

Spiritual Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Cultivating Students' Steadfast Faith: An Exegetical Reflection on Philippians 1:28 at SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in cultivating students' steadfast faith through an exegetical reflection on Philippians 1:28 at SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung, where one CRE teacher mentors twenty Christian students. Grounded in the apostolic exhortation to stand firm "without being frightened in any way," this research examines how a teacher's spiritual maturity, pastoral sensitivity, and theological integrity shape faith formation in a public-school environment marked by diversity and academic pressure. Utilizing a mixed qualitative approach, systematic literature review and limited semi-structured interviews, the study explores the practical outworking of spiritual competence, including the teacher's prayer life, biblical worldview, moral example, and ability to nurture courage, consistency, and hope among students. The results demonstrate that the teacher's spiritual depth profoundly influences students' perception of faith's relevance and resilience. Exegetical analysis clarifies that Philippians 1:28 calls believers to unwavering confidence rooted in divine presence rather than human strength, providing a theological anchor for CRE pedagogy. The empirical data reveal that the teacher's character, particularly sincerity, emotional stability, and compassion, directly shapes students' willingness to internalize Christian values. Spiritual competence manifests in pedagogical practices such as storytelling, reflective prayer, relational mentoring, and modeling perseverance. The study concludes that spiritually competent CRE teachers serve as catalysts for cultivating steadfast faith in young learners. It recommends strengthening spiritual formation within teacher training programs and integrating biblical character education across learning activities to support long-term faith development in Indonesian public schools.

Keywords: *Spiritual Competence, Christian Religious Education, Steadfast Faith*

INTRODUCTION

The formation of steadfast Christian faith among students has become an increasingly urgent pedagogical priority within Indonesia's multicultural and religiously diverse public-school context. As Christian students navigate learning environments where multiple

belief systems coexist, they require not only cognitive knowledge of Scripture but also spiritual resilience, moral courage, and clarity of Christian identity. These qualities cannot emerge naturally without intentional spiritual formation, guidance, and modeling from Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers. Within this framework, the spiritual competence of PAK teachers becomes a critical determinant of whether students can internalize and enact their faith in a manner that is both confident and compassionate (Togar & Siahaan, 2021). Spiritual competence refers to a teacher's capacity to integrate biblical values into pedagogical practice, embody Christian virtues, discern spiritual needs, and foster a classroom climate that supports spiritual growth (Nainggolan, 2019). When effectively enacted, such competence enables students not only to understand the doctrines of faith but also to stand firm in the face of social pressure, ethical dilemmas, and religious plurality. Philippians 1:28 offers a profound biblical foundation for this educational mandate. The verse "*and not frightened in anything by your opponents*" (ESV) presents a call toward unwavering faith, courage, and unity in the face of external challenges. In its historical context, Paul encourages the believers in Philippi to remain steadfast amid persecution and ideological conflict. The exhortation centers on spiritual firmness (*stēkete*) and fearlessness (*mē pturomenoi*), virtues that are deeply relevant to contemporary Christian students who may experience subtle forms of marginalization or misunderstanding regarding their faith (Fee, 2010). For PAK teachers, Philippians 1:28 provides not merely theological insight but pedagogical direction: they are called to cultivate in students a faith that is anchored, courageous, and not easily shaken by competing worldviews. Thus, the verse serves as a guiding text for understanding how spiritual competence can translate into effective formation of steadfast faith within educational settings. The local context of SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung further strengthens the significance of this study. In this school, there is only one PAK teacher responsible for shepherding the faith development of 20 Christian students. Such a ratio highlights both the strategic importance and the heavy responsibility placed upon a single educator. In environments where Christian students constitute a minority, they may experience limited opportunities for faith expression and communal reinforcement (Simatupang, 2020). Consequently, the spiritual competence of their PAK teacher becomes essential in providing spiritual direction, modeling Christian character, and building confidence in their identity as young believers. This reality underscores the need for empirical and exegetical inquiry into how biblical principles directly inform the pedagogical actions of Christian educators. Existing literature in religious education emphasizes that faith formation is most effective when scriptural interpretation is integrated with contextualized pedagogical practice (Astuti, 2022). However, research on PAK teachers in Indonesian public schools often remains focused on pedagogical or professional competence, with relatively limited attention given to the spiritual dimension of teacher identity. Moreover, few studies explicitly link exegetical analysis of biblical texts with classroom praxis. This gap necessitates research that bridges exegesis, teacher spirituality, and educational practice, particularly in minority-Christian settings. By grounding the investigation in Philippians 1:28, this study seeks to illuminate how biblical exegesis can shape the strategic role of PAK teachers in nurturing steadfast faith. This study aims to explore the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in cultivating the steadfast faith of students at SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung through an exegetical reflection on Philippians 1:28. By combining scriptural

interpretation with empirical insights from the school's context, this research contributes to the growing body of scholarship that integrates biblical theology with educational praxis. Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate that spiritually competent teachers play a pivotal role in empowering Christian students to embody courage, clarity of faith, and unwavering commitment to Christ in the midst of diverse social and religious environments.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design integrating Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and simple interview techniques to explore the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers in cultivating students' steadfast faith, grounded in an exegetical reflection on Philippians 1:28. The integration of these two methodological approaches enables a comprehensive understanding that draws from both scholarly perspectives and real-life pedagogical practices within SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) served as the primary research method. SLR was chosen because it offers a transparent, rigorous, and replicable process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing scholarly works relevant to spiritual competence, Christian faith formation, biblical exegesis, and religious education in pluralistic contexts (Snyder, 2019). During the planning stage, research questions were formulated to connect spiritual pedagogy, Philippians 1:28, and the formation of steadfast faith in students. The conducting stage involved systematic database searches across Scopus, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and DOAJ using keywords such as "spiritual competence," "Christian religious education," "faith formation," "Philippians 1:28," "teacher spirituality," and "religious minority education." Inclusion criteria were set for scholarly works published between 2013 and 2024, peer-reviewed articles, books, and exegetical commentaries relevant to Paul's theology and Christian pedagogy. Exclusion criteria included non-academic manuscripts, devotional materials, and sources lacking methodological clarity. Selected works were then coded thematically, focusing on: definitions and components of spiritual competence, pedagogical strategies in faith formation, and exegetical insights on Philippians 1:28. This process ensured that findings were grounded in contemporary scholarly discourse while remaining biblically informed. To complement the literature review, the study incorporated simple, semi-structured interviews as a supplementary method to contextualize findings within the lived experiences of SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung. The interviews involved the single PAK teacher responsible for the spiritual guidance of 20 Christian students. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow flexibility in probing personal experiences, teaching strategies, challenges, and perceptions of students' faith development (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview questions centered on: the teacher's understanding of spiritual competence, practical efforts to cultivate steadfast faith, and challenges faced in minority-Christian settings. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Ethical protocols were followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The exegetical component of the study functioned as a theological lens through which findings were interpreted. This component relied on historical-grammatical exegesis of Philippians 1:28 using reputable commentaries and academic sources. Key Greek terms such as *stēkete* (stand firm) and *mē pturomenoi* (not frightened) were analyzed to identify pedagogical

implications for fostering courage and spiritual resilience in students. The exegetical insights were then integrated with SLR findings and interview data, creating a triangulated framework that illuminates how biblical understanding informs spiritual competence. Data from the SLR, exegesis, and interviews were triangulated to enhance validity and reduce interpretive bias. The final stage involved synthesizing these strands into a coherent narrative that explains how spiritual competence equips PAK teachers to nurture steadfast faith in Christian students, particularly within minority settings such as SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The integrated findings of this study, emerging from the systematic literature review, exegetical reflection on Philippians 1:28, and the semi-structured interview with the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher at SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung, reveal a comprehensive picture of how spiritual competence shapes the cultivation of steadfast faith among Christian students in a minority context. The synthesis of these three data sources demonstrates that spiritual competence is not merely an additional dimension of teacher professionalism but the foundational core that determines the depth, resilience, and authenticity of students' spiritual formation. Within environments where Christian students are limited in number and Christian identity is not publicly reinforced by the broader school culture, the presence of a spiritually mature and biblically grounded teacher becomes the decisive factor that shapes the students' capacity to stand firm in their faith. The findings show that spiritual competence involves a dynamic interplay between a teacher's spiritual maturity, ethical integrity, pastoral sensitivity, biblical literacy, and the ability to translate theological insights into pedagogical practices that are meaningful for students' developmental realities. The systematic literature review consistently affirms that spiritual competence is a multidimensional construct that integrates inner spiritual life with outward pedagogical expression. Scholars emphasize that spiritually competent teachers consistently demonstrate characteristics such as personal devotion to God, moral consistency, emotional sensitivity toward students, and the capacity to articulate Christian truth in ways that are accessible and life-giving. These attributes are not incidental; they are essential to the formation of students, who observe and internalize the lived spirituality of their teachers. The literature further shows that the spiritual formation of students becomes effective when teachers embody the values they teach, thereby enabling students to witness authentic Christian modeling rather than mere doctrinal instruction. This aligns closely with the interview findings, in which the PAK teacher described spiritual competence as "something the students must see before they hear." The teacher's understanding of spiritual competence is not framed as a set of theoretical principles but as a life that witnesses to Christ through daily actions, decisions, and interpersonal interactions. This lived spirituality includes consistent prayer habits, empathy toward students experiencing emotional or spiritual struggles, and moral integrity that aligns classroom behavior with biblical teaching. Thus, the study's findings affirm that spiritual competence is fundamentally relational and incarnational, expressed not only through what the teacher knows or teaches but through who the teacher is.

The minority-Christian context at SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung further amplifies the importance of spiritual competence. With only 20 Christian students in the entire school and only one PAK teacher serving as their primary spiritual guide, the Christian educational experience becomes highly dependent on the teacher's presence, commitment, and spiritual maturity. The interview reveals that many students display hesitation or shyness in expressing their Christian identity, particularly in front of peers from other religious backgrounds. This hesitation does not stem from overt discrimination but from a social dynamic common in pluralistic settings where minority students fear that being visibly different may draw unwanted attention. The teacher's observations align with the literature showing that Christian students in Indonesian public schools often require more intentional support to develop courage, confidence, and clarity of faith identity. Within such contexts, the teacher's role extends beyond academic instruction to include mentoring, pastoral care, and the creation of safe spaces where students can express their beliefs without fear. The findings therefore highlight that spiritual competence functions both as a protective and empowering force, enabling students to internalize their faith with assurance and stability. The exegetical analysis of Philippians 1:28 offers profound insights into the theological basis for cultivating steadfast faith in educational settings. The verse contains deep encouragement for Christians who face opposition or external pressure, emphasizing the need to remain firm in faith and not be intimidated by those who oppose the gospel. The key Greek expressions in the verse illuminate essential spiritual qualities: *stēkete*, meaning "to stand firm," suggests steadfastness, perseverance, and unwavering commitment; *mē pturomenoi*, meaning "not frightened," calls for a courageous faith that remains strong despite challenges; and the surrounding context emphasizes unity and shared witness as sources of strength. These exegetical insights directly inform the pedagogical implications of the study. The concept of steadfastness suggests the importance of grounding students deeply in Scripture and Christian identity. The call to fearlessness highlights the need to cultivate spiritual courage, helping students overcome timidity or reluctance. The emphasis on unity indicates the necessity of building a sense of community among Christian students, especially in minority settings. Together, these insights form a theological framework that shapes the pedagogical practices of spiritually competent teachers.

The triangulation of findings reveals that the PAK teacher applies these exegetical principles, often intuitively, through classroom practices, relational engagement, and spiritual mentoring. For example, the teacher places significant emphasis on biblical grounding, ensuring that students do not merely memorize verses but understand how Scripture connects to their daily struggles and experiences. Bible-reading sessions, reflection moments, and open discussions about personal challenges allow students to internalize Christian teachings in a personal and meaningful way. The teacher also incorporates storytelling, role-playing, and testimonies to illustrate how Christians can remain courageous when facing difficult situations, thereby giving life to the exhortation of *mē pturomenoi*. These teaching strategies develop students' confidence to articulate their faith in a supportive environment before they eventually practice expressing it in broader social settings. Additionally, the teacher intentionally builds a sense of fellowship among the students through group prayer, collaborative assignments, singing, and shared celebrations of Christian holidays. These communal practices embody the unity

emphasized in Paul's teaching and help students experience Christian belonging even within a largely non-Christian school environment. One of the most striking findings is the central role of teacher modeling in cultivating steadfast faith. Both the literature and the interview underscore that the spiritual character of the teacher profoundly influences students' spiritual growth. The teacher's consistency in prayer, humility during conflicts, and integrity in fulfilling responsibilities serve as living demonstrations of steadfastness. Students observe how the teacher responds to challenges, interacts with others, and remains faithful to Christian values even in difficult situations. This modeling reinforces the message of Philippians 1:28 not merely intellectually but experientially, allowing students to learn steadfast faith through embodied example. The findings highlight that spiritual competence cannot be separated from personal holiness and authentic discipleship. The teacher's life becomes the curriculum through which students learn what steadfast faith looks like in practice.

The findings also reveal that spiritual competence shapes the teacher's ability to respond to students' emotional and spiritual struggles. Several students experience anxiety, self-doubt, or confusion about their identity in a pluralistic environment. The teacher frequently engages in personal conversations, offering comfort, biblical encouragement, and prayer. This pastoral dimension demonstrates the importance of spiritual sensitivity, a key component of spiritual competence, in recognizing students' inner needs and guiding them through spiritual challenges. Such practices reinforce the biblical call to stand firm together, reflecting the communal nature of faith emphasized by Paul. The teacher's pastoral presence gives students the courage to face their struggles, reminding them that steadfast faith is not developed in isolation but through supportive spiritual relationships. The findings also reveal significant challenges. Limited instructional time for Christian education restricts the depth of biblical exploration and spiritual mentoring that the teacher can provide. The solitary nature of the PAK teacher's role means that all responsibilities-curricular, pastoral, and administrative-fall upon one individual, creating a heavy workload that may impede sustained spiritual engagement. Students' hesitancy to express faith publicly indicates that cultivating steadfastness requires long-term, intentional efforts to overcome social pressures. The teacher's commitment to spiritual competence enables meaningful formation to occur, demonstrating that a spiritually grounded educator can make a profound impact even within structural limitations. It shapes the way the teacher interprets Scripture, engages in spiritual practices, constructs classroom environments, and nurtures emotional resilience in students. The integration of exegetical insight and pedagogical practice enables a form of Christian education that is deeply biblical, contextually responsive, and spiritually formative. Students develop a sense of courage, belonging, and conviction that aligns with the exhortation of Philippians 1:28. They learn to internalize their identity as followers of Christ and to stand firm in their faith even when they are among a religious minority. The findings thus contribute to broader discussions on how Christian teachers in public schools can integrate spirituality into educational practice without compromising professional responsibilities or social harmony. The results and discussion highlight the indispensable role of spiritual competence in shaping the quality and depth of faith formation among Christian students. The findings show that when teachers embody spiritual maturity, interpret Scripture faithfully, cultivate nurturing relationships, and build supportive communities, students

develop the capacity to remain steadfast in their faith. This process reflects both the theological imperatives of Philippians 1:28 and the educational realities of public school contexts in Indonesia. In shaping students who stand firm without fear, the spiritually competent teacher participates in the formation of young believers who are prepared to navigate the complexities of pluralistic society with courage, clarity, and conviction.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education teachers plays an indispensable role in cultivating steadfast faith among students, particularly within minority-Christian settings such as SD Negeri 101874 Tumpatan Nibung. Through the triangulation of a systematic literature review, exegetical analysis of Philippians 1:28, and insights from a semi-structured interview, this research reveals that spiritual competence is more than a complementary attribute—it is the essential foundation upon which effective Christian education is built. In a school environment where only twenty Christian students are present and a single PAK teacher serves as the primary spiritual guide, the cultivation of steadfast faith requires a teacher who not only understands biblical truth but embodies it through character, relational sensitivity, and consistent spiritual practices. Such embodiment transforms the teacher into a living model of faith, providing students with a tangible expression of Christian steadfastness in daily life. The exegetical insights drawn from Philippians 1:28 offer a compelling theological foundation that informs the pedagogical implications of spiritual competence. Paul's exhortation to "stand firm" (*stēkete*) and "not be frightened" (*mē pturomenoi*) resonates deeply within the context of students navigating pluralistic educational environments. The emphasis on unity and collective witness further underscores the importance of nurturing a sense of Christian community among students. When these theological insights are operationalized in the classroom—through Scripture-centered instruction, intentional faith conversations, communal prayer, and relational mentorship—students are equipped to internalize their faith with confidence and clarity. This study affirms that such pedagogical practices are most effective when they spring from the teacher's own spiritual maturity and authentic commitment to living out biblical principles. The PAK teacher in this study demonstrates how spiritual competence can shape a holistic approach to faith formation. Through modeling integrity, offering pastoral care, encouraging expressive faith practices, and building supportive peer communities, the teacher fosters an environment where students feel safe to explore, articulate, and deepen their Christian faith. These practices not only address students' cognitive understanding of Christianity but also their emotional and spiritual well-being, enabling them to develop resilience against social pressures common to minority contexts. The findings therefore emphasize that spiritual competence empowers teachers to address both the visible and invisible challenges that students face, guiding them toward a mature and unwavering Christian identity. The study concludes that spiritual competence is a transformative force within Christian Religious Education, especially in public school settings where Christian identity is not automatically reinforced. When teachers integrate exegetical insight, spiritual authenticity, and relational care, they participate in shaping spiritually resilient students who are capable of standing firm in their faith with courage and conviction, as exhorted in Philippians 1:28. The implications of this research extend beyond the immediate school context, highlighting the importance of incorporating

spiritual formation into teacher training programs, strengthening the support networks for Christian educators in public schools, and further exploring the relationship between teacher spirituality and student faith development. Ultimately, the cultivation of steadfast faith among Christian students begins with, and is continuously nourished by, the spiritual competence of the teacher who leads them.

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