



The Spirituality of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Communicating the Message of Gratitude: A Reflection on Exodus 13:16 (A Study at SD Negeri 116258 Sei Peranginan)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the spirituality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and students' formation of gratitude at SD Negeri 116258 Sei Peranginan, North Labuhanbatu. Drawing theological insight from Book of Exodus 13:16, which emphasizes embodied remembrance of God's saving acts, the research investigates how teachers communicate gratitude not only through instruction but also through spiritual modeling. A quantitative approach was employed involving 55 Christian students as respondents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires measuring perceptions of teacher spirituality and students' gratitude attitudes and behaviors. Statistical analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between teacher spirituality and students' gratitude formation. The findings indicate that students who perceive their teachers as spiritually consistent, demonstrating authentic prayer life, biblical integration, moral integrity, and relational warmth, are more likely to internalize gratitude cognitively, express it emotionally, and practice it behaviorally. The strongest influence was found in behavioral expressions of gratitude, suggesting that lived example plays a critical role in Christian character formation. The study concludes that teacher spirituality is not merely a personal dimension of faith but a pedagogical force that shapes students' spiritual identity. When gratitude is communicated through both theological reflection and embodied witness, students develop a deeper awareness of God's faithfulness and cultivate lasting habits of thankfulness in daily life.

Keywords: *Spirituality, Christian Religious Education, Gratitude*

INTRODUCTION

Gratitude occupies a central place in Christian spirituality, shaping both individual devotion and communal identity. Within the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), the teacher's spirituality significantly influences how biblical values such as

gratitude are understood, embodied, and practiced by students. Spirituality in education is not limited to personal piety but encompasses the integration of faith, character, relational presence, and pedagogical intentionality (Palmer, 1998). In Christian pedagogy, the teacher's spiritual life becomes a living curriculum through which theological truths are communicated and modeled. Therefore, examining how CRE teachers communicate gratitude as a spiritual discipline provides insight into the broader role of teacher spirituality in faith formation. A biblical foundation for gratitude as a formative spiritual practice is found in Book of Exodus 13:16. This passage forms part of Israel's remembrance of deliverance from Egypt and emphasizes the importance of visible signs and embodied reminders of God's saving acts. The instruction to bind the memory of deliverance as a sign on the hand and a symbol on the forehead reflects the integration of memory, identity, and daily practice. Scholars interpret this text as a call to cultivate embodied remembrance, ensuring that gratitude for God's redemptive action shapes communal consciousness (Childs, 1974; Fretheim, 1991). Gratitude, therefore, is not a fleeting emotion but a disciplined act of remembering God's faithfulness in history. In Christian education, gratitude functions as both theological conviction and pedagogical aim. Groome (2011) argues that Christian teaching involves helping learners participate in the story of God's action in history, enabling them to interpret their lives through the lens of divine grace. Similarly, Pazmiño (2008) emphasizes that teachers in Christian contexts are called to integrate biblical narratives with lived experience so that students recognize God's presence in everyday circumstances. When teachers embody gratitude through consistent attitude and reflective practice, they provide students with a model of how faith shapes perception and response. Educational psychology further underscores the formative power of gratitude in child development. Research suggests that cultivating gratitude enhances emotional well-being, empathy, and prosocial behavior (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). For elementary-aged learners, gratitude can foster resilience and communal awareness when intentionally nurtured within supportive learning environments. Thus, the spirituality of CRE teachers, expressed through prayerful reflection, relational warmth, and consistent acknowledgment of God's provision, becomes instrumental in shaping students' dispositions.

At SD Negeri 116258 Sei Peranginan, North Labuhanbatu, the presence of 55 Christian students and eight Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, provides a communal context where gratitude can be cultivated intentionally. This relatively supportive faith environment offers opportunities for collaborative spiritual formation, yet it also requires deliberate pedagogical direction to prevent gratitude from becoming a routine phrase devoid of depth. The teacher's spirituality, therefore, becomes a key variable in determining whether biblical remembrance translates into lived thanksgiving. This study seeks to explore how the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers influences the communication of gratitude, drawing theological reflection from Exodus 13:16. By examining classroom practices, relational dynamics, and spiritual modeling, the research aims to demonstrate that gratitude is most effectively taught when it is first embodied. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader discussions on how teacher spirituality functions as a transformative force in Christian elementary education, shaping students not only to understand gratitude cognitively but also to practice it as a rhythm of faithful remembrance.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between the spirituality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the effectiveness of communicating gratitude based on Book of Exodus 13:16 at SD Negeri 116258 Sei Peranginan, North Labuhanbatu. A correlational survey approach was chosen to measure the degree to which teacher spirituality influences students' understanding and practice of gratitude. The population consisted of 55 Christian students enrolled at the school. Because the total population was relatively small, the study used a total sampling technique in which all 55 Christian students participated as respondents. The eight Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, were included as contextual respondents to provide data regarding spiritual practices and instructional emphasis on gratitude. Data were collected using structured questionnaires developed based on established theoretical frameworks of Christian spirituality and gratitude formation. The teacher spirituality instrument measured dimensions such as spiritual discipline, authenticity, relational warmth, biblical integration, and modeling behavior. The student gratitude instrument measured cognitive understanding of biblical gratitude, emotional disposition, and observable behaviors such as thankfulness, empathy, and acknowledgment of God's provision. All items were designed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Prior to distribution, the instruments were reviewed for content validity by two experts in Christian education and educational measurement. A pilot test was conducted with a small comparable group to ensure clarity and reliability. Internal consistency reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to determine mean scores and standard deviations for each variable, followed by inferential statistical analysis using Pearson product-moment correlation to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between teacher spirituality and students' gratitude formation. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality of responses, and using aggregated data for reporting purposes. Through this quantitative methodology, the study sought to provide measurable evidence regarding the influence of teacher spirituality on the communication and internalization of gratitude within Christian elementary education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis of this study reveals a significant and positive relationship between the spirituality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the effectiveness of communicating gratitude among students at SD Negeri 116258 Sei Peranginan, North Labuhanbatu. Drawing theological reflection from Book of Exodus 13:16, which emphasizes embodied remembrance of God's saving acts, the study measured how teacher spirituality correlates with students' cognitive understanding, emotional disposition, and behavioral expression of gratitude. With a total sample of 55 Christian students and contextual data from eight Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, the results provide measurable insight into how spirituality functions

pedagogically within an elementary school context. Descriptive statistical analysis indicated that the overall mean score for teacher spirituality was high, with students perceiving their CRE teacher as consistent in spiritual discipline, authentic in faith expression, relationally warm, and intentional in integrating biblical teaching into daily classroom life. The dimension of “modeling gratitude in daily interaction” received the highest average rating, suggesting that students most readily recognize spirituality through observable behaviors rather than abstract theological explanations. The dimension of “explicit biblical instruction on gratitude” also scored highly, indicating that Exodus 13:16 and related themes of remembrance and thanksgiving were intentionally integrated into classroom teaching. The relatively low standard deviation across items suggests consistency in students’ perceptions, implying that teacher spirituality was experienced collectively rather than unevenly distributed among respondents.

On the student gratitude scale, descriptive results also showed high overall means across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Students demonstrated strong agreement with statements indicating understanding that gratitude is rooted in remembering God’s help, recognizing blessings in everyday life, and expressing thankfulness toward peers and teachers. Behavioral items such as “I say thank you to God in prayer” and “I appreciate my friends and teachers” also received high mean scores. Notably, the affective dimension, reflecting emotional awareness of gratitude, showed slightly lower but still positive mean values compared to cognitive understanding. This suggests that while students comprehend theological concepts of gratitude, ongoing cultivation is necessary to deepen emotional internalization. Inferential statistical analysis using Pearson’s product-moment correlation revealed a strong positive correlation between teacher spirituality and students’ gratitude formation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.05$). This coefficient indicates a substantial relationship, suggesting that higher levels of perceived teacher spirituality are associated with higher levels of student gratitude across measured dimensions. The significance level confirms that the correlation is unlikely to have occurred by chance within the sample. The strength of this relationship underscores the formative influence of teacher spirituality in shaping students’ value orientation and behavioral practice.

Further analysis of sub-dimensions revealed meaningful patterns. The strongest correlation was found between the teacher’s modeling behavior and students’ behavioral expressions of gratitude. This finding suggests that students are particularly influenced by what teachers do rather than solely by what they say. When teachers visibly demonstrate thankfulness in prayer, acknowledgment of others, and expressions of appreciation in everyday interaction, students are more likely to replicate those behaviors. This aligns with social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn through observation and imitation of significant role models. Within a Christian educational framework, such modeling corresponds with the biblical call to embody faith visibly. Another notable finding was the moderate-to-strong correlation between explicit biblical instruction and students’ cognitive understanding of gratitude. Students who reported that their teacher frequently explained the meaning of Exodus 13:16 and emphasized remembrance of God’s deliverance showed higher comprehension of gratitude as theological response rather than mere politeness. This indicates that instruction and modeling function

synergistically. While modeling influences behavior, structured biblical explanation strengthens conceptual clarity. The integration of narrative theology with relational practice appears essential for comprehensive gratitude formation. Interestingly, the correlation between teacher spirituality and students' affective gratitude, though significant, was slightly lower than behavioral correlation. This suggests that emotional internalization develops gradually and may require extended reinforcement beyond classroom interaction. However, the positive relationship indicates that teacher spirituality contributes meaningfully to cultivating not only outward expressions but also inward dispositions of thankfulness.

The discussion of these findings highlights several pedagogical implications. The strong correlation confirms that teacher spirituality functions as a measurable educational variable rather than an intangible ideal. Spiritual authenticity, consistent prayer life, and relational warmth are not merely personal attributes; they exert demonstrable influence on students' moral and spiritual development. In light of Exodus 13:16, which commands visible and embodied remembrance, teacher spirituality becomes a contemporary enactment of binding gratitude "on the hand and forehead," that is, integrating faith into action and identity. The data emphasize the importance of embodiment in teaching gratitude. The highest correlations emerged where teacher modeling intersected with student behavior. This suggests that gratitude education is most effective when students witness it enacted daily. The CRE teacher's practice of beginning classes with thanksgiving prayer, verbally appreciating student effort, and acknowledging God's provision in ordinary events creates an environment saturated with gratitude. Such repeated exposure normalizes thankfulness as communal culture rather than isolated religious ritual. The communal context of SD Negeri 116258 Sei Peranginan strengthens the impact of teacher spirituality. With 55 Christian students and eight Christian teachers, the school environment provides a supportive framework for reinforcing gratitude messages. Although this study focused primarily on the CRE teacher's influence, the presence of multiple Christian educators likely contributes to cultural consistency. The quantitative findings, however, underscore that the CRE teacher's spirituality plays a central role in shaping students' interpretive lens. The results contribute to broader discussions on faith integration in public education contexts. The strong statistical relationship demonstrates that spiritual formation can coexist with structured pedagogical design. Gratitude, grounded in biblical theology, does not diminish academic rigor but enhances emotional and relational climate. Research in positive psychology supports the educational benefits of gratitude practices, including improved well-being and social cohesion. The present findings provide context-specific evidence within a Christian elementary school setting, bridging theological reflection and empirical measurement. The study suggests that teacher development programs should include attention to spiritual formation alongside instructional strategy. If teacher spirituality significantly influences student outcomes, professional training must address reflective practice, devotional discipline, and ethical modeling. Spiritual growth is not peripheral to educational effectiveness but integral to it. The measurable impact observed in this study reinforces the necessity of holistic teacher preparation. The findings reveal that gratitude education involves both cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Students demonstrated strong conceptual understanding when biblical teaching was clear and structured. However, sustained behavioral

expression required consistent modeling and reinforcement. This dynamic mirrors the structure of Exodus 13:16 itself, where remembrance is tied to visible action. Theological instruction without embodied example risks abstraction, while example without explanation may lack depth. Effective pedagogy integrates both. While the correlation is strong, it does not imply causation. The quantitative design identifies relationship rather than direct causal determination. Nonetheless, the magnitude and consistency of the correlation provide compelling evidence of influence. Future research employing longitudinal or experimental designs could further explore causal pathways. The relatively small population size strengthens the contextual reliability of findings while limiting generalizability. Because the study included the entire population of Christian students at the school, the results accurately represent that community. However, application to other settings should consider contextual differences such as school culture, teacher experience, and denominational diversity. The study underscores the pedagogical power of remembrance. Exodus 13:16 frames gratitude as active memory of deliverance. In classroom practice, this remembrance is translated into storytelling, reflective prayer, and acknowledgment of daily blessings. Students learn to connect historical salvation narrative with present experience. The quantitative data confirm that such integration fosters measurable gratitude disposition. Finally, the discussion affirms that spirituality in Christian education is both relational and transformative. The CRE teacher's consistent spiritual practice, manifested in humility, thanksgiving, and attentiveness, creates an atmosphere conducive to gratitude formation. Students do not merely recite theological truths; they internalize patterns of recognition and response. Through repeated interaction, gratitude becomes part of school identity.

The quantitative results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between teacher spirituality and student gratitude formation. The findings validate the theological insight of Exodus 13:16 within contemporary educational practice: remembrance must be embodied to shape identity. When teachers communicate gratitude through both instruction and lived example, students develop cognitive understanding, emotional awareness, and behavioral expression of thankfulness. The data suggest that spirituality is not an abstract dimension of teacher identity but a measurable and influential factor in shaping the moral and spiritual character of learners.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there is a significant and positive relationship between the spirituality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the formation of gratitude among students at SD Negeri 116258 Sei Peranginan, North Labuhanbatu. Grounded in theological reflection on Book of Exodus 13:16, which emphasizes embodied remembrance of God's saving acts, the findings demonstrate that gratitude is most effectively cultivated when it is both taught and modeled. Teacher spirituality, expressed through consistent prayer life, authentic faith practice, relational warmth, and intentional biblical integration, was shown to correlate strongly with students' cognitive understanding, emotional awareness, and behavioral expression of gratitude. The

quantitative results confirm that spirituality functions as a measurable and influential educational factor. Students who perceived higher levels of teacher spirituality demonstrated stronger tendencies to recognize God's blessings, express thankfulness in prayer, and practice appreciation toward peers and teachers. The strongest relationship was found between teacher modeling and students' behavioral gratitude, underscoring the importance of embodied example in Christian pedagogy. The communal context of 55 Christian students supported by eight Christian teachers reinforces the formative potential of consistent spiritual culture within the school environment. However, the central role of the CRE teacher remains pivotal in integrating theological remembrance with daily classroom practice. The spirituality of Christian educators is not peripheral to instructional effectiveness but foundational to moral and spiritual formation. When gratitude is communicated through both biblical teaching and lived authenticity, students are guided to internalize thankfulness as a lasting dimension of faith and identity.

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