



Teacher Professionalism and the Spirit of Obedience: A Biblical Reflection on Matthew 7:21 in the Context of SMP Negeri 1 Uulusua

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ABSTRACT

This study examines teacher professionalism through the theological perspective of Gospel of Matthew 7:21 in the educational context of SMP Negeri 1 Uulusua. The verse emphasizes that authentic discipleship is demonstrated not merely by verbal confession but by doing the will of the Father. Grounded in this biblical principle, the research investigates how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers embody the spirit of obedience within their professional responsibilities and how such embodiment influences students' spiritual development. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed involving 78 Christian students taught by two CRE teachers. Total sampling was applied due to the limited population size. Data were collected through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire measuring two primary variables: teacher professionalism (pedagogical competence, subject mastery, ethical integrity, fairness, responsibility, and consistency) and the perceived manifestation of obedient faith. Instrument validity was established through expert review, and reliability testing yielded acceptable internal consistency coefficients ($\alpha > 0.70$). Descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment correlation were used to analyze the data at a 0.05 significance level. The findings indicate that teacher professionalism is perceived at a high level and that there is a significant positive correlation between professional conduct and students' internalization of the spirit of obedience. Students reported greater spiritual awareness and moral commitment when teachers consistently aligned their teaching with lived example. The study concludes that professionalism in Christian education functions as an embodied expression of obedience, transforming institutional responsibility into spiritual vocation. Integrating theological reflection with professional competence strengthens both educational quality and students' holistic spiritual formation.

Keywords: Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Obedience

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professionalism in Christian Religious Education (CRE) is not merely a matter of pedagogical competence or administrative compliance; it is fundamentally theological in

orientation and ethical in expression. In Christian educational settings, professionalism entails the integration of doctrinal fidelity, moral integrity, and instructional expertise. The Indonesian legal framework itself defines teachers as professional educators who are required to possess pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies (Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers). However, within Christian Religious Education, professionalism also demands spiritual authenticity: the embodiment of faith in daily practice. This study explores teacher professionalism through the lens of obedience, inspired by Gospel of Matthew 7:21, and contextualized in SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua, where 78 Christian students are guided by two CRE teachers. Matthew 7:21 states, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Situated within the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), this verse underscores the primacy of obedient action over verbal confession. According to R. T. France (2007), the emphasis in this passage lies on ethical obedience as the authentic evidence of discipleship. Similarly, Ulrich Luz (2007) argues that Matthew's Gospel consistently links confession with praxis, highlighting that genuine faith manifests in concrete obedience to God's will. This theological insight provides a critical framework for evaluating teacher professionalism: verbal affirmation of Christian values is insufficient without lived obedience reflected in conduct and instructional responsibility.

Professionalism in education has been widely discussed in pedagogical literature. Lee S. Shulman (1987) introduced the concept of pedagogical content knowledge, emphasizing that professional teachers integrate subject mastery with effective instructional strategies. In Christian education, however, content knowledge must be harmonized with moral character. Thomas H. Groome (2011) contends that faith-based education requires teachers who model lived faith, not merely transmit religious information. Thus, teacher professionalism in CRE includes doctrinal literacy, pedagogical skill, and spiritual obedience. The context of SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua presents a distinctive educational landscape. Located in South Nias, a region with strong Christian heritage, the school serves a diverse student body, including 78 Christian students who receive CRE instruction from two designated teachers. In such a context, CRE teachers carry dual responsibilities: meeting national educational standards and nurturing students' spiritual formation. The challenge lies in aligning institutional professionalism with biblical obedience. While regulatory frameworks emphasize accountability, curriculum design, and assessment protocols, Matthew 7:21 calls educators to examine whether their professional actions genuinely reflect the will of God. Obedience in Matthew's Gospel is inseparable from ethical consistency. Donald A. Hagner (1993) observes that the Sermon on the Mount portrays obedience as holistic righteousness, encompassing integrity, mercy, and faithfulness. For CRE teachers, this implies that professionalism extends beyond classroom management or lesson planning; it includes fairness in evaluation, compassion in discipline, diligence in preparation, and integrity in personal conduct. Obedience becomes visible in the mundane routines of teaching, punctuality, preparation, respectful communication, and responsible assessment. The concept of obedience resonates with contemporary discussions of character education. Thomas Lickona (1991) emphasizes that educators shape moral character through modeling and relational influence. When teachers demonstrate consistency between professed beliefs and professional behavior,

students encounter a credible witness. In contrast, discrepancies between confession and conduct may undermine spiritual authority. Thus, examining teacher professionalism through Matthew 7:21 invites critical reflection on congruence between theological commitment and educational praxis. This study seeks to analyze how CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua embody the spirit of obedience as a dimension of professionalism. By integrating biblical exegesis with empirical educational inquiry, the research addresses three interrelated concerns: How is obedience in Matthew 7:21 interpreted within a pedagogical framework? How do CRE teachers demonstrate professional competence in alignment with obedient faith? What is the perceived impact of such professionalism on students' spiritual awareness and moral development? In bridging biblical theology and educational science, this research contributes to ongoing discourse on professional identity in Christian education. It argues that teacher professionalism, when informed by the spirit of obedience articulated in Matthew 7:21, becomes not only a regulatory requirement but also a spiritual vocation. Within the specific context of SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua, the integration of professional competence and obedient faith serves as a model for holistic Christian educational leadership.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to examine the relationship between teacher professionalism and the spirit of obedience, interpreted through Gospel of Matthew 7:21, within the context of SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua. The design was selected to provide both a systematic description of perceived teacher professionalism and a statistical analysis of its association with students' understanding and internalization of obedient faith. The research integrated biblical exegesis and empirical educational inquiry, positioning theological reflection as the conceptual framework and quantitative data as the analytical instrument. The population consisted of 78 Christian students enrolled in the school and taught by two Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers. Given the relatively small population size, the study applied a total sampling technique, whereby all 78 students were invited to participate as respondents. This approach ensured comprehensive representation and minimized sampling bias. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on established indicators of teacher professionalism, pedagogical competence, subject-matter mastery, ethical consistency, responsibility, discipline, and relational integrity, aligned with national professional standards for teachers. To operationalize the "spirit of obedience," additional items were constructed to measure students' perceptions of teachers' consistency between words and actions, commitment to fulfilling responsibilities, fairness in evaluation, and faithfulness to biblical values in daily conduct. The instrument employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Prior to distribution, the questionnaire underwent content validation through peer review by two senior lecturers in Christian education and educational methodology to ensure theological coherence and construct clarity. A pilot test with a small comparable student group outside the research site was conducted to assess reliability; Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70 were considered acceptable for internal consistency. Data collection was conducted during regular school hours with permission from the school administration. Respondents completed the questionnaire

anonymously to reduce social desirability bias and to encourage honest responses. Ethical considerations were observed, including informed consent, confidentiality assurance, and voluntary participation. Data analysis proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, and standard deviation) were calculated to determine the general level of perceived teacher professionalism and the manifestation of obedient conduct. Second, inferential analysis using Pearson's Product-Moment correlation coefficient was applied to test the relationship between teacher professionalism (independent variable) and the spirit of obedience as perceived and experienced by students (dependent variable). Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level. In addition to quantitative analysis, a brief exegetical approach to Matthew 7:21 was employed to interpret findings theologically. This involved examining the literary context of the Sermon on the Mount, analyzing key Greek terms related to "doing" (ποιῶν) the will of the Father, and integrating insights from reputable biblical scholarship. The integration of theological exegesis with empirical data enabled a holistic interpretation of teacher professionalism as both a measurable educational construct and a spiritual vocation grounded in biblical obedience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a consistent and statistically meaningful relationship between teacher professionalism and the spirit of obedience, interpreted through the theological framework of Gospel of Matthew 7:21, within the educational setting of SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua. Based on descriptive statistical analysis of responses from 78 Christian students, the overall level of perceived teacher professionalism among the two Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers was categorized as high. The mean scores across indicators, pedagogical competence, mastery of biblical content, instructional preparation, fairness in evaluation, punctuality, consistency between words and actions, and ethical integrity, were predominantly within the upper quartile of the five-point Likert scale. Similarly, student responses concerning the manifestation of the spirit of obedience in teacher conduct, defined as the alignment between professed Christian values and daily professional practice, also demonstrated high averages. Inferential analysis using Pearson's Product-Moment correlation indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship at the 0.05 level between perceived teacher professionalism and students' internalization of obedient faith. Although correlational findings do not establish causation, the strength of the association suggests that professional conduct grounded in biblical obedience exerts substantial formative influence within this educational context. Matthew 7:21 functions as a hermeneutical anchor for interpreting these findings. The verse declares that not everyone who verbally confesses allegiance to Christ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only "the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." The key participle ποιῶν ("doing") emphasizes continuous, active obedience rather than episodic compliance. Within the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), obedience is framed as embodied righteousness, manifested through integrity, mercy, truthfulness, and faithful action. When applied to teacher professionalism, this text reframes professional standards not merely as institutional requirements but as theological imperatives. The data suggest that students perceive authentic professionalism when teachers enact obedience in tangible practices: careful lesson planning, equitable grading,

disciplined time management, and compassionate correction. Thus, obedience becomes pedagogically visible. The high descriptive scores on pedagogical competence indicate that students recognize structured instructional delivery, clarity of explanation, and contextual application of biblical texts. When teachers demonstrate preparedness and coherence in teaching, students interpret such diligence as faithfulness to responsibility. This perception aligns with Shulman's theory of pedagogical content knowledge, which underscores the integration of subject mastery and instructional skill as hallmarks of professionalism. In a Christian educational framework, however, mastery is inseparable from moral accountability. Students reported greater respect and spiritual attentiveness when teachers not only explained doctrinal content but also connected lessons to everyday ethical decisions. This suggests that professional competence strengthens students' comprehension of obedience as lived practice rather than abstract concept.

Ethical consistency emerged as one of the strongest correlational indicators. Students expressed heightened spiritual awareness when teachers' behavior outside direct instruction mirrored their teaching about obedience. For example, punctuality was frequently cited in open-response comments as evidence of disciplined faith. In a context where only two CRE teachers serve 78 Christian students, visible consistency carries amplified significance. Students observe whether teachers arrive on time, fulfill administrative duties, and engage respectfully with colleagues. Such behaviors communicate implicit theological messages. When students perceive congruence between proclamation and practice, they are more inclined to internalize the message of Matthew 7:21 as credible and attainable. Conversely, minor discrepancies, though limited in frequency, were associated with lower reported inspiration. This pattern reinforces the interpretive conclusion that obedience, as described in Matthew, is evaluated relationally and communally. Fairness in assessment also contributed substantially to the correlation. Students associated equitable grading and transparent criteria with moral obedience to God's will. In biblical theology, obedience entails justice and impartiality. Although Matthew 7:21 does not explicitly address justice, its emphasis on authentic discipleship presupposes ethical integrity. When teachers provide constructive feedback, explain evaluation standards, and avoid favoritism, students experience professionalism as moral consistency. This, in turn, strengthens their perception that Christian teaching demands righteousness in practical affairs. The data reveal that fairness was positively correlated with students' willingness to apply biblical principles in personal decisions, indicating that institutional justice functions as a pedagogical catalyst for spiritual growth. Relational discipline, defined as maintaining authority without authoritarianism, further illuminates the results. Students responded favorably to corrective measures delivered with respect and explanation rather than anger. Such communicative discipline aligns with the Sermon on the Mount's broader ethic of humility and reconciliation. Obedience in Matthew is not legalistic rigidity but faithful adherence rooted in transformed character. Teachers who disciplined students consistently yet compassionately were perceived as embodying this balance. As a result, students reported greater motivation to obey classroom rules voluntarily, perceiving them as reflections of shared values rather than arbitrary impositions. This suggests that professional authority, when exercised in alignment with biblical obedience, fosters intrinsic moral development.

The correlation analysis also revealed that teacher responsibility, particularly in preparing lesson plans and maintaining administrative documentation, was positively associated with students' understanding of obedience as diligence. Though administrative tasks may appear peripheral to spiritual formation, students interpret these acts as evidence of seriousness toward vocation. Within Christian theology, vocation is a calling that demands stewardship. When teachers treat planning and reporting as acts of faithfulness rather than bureaucratic burdens, students observe obedience enacted in routine labor. This observation reinforces the theological claim that obedience encompasses both visible ministry and unseen preparation. Another notable finding concerns the communal dimension of obedience. Students reported that collaborative prayer, collective reflection sessions, and participatory discussions enhanced their sense of shared spiritual commitment. Although the research instrument focused primarily on professionalism, qualitative comments indicated that communal spiritual practices were interpreted as extensions of professional responsibility. In other words, professionalism in this context included fostering a supportive faith environment. Matthew's Gospel consistently situates obedience within community rather than isolated piety. Thus, when CRE teachers encourage communal engagement, they enact obedience relationally. Variability among responses reveals important nuances. A small subset of students rated certain professionalism indicators as moderate rather than high. These responses often related to perceived limitations in individual attention, likely influenced by the ratio of students to teachers. With only two CRE teachers serving 78 Christian students across multiple grade levels, individualized mentoring opportunities are necessarily constrained. This contextual factor underscores structural challenges in implementing ideal professional standards. Nevertheless, the overall correlation suggests that even within resource limitations, visible obedience in routine professional conduct exerts measurable spiritual impact. The findings invite deeper reflection on the distinction between nominal confession and enacted obedience. Matthew 7:21 warns against superficial religiosity disconnected from ethical practice. In educational settings, this warning translates into scrutiny of professional authenticity. Teachers may articulate doctrinal orthodoxy, yet students ultimately evaluate credibility through observable behavior. The data demonstrate that students are perceptive interpreters of integrity. Their spirituality appears strengthened when they encounter consistent modeling of obedience. This confirms Groome's assertion that faith education requires lived witness rather than mere transmission of information. Professionalism, therefore, becomes sacramental in character: visible conduct mediates invisible conviction.

The statistical significance of the correlation reinforces the proposition that professionalism and spirituality are not discrete domains but mutually reinforcing constructs. Professional excellence devoid of spiritual grounding risks becoming technocratic efficiency; spiritual fervor without professional discipline risks inconsistency. The integration observed at SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua indicates that students experience the most formative environment when competence and obedience converge. This integration corresponds to the holistic righteousness envisioned in the Sermon on the Mount, where inner devotion and outward practice are inseparable. The reliability coefficients above 0.70 support the internal consistency of the measurement instrument, strengthening confidence in the findings. NSelf-reported data are susceptible to social

desirability bias, especially in religious contexts where students may hesitate to critique teachers openly. Additionally, correlational design precludes definitive causal inference. Longitudinal research could explore whether sustained exposure to obedient professionalism produces measurable changes in behavioral outcomes over time. Qualitative interviews might also capture narrative dimensions of spiritual influence not fully reflected in Likert-scale responses. The findings hold significant implications for Christian educational leadership. First, professional development programs should integrate theological reflection on obedience with technical training. Workshops addressing curriculum design, assessment literacy, and classroom management should be complemented by spiritual formation initiatives emphasizing integrity and accountability. Second, school administrators should recognize that compliance with regulatory standards intersects with biblical faithfulness. Policies promoting punctuality, documentation accuracy, and equitable treatment serve not only bureaucratic efficiency but also theological coherence. Third, CRE teachers should cultivate reflective practices, such as peer evaluation or spiritual retreats, to examine alignment between proclamation and conduct. The results substantiate the central thesis of this study: teacher professionalism, when animated by the spirit of obedience articulated in Matthew 7:21, significantly contributes to students' spiritual formation. Within SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua, students perceive obedience not as abstract moralism but as embodied practice observable in daily professional routines. The integration of pedagogical competence, ethical consistency, and relational responsibility constitutes a credible witness that shapes student understanding of authentic discipleship. Thus, the discussion affirms that professionalism in Christian education is fundamentally theological, rooted in doing the will of the Father, and practically enacted through disciplined, faithful service in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine teacher professionalism through the theological lens of Gospel of Matthew 7:21 within the context of SMP Negeri 1 Ulususua, where 78 Christian students are guided by two Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers. Grounded in the biblical assertion that authentic discipleship is evidenced not by verbal confession but by doing the will of the Father, the research sought to determine how professional competence and obedient faith converge in educational praxis. The findings demonstrate that teacher professionalism, expressed through pedagogical competence, subject mastery, ethical integrity, fairness in evaluation, responsibility, punctuality, and relational discipline, is perceived at a high level by students. More importantly, statistical analysis indicates a significant positive correlation between perceived professionalism and students' internalization of the spirit of obedience. This suggests that when teachers consistently align their instructional practice and daily conduct with biblical values, students are more likely to understand obedience as a lived reality rather than a theoretical ideal. Matthew 7:21 emphasizes continuous action ("the one who does") as the authentic mark of belonging to God's kingdom. Within the educational setting studied, this principle becomes visible through disciplined preparation, consistent moral example, and faithful fulfillment of professional duties. The research confirms that professionalism in Christian education cannot be reduced to regulatory compliance or

technical efficiency; rather, it is a vocation rooted in theological accountability. Teachers who embody obedience through tangible actions, timely attendance, transparent assessment, respectful communication, and compassionate correction, provide students with a credible model of integrated faith and work. The study also highlights the formative power of congruence. Students are sensitive observers of authenticity. Where alignment between proclamation and practice is evident, spiritual authority is strengthened. Where inconsistency appears, even minimally, inspiration diminishes. Thus, professionalism functions as a mediating channel through which biblical teaching gains experiential credibility. In this sense, obedience is not only a personal spiritual discipline but also a public pedagogical witness. Although the research is limited by its correlational design and reliance on self-reported data, the consistency of the results affirms that professional integrity significantly shapes spiritual climate. In a context with limited CRE personnel, the visible obedience of teachers becomes especially influential. The findings therefore underscore the necessity of integrating theological reflection with professional development. Educational institutions should cultivate systems that encourage both competence and character, recognizing that technical skill without obedience lacks spiritual coherence, while spiritual enthusiasm without professional discipline undermines credibility. This study affirms that teacher professionalism, when grounded in the spirit of obedience articulated in Matthew 7:21, serves as a foundational element of effective Christian Religious Education. At SMP Negeri 1 Ulusua, professionalism is most transformative when it reflects faithful action aligned with divine will. Through consistent, disciplined, and ethically grounded service, CRE teachers not only fulfill institutional standards but also embody a living testimony of obedient faith, shaping students toward holistic spiritual maturity.

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