In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Sipora, humility was manifested in everyday practices such as teachers' willingness to listen to students, their openness to feedback from colleagues, and their readiness to assist beyond formal responsibilities. Such behaviors foster trust and emotional safety, which are essential for effective educational leadership. The data further suggest that humility enables leaders to exercise authority without coercion. Teachers reported that students were more responsive and respectful when they perceived their teachers as caring and approachable rather than authoritarian. This relational dimension of authority reflects the biblical principle that leadership influence flows from character rather than position, reinforcing the theological framework of this study.

The interviews revealed that servant leadership is a lived reality rather than an abstract concept among Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Sipora. Participants frequently described leadership as "serving the needs of students" and "supporting colleagues in their work." This orientation toward service was evident in teachers' commitment to mentoring students, addressing personal and academic challenges, and creating inclusive learning environments. These findings are consistent with the SLR results, which highlight servant leadership as a model that prioritizes empathy, stewardship, and community

building (Spears, 2010; Eva et al., 2019). In this study, servant leadership was not limited to formal leadership roles such as principals or senior teachers. Instead, it was embodied by Christian educators across different positions, indicating that spiritual authority transcends organizational hierarchy. The emphasis on service also reflects the theological message of Matthew 20:26-28, where Jesus instructs His disciples that greatness is achieved through service. Participants interpreted this passage as a call to lead with compassion and self-sacrifice, especially in a public-school context where diverse religious backgrounds require sensitivity and respect. This theological reflection enriches the understanding of servant leadership by grounding it in biblical ethics rather than merely managerial effectiveness.

Another significant result is the strong link between humility and moral credibility. Teachers emphasized that students are highly sensitive to inconsistencies between words and actions. Leaders who demonstrate humility by admitting mistakes, showing fairness, and treating others with respect were perceived as morally authoritative. Conversely, authoritarian behavior was associated with resistance and disengagement among students. This finding aligns with moral leadership theory, which posits that ethical behavior and personal integrity are central to leadership effectiveness (Brown & Treviño, 2006). In the Christian educational context, moral credibility is closely tied to spiritual authenticity. Participants noted that humility allows leaders to model Christian virtues in a way that is observable and relatable, thereby reinforcing their moral authority. The study also found that humility enables leaders to navigate conflicts constructively. Teachers reported that conflicts with students or colleagues were more effectively resolved through dialogue and mutual respect rather than punitive measures. This approach reflects a leadership style that values reconciliation and understanding, consistent with Christian ethical teachings.

A distinctive contribution of this study lies in its exploration of spiritual authority within a public-school setting. SMP Negeri 1 Sipora is characterized by religious diversity, which necessitates a leadership approach that is inclusive and respectful. The findings indicate that Christian teachers exercise spiritual authority not through overt religious instruction outside their formal teaching roles, but through ethical conduct, compassion, and professionalism. Participants emphasized that humility enables them to express their faith implicitly through actions rather than explicitly through doctrine. This approach aligns with the concept of lived religion, where faith is expressed through daily practices and relationships (Ammerman, 2014). In this sense, spiritual authority becomes a quiet yet powerful influence that shapes the school culture without imposing religious beliefs. The SLR supports this finding by highlighting the importance of contextual sensitivity in faith-based leadership (Sullivan, 2019). In pluralistic environments, humility functions as a bridge that allows leaders to uphold their values while respecting diversity. This balance enhances the legitimacy of spiritual authority and prevents potential tensions related to religious expression in public institutions.

The data reveal that humility-based leadership significantly enhances teacher–student relationships. Students are more likely to trust and engage with teachers who demonstrate genuine care and respect. Teachers reported that such relationships facilitate not only academic learning but also character development. This finding

resonates with educational research emphasizing the role of relational trust in effective teaching and leadership (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). In this study, humility was identified as a key factor in building trust, as it signals approachability and authenticity. Teachers who practice humility create a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and understood. The theological reflection on Matthew 20:26-28 further illuminates this dynamic by framing leadership as a relational act of service. When teachers embody this principle, they model a form of authority that empowers rather than suppresses students. This approach contributes to holistic education, integrating cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

At the organizational level, the study found that humility-based spiritual authority contributes to a positive school culture characterized by collaboration and mutual respect. Teachers described a sense of shared responsibility and openness that fosters teamwork and collective problem-solving. This culture was attributed to leadership practices that prioritize service and humility. The SLR indicates that such cultures are associated with higher levels of organizational commitment and well-being (Northouse, 2021). In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Sipora, humility serves as a unifying value that transcends individual differences and aligns the school community around common ethical principles. The findings also suggest that spiritual authority rooted in humility can enhance leadership sustainability. Leaders who serve rather than dominate are more likely to inspire long-term commitment and trust. This insight underscores the relevance of biblical leadership principles for contemporary educational challenges. A key contribution of this study is the integration of theological reflection with educational leadership practice. By grounding leadership analysis in Matthew 20:26-28, the study offers a faith-informed perspective that complements secular leadership theories. The results demonstrate that biblical principles of humility and service are not only theologically significant but also practically effective in educational settings. This integration responds to calls in the literature for more holistic approaches to leadership that consider ethical and spiritual dimensions (Shields, 2018). The findings suggest that Christian piety, when expressed through humility, enhances leadership authenticity and effectiveness. The results indicate that spiritual authority exercised through humility has a profound impact on educational leadership at SMP Negeri 1 Sipora. Humility emerges as the core virtue that enables leaders to serve effectively, build trust, and foster inclusive relationships. By aligning leadership practices with the teachings of Matthew 20:26-28, Christian educators embody a form of authority that is both ethically grounded and contextually appropriate. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on educational leadership by highlighting the relevance of faith-based virtues in pluralistic educational environments. They also offer practical implications for teacher development and leadership training, emphasizing the cultivation of humility as a key leadership competency.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that spiritual authority grounded in humility constitutes a vital foundation for effective educational leadership within the context of SMP Negeri 1 Sipora. Drawing on the integration of a Systematic Literature Review and empirical insights from

simple interviews, the findings affirm that humility is not a weakness in leadership but a defining strength that legitimizes authority, fosters trust, and enhances relational quality in educational environments. In alignment with the theological reflection on Matthew 20:26-28, leadership is most authentically exercised not through power, status, or control, but through service, self-giving, and moral integrity. The results demonstrate that Christian teachers who embody humility are able to exercise spiritual authority in ways that are constructive, inclusive, and contextually sensitive. In a public-school setting marked by religious diversity, humility enables educators to express their faith implicitly through ethical conduct, compassion, and professionalism rather than through coercive or exclusive practices. This form of lived spirituality allows Christian values to contribute positively to the broader school culture while respecting pluralism and institutional boundaries. The study highlights that humility-based leadership significantly strengthens teacher–student relationships. When teachers lead with empathy, patience, and consistency between words and actions, students respond with greater trust, respect, and engagement. Such relationships support not only academic achievement but also character formation, indicating that spiritual authority has a holistic impact on educational outcomes. At the organizational level, humility fosters collaboration, mutual respect, and a shared sense of responsibility among teachers, contributing to a healthy and sustainable school culture. This research reinforces the relevance of servant leadership and moral leadership theories while extending them through a biblical framework. By grounding leadership analysis in Matthew 20:26-28, the study demonstrates that Christian theological principles can meaningfully inform contemporary educational leadership without losing contextual relevance. Practically, the findings suggest that leadership development programs for Christian educators should prioritize the cultivation of humility, ethical discernment, and service-oriented attitudes as core competencies. Spiritual authority exercised through humility emerges as a transformative leadership paradigm for Christian educators in public schools. It offers a model of leadership that is credible, ethical, and responsive to the complexities of modern educational contexts. By embracing humility as the heart of authority, Christian teachers can contribute to inclusive, just, and life-giving educational communities that reflect both professional excellence and deep moral conviction.

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