



Social Communication of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Nurturing Students' Spirituality: An Inspirational Study of Exodus 28:29 at SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in nurturing students' spirituality through social communication, drawing theological inspiration from Exodus 28:29 within the educational context of SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera. The verse portrays the high priest carrying the names of Israel upon his heart before the Lord, symbolizing remembrance, representation, and covenantal responsibility. Using a quantitative descriptive correlational design, the study involved 75 respondents selected proportionally from a population of 295 Christian students. Data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring two primary variables: teachers' social communication competence (clarity, empathy, dialogical openness, feedback quality, relational presence, and consistency between words and actions) and students' spirituality (awareness of God's presence, prayer engagement, moral sensitivity, and sense of Christian community). Statistical analysis employed descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment correlation at a 0.05 significance level. The findings reveal that students perceive the CRE teacher's social communication competence as high and that student spirituality also reflects a positive level. Moreover, a significant positive correlation was identified between the two variables, indicating that effective social communication by the teacher is associated with strengthened student spirituality. The study concludes that CRE teachers' social communication competence functions as an embodied expression of priestly representation, translating biblical theology into pedagogical praxis. By carrying students "upon the heart" through empathetic, consistent, and dialogical engagement, teachers contribute meaningfully to holistic spiritual development. The research underscores the importance of integrating theological reflection and educational communication in strengthening Christian education within contemporary school contexts.

Keywords: *Social Communication, Christian Religious Education, Spirituality*

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual formation within formal education requires more than curriculum design and doctrinal transmission; it depends fundamentally on relational interaction and meaningful communication. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), social communication functions as a primary medium through which theological values are internalized and spiritual identity is cultivated. Teachers are not merely conveyors of biblical information but communicative agents whose verbal, nonverbal, and relational patterns shape students' spiritual perception. This study examines the role of social communication by CRE teachers in nurturing students' spirituality through an inspirational engagement with Exodus 28:29 within the institutional setting of SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera, where approximately 295 Christian students are guided by three Christian teachers. Exodus 28:29 describes the high priest Aaron bearing the names of the sons of Israel on the breastpiece of judgment "over his heart" when he enters the Holy Place, as a continual memorial before the LORD. The priestly symbolism emphasizes representation, remembrance, and relational accountability. Scholars observe that the priest's act of carrying the names over his heart reflects covenantal solidarity and intercessory responsibility (Fretheim, 1991). The high priest does not approach God in isolation; he embodies the community before the divine presence. This imagery offers a powerful paradigm for educational spirituality: teachers, like priests, carry their students symbolically "over the heart," communicating care, advocacy, and spiritual attentiveness. The priestly garments in Exodus 28 signify ordered mediation between God and Israel. Christopher J. H. Wright notes that Israel's priesthood functioned as a visible reminder of covenant identity and communal belonging (Wright, 2004). The engraved names on the breastpiece symbolized personal recognition within the larger redemptive narrative. When applied to Christian education, this text suggests that spiritual formation flourishes where relational recognition and intentional communication occur. Social communication, therefore, becomes not merely instructional but representational, it communicates to students that they are known, remembered, and valued.

Educational theory supports this relational dimension. Lee S. Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge emphasizes the integration of subject mastery with relational sensitivity in teaching practice (Shulman, 1987). Beyond cognitive transmission, communication theory highlights the formative impact of interpersonal interaction. Effective teachers employ empathy, active listening, and dialogical engagement to foster trust and openness, thereby facilitating deeper learning. Paulo Freire underscores that authentic education arises from dialogical relationships in which teachers and learners engage one another in meaningful exchange (Freire, 2000). Although Freire's framework originates within critical pedagogy, its emphasis on relational dialogue aligns with the priestly imagery of Exodus 28:29, where representation and remembrance are central. In vocational high school contexts such as SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera, students often navigate complex developmental and social challenges, including identity formation, peer influence, and vocational uncertainty. Spirituality in such an environment cannot be reduced to ritual participation; it must be nurtured through consistent communicative presence. With 295 Christian students and only three Christian teachers, the dynamics of scale present both opportunity and strain. The effectiveness of spiritual

cultivation depends significantly on how teachers structure communication within classroom instruction, mentorship conversations, devotional activities, and informal interactions. Contemporary research in character education affirms that relational trust and positive teacher-student communication correlate with moral development and psychosocial well-being. Spirituality, understood as awareness of divine presence and commitment to ethical living, grows where communication affirms dignity and accountability. In light of Exodus 28:29, the image of bearing names “over the heart” suggests that communication rooted in empathy and intercessory concern forms a theological foundation for educational practice. This study seeks to investigate how social communication by CRE teachers influences students’ spirituality within the specified school context. By integrating exegetical reflection on Exodus 28:29 with empirical analysis of communicative competence, the research aims to demonstrate that effective spiritual formation in Christian education depends on relational intentionality. The study contributes to the broader discourse at the intersection of biblical theology, communication theory, and professional educational practice, affirming that teachers who communicate with representational care become instruments of spiritual growth within contemporary school communities.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design with a correlational approach to examine the relationship between the social communication competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and students’ spirituality as inspired by Exodus 28:29 at SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera. The quantitative paradigm was selected to allow systematic measurement of communication variables and statistical analysis of their association with indicators of student spirituality (Creswell, 2014). The correlational design was appropriate because the study aimed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between perceived teacher communication competence and students’ spiritual development rather than to establish experimental causation. The population consisted of 295 Christian students enrolled at the school during the academic year of the research. To ensure representativeness while maintaining feasibility, proportional random sampling was applied, resulting in a sample of 75 students drawn from different grade levels and vocational majors. Although three teachers at the school are Christian (including the CRE teacher), the primary respondents were students, as the study focused on students’ perceptions of teacher communication and their own spiritual growth. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument measured two principal variables. The first variable assessed the social communication competence of the CRE teacher, including clarity of verbal explanation, empathetic listening, openness to dialogue, constructive feedback, relational availability, nonverbal warmth, and consistency between spoken values and personal conduct. These indicators were formulated based on communication theory and pedagogical competence frameworks (Shulman, 1987). The second variable measured students’ spirituality, including awareness of God’s presence, engagement in personal prayer and reflection, moral sensitivity in daily decisions, sense of belonging within the Christian community, and

perceived spiritual encouragement from teacher interaction. The conceptualization of spirituality integrated theological reflection on the representational imagery of Exodus 28:29 with educational psychology perspectives on spiritual formation. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in biblical studies and educational communication. Construct validity was examined through item analysis, and reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for internal consistency (Creswell, 2014). Formal permission was obtained from school authorities, and participants were informed about confidentiality and voluntary participation to minimize response bias. Data analysis was conducted in two stages. Descriptive statistics (mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage distributions) were used to determine overall levels of teacher communication competence and student spirituality. Subsequently, Pearson's Product-Moment correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between the two variables at a 0.05 significance level. Through this methodological framework, the study sought to provide empirical evidence regarding the extent to which CRE teachers' social communication competence contributes to nurturing students' spirituality in the vocational school context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the social communication competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the spirituality of students at SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera, interpreted through the theological lens of Exodus 28:29. Descriptive statistical analysis indicates that students generally perceive the CRE teachers' social communication competence to be at a high level. Mean scores across communication indicators, clarity of verbal explanation, empathy in listening, openness to dialogue, constructive feedback, relational availability, consistency between speech and conduct, and nonverbal warmth, consistently fall within the upper range of the Likert scale. Similarly, students' spirituality, measured through indicators such as awareness of God's presence, engagement in prayer and reflection, moral sensitivity, communal belonging, and perceived spiritual encouragement, also demonstrates high average scores. Pearson's Product-Moment correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant positive correlation at the 0.05 level, indicating that stronger perceptions of teacher communication competence are associated with higher levels of reported student spirituality. Although correlational findings do not establish direct causality, the strength and consistency of the relationship suggest that social communication functions as a critical mediating variable in spiritual formation within this educational setting. Exodus 28:29 presents the image of Aaron bearing the names of the sons of Israel on the breastpiece of judgment "over his heart" when entering the Holy Place, as a continual memorial before the LORD. Within the priestly theology of Exodus 25–31, this act signifies representation, remembrance, and covenantal solidarity. The high priest does not approach God autonomously; he symbolically carries the community into divine presence. The engraved names over the heart emphasize relational intimacy and responsibility. In the context of Christian education, this imagery provides a conceptual

framework for understanding teacher-student relationships. Students' responses in this study suggest that when CRE teachers communicate in ways that express personal recognition and concern, calling students by name, acknowledging their struggles, encouraging their growth, they embody a representational posture analogous to the priestly image. Such communication fosters spiritual receptivity because students perceive that they are known and valued rather than treated as anonymous recipients of instruction.

The results indicate that clarity of verbal communication significantly contributes to theological understanding. Students reported greater awareness of spiritual concepts when explanations were structured, coherent, and contextually grounded. For instance, when teachers explicitly connected the priestly symbolism of "bearing names over the heart" to contemporary notions of advocacy, intercessory prayer, and communal care, students demonstrated stronger conceptual comprehension and personal resonance. This aligns with Lee S. Shulman's theory of pedagogical content knowledge, which posits that effective teaching requires transforming disciplinary content into accessible forms for learners (Shulman, 1987). The data suggest that competence in explanatory communication directly influences the intelligibility of spiritual themes, thereby reinforcing cognitive dimensions of spirituality. Beyond clarity, empathy emerged as a particularly influential communicative factor. Students who rated teachers highly in empathetic listening and relational openness also reported heightened spiritual motivation and personal reflection. This finding resonates with communication theory emphasizing that relational trust enhances message reception. When students feel heard and respected, they are more likely to internalize moral and spiritual guidance. In vocational high school contexts, where students often encounter academic pressure and identity challenges, empathetic communication provides psychological safety. Theologically, this dynamic parallels the priestly role in Exodus 28:29: bearing names over the heart signifies attentiveness and concern. Students' spirituality, therefore, appears nurtured not solely through doctrinal instruction but through relational affirmation communicated consistently. Dialogical engagement further strengthens spiritual development. Survey data show that participatory discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and reflective group activities correlate with higher spirituality scores. When teachers invite students to articulate personal experiences of faith, moral dilemmas, and vocational aspirations, communication shifts from monological transmission to interactive formation. Paulo Freire's emphasis on dialogical pedagogy underscores that authentic education involves mutual exchange rather than unilateral instruction (Freire, 2000). While Freire's theoretical framework arises from a socio-political perspective, its dialogical principle aligns with the relational theology of Exodus 28:29. The high priest's representational act implies relational reciprocity within covenant community; similarly, dialogical communication fosters shared spiritual responsibility. The data suggest that spirituality deepens where communication invites participation rather than passive reception.

Constructive feedback and consistent ethical modeling also contribute significantly to spiritual outcomes. Students reported that teachers who provided affirming yet corrective feedback encouraged personal accountability without diminishing self-worth.

This balance mirrors the biblical concept of judgment embedded in the breastpiece imagery, where justice and compassion coexist. Communication that combines encouragement with moral clarity appears to cultivate disciplined spirituality. Furthermore, consistency between spoken values and personal conduct emerged as a critical variable. Students who perceived alignment between teachers' words and actions expressed stronger trust and spiritual engagement. Inconsistency, by contrast, was associated with lower motivational scores in a minority of responses. These findings underscore that social communication extends beyond verbal exchange to embodied integrity. Given the institutional scale, 295 Christian students served by three Christian teachers, the relational demands are considerable. The data indicate that despite numerical challenges, intentional communication strategies mitigate relational distance. Teachers reportedly employ structured devotional sessions, mentoring conversations, and digital communication platforms to maintain accessibility. Students who reported experiencing individualized attention, even briefly, demonstrated significantly higher spirituality scores. This suggests that representational care, even within large cohorts, remains feasible through deliberate communicative planning. The priestly image of bearing names over the heart, therefore, becomes a metaphor for intentional remembrance in expansive educational contexts. A minority of students expressed moderate levels of spiritual engagement despite positive communication ratings. This suggests that communication competence, while significant, interacts with additional factors such as family background, peer influence, and personal disposition. Spirituality is multidimensional, and teacher communication constitutes one influential but not exclusive determinant. Furthermore, while the correlation is statistically significant, the study's reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias. Students may respond favorably due to relational loyalty or social desirability. Future research incorporating qualitative interviews or longitudinal observation could enrich interpretive depth and clarify causal pathways. The overall pattern is consistent: social communication competence significantly correlates with spiritual vitality among students. The representational theology of Exodus 28:29 provides a compelling interpretive lens for understanding this relationship. When teachers symbolically "carry" students over their hearts, through attentive listening, relational presence, and ethical consistency, communication becomes formative rather than merely informative. Spirituality in this vocational high school context appears nurtured through a convergence of cognitive clarity, relational empathy, dialogical engagement, and moral modeling. The results affirm that effective social communication by CRE teachers functions as a vital conduit for spiritual formation. The priestly imagery of Exodus 28:29 offers not only theological symbolism but also pedagogical insight: spiritual leadership involves remembering, representing, and relationally engaging those entrusted to one's care. Within SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera, the statistically significant association between communication competence and student spirituality underscores the educational imperative of cultivating communicative excellence alongside theological depth. The discussion thus contributes to broader scholarship at the intersection of biblical theology, communication studies, and professional Christian education, affirming that relationally grounded communication remains central to nurturing authentic student spirituality.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in nurturing students' spirituality through social communication, inspired by the theological symbolism of Exodus 28:29, within the educational context of SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera. Drawing on quantitative analysis of students' perceptions, the findings demonstrate that social communication competence is not merely a pedagogical accessory but a substantive and formative dimension of spiritual education. The empirical results indicate that the CRE teacher's communication practices, characterized by clarity of explanation, empathetic listening, dialogical openness, moral consistency, and relational availability, contribute significantly to the strengthening of students' spiritual awareness, moral sensitivity, and sense of belonging within the Christian community of the school. Exodus 28:29 presents the imagery of the high priest carrying the names of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord, symbolizing representation, remembrance, and covenantal responsibility. When interpreted within the pedagogical sphere, this text provides a normative framework for understanding teacher-student relationships in Christian education. The CRE teacher's communicative posture mirrors the priestly act of bearing others "upon the heart," which in educational praxis translates into intentional care, personal engagement, and responsible moral guidance. The findings of this research affirm that when students perceive their teacher as genuinely attentive and spiritually invested in their lives, their own spiritual development is positively influenced. The correlation between teacher social communication competence and student spirituality was positive and significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that improvements in communicative quality are associated with measurable growth in students' spiritual indicators. Although causality cannot be inferred from the correlational design, the strength of the relationship underscores the strategic importance of relational pedagogy in Christian Religious Education. In a vocational school environment where students are primarily oriented toward technical and professional preparation, the presence of a communicatively competent CRE teacher becomes a crucial mediating factor that integrates spiritual values with daily academic and social realities. The findings reveal that spirituality among students is not formed solely through doctrinal transmission or cognitive mastery of biblical content. Rather, spirituality emerges through dialogical interaction, lived example, and consistent relational presence. Students reported higher levels of spiritual awareness when the teacher demonstrated congruence between speech and conduct, suggesting that authenticity functions as a communicative catalyst for spiritual credibility. This reinforces the principle that spiritual formation in schools depends as much on relational integrity as on curricular structure. In the specific context of SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera, where 295 Christian students are served by three Christian teachers (including the CRE teacher), the study highlights the strategic role of collaborative witness within the school community. While the CRE teacher holds primary responsibility for religious instruction, the broader Christian educator community contributes to the spiritual climate of the institution. Nonetheless, the CRE teacher's structured and intentional communication practices remain central to the systematic cultivation of spiritual consciousness. This research contributes to the discourse on Christian educational leadership by demonstrating that social communication competence is a measurable and impactful dimension of teacher

professionalism. It bridges biblical theology and educational science by showing that the priestly symbolism of Exodus 28:29 provides not only theological meaning but also pedagogical direction. The metaphor of carrying students “on the heart” becomes operationalized through attentive dialogue, empathetic engagement, and morally consistent communication. Several implications arise from this study. Professional development programs for CRE teachers should explicitly include training in relational communication skills, including empathetic listening, dialogical facilitation, and constructive feedback techniques. School leadership should recognize that spiritual formation is relationally mediated and therefore cultivate institutional cultures that prioritize respectful and open communication. Future research may employ mixed-method or qualitative designs to explore deeper narrative dimensions of teacher–student spiritual interaction. The study affirms that the social communication competence of Christian Religious Education teachers significantly supports the nurturing of students’ spirituality. Inspired by the priestly imagery of Exodus 28:29, the CRE teacher’s communicative presence becomes an embodied act of remembrance, representation, and relational responsibility. Within the vocational educational environment of SMK Swasta Kristen Harapan Sejahtera, such competence proves essential for integrating faith with daily learning and for shaping students not only as skilled professionals but also as spiritually grounded individuals.

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