



The Spirituality of Christian Religious Education Teachers and the Dynamics of Joy in the Epistle to the Philippians: A Contextual Study at SDN 1 Katanjung

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the spirituality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and its influence on the dynamics of joy in the learning process as reflected in the theological message of the Epistle to the Philippians. In the Pauline epistle, joy is presented as a fundamental expression of Christian faith that emerges from a deep relationship with Christ rather than from favorable external circumstances. The purpose of this research is to examine how the spirituality of CRE teachers contributes to the experience of joy and positive engagement among students in the learning environment. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach conducted at SDN 1 Katanjung. The participants consisted of 19 Christian students and four Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis related to Christian Religious Education activities. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures involving data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns related to teacher spirituality and the manifestation of joy in the learning process. The findings reveal that the spirituality of the CRE teacher plays a significant role in creating a joyful and supportive learning atmosphere. The teacher demonstrates authentic spiritual attitudes through prayer, encouragement, and positive interaction with students. In conclusion, teacher spirituality significantly contributes to the development of joyful learning dynamics in Christian Religious Education. By integrating spiritual authenticity with pedagogical practice, teachers can nurture both the academic and spiritual growth of students.

Keywords: Spirituality, Christian Religious Education, Joy

INTRODUCTION

Teacher spirituality has become an important theme in contemporary discussions of Christian education because it connects the inner life of the educator with the effectiveness of teaching and character formation among students. In educational

practice, teachers are not only responsible for delivering academic content but also for shaping the moral and spiritual atmosphere of the classroom. The spiritual orientation of a teacher influences how learning takes place, how relationships are formed, and how values are communicated to students. Scholars in Christian education emphasize that teachers who cultivate a deep spiritual life are more capable of guiding students toward holistic development that integrates intellectual growth with moral and spiritual maturity (Pazmiño, 2008). Within this perspective, spirituality is not merely a personal religious practice but an integral dimension of professional identity that shapes the teacher's attitudes, motivations, and commitment to the educational vocation. One of the central themes of Christian spirituality in the New Testament is the concept of joy. Joy in Christian theology is not simply an emotional response to favorable circumstances but a spiritual attitude rooted in faith and trust in God. This understanding is particularly evident in the writings of the apostle Paul in Epistle to the Philippians, which is widely recognized as the "letter of joy." Despite being written while Paul was imprisoned, the epistle repeatedly emphasizes rejoicing in the Lord and maintaining a spirit of gratitude and hope in the midst of difficulties. Biblical scholars note that the theme of joy appears throughout the letter as an expression of spiritual resilience and deep communion with God (Wright, 2004). Such joy is not dependent on external conditions but arises from a life centered on Christ and committed to serving others.

The concept of joy has important pedagogical implications. A teacher who embodies spiritual joy creates a learning environment that is encouraging, supportive, and inspiring for students. Educational research suggests that the emotional climate of the classroom significantly affects students' motivation, engagement, and overall learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009). When teachers approach their work with enthusiasm, gratitude, and a positive outlook, students are more likely to experience learning as meaningful and enjoyable. Conversely, a lack of spiritual vitality may lead to a classroom atmosphere that feels routine or disengaged. Therefore, the cultivation of joyful spirituality among teachers is closely related to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. The theological message of joy in the Epistle to the Philippians also highlights the importance of unity, humility, and perseverance in the Christian life. Paul encourages believers to live in harmony, to serve one another with humility, and to remain faithful in their commitment to Christ. These values are directly relevant to the work of teachers, who are called to guide students not only in academic learning but also in the development of attitudes that support healthy relationships and ethical behavior. Palmer (1998) argues that teaching is deeply connected to the identity and inner life of the teacher; thus, the authenticity of the teacher's spiritual life can significantly influence the learning environment. When teachers demonstrate genuine joy rooted in faith, they provide students with a living example of how spiritual values can be integrated into daily life. The relevance of teacher spirituality becomes particularly significant in elementary school settings, where students are in a formative stage of emotional and moral development. At this stage, students are highly responsive to the attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by their teachers. Teachers who display patience, encouragement, and joy can foster a classroom atmosphere that promotes confidence and curiosity in learning. In Christian Religious Education, such an environment also supports students' understanding of biblical teachings by connecting theological concepts with lived experiences. Joyful

teaching therefore becomes a practical expression of Christian spirituality that helps students perceive faith as a positive and life-giving reality.

This study is conducted in the context of SDN 1 Katanjung, where Christian Religious Education is provided for Christian students within the formal curriculum. The school community includes 19 Christian students and four Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education teacher. This context offers an opportunity to explore how the spirituality of teachers influences the dynamics of learning and the experience of joy within the classroom. Understanding this relationship is important for strengthening the role of Christian Religious Education in nurturing students' spiritual awareness and character development. Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the relationship between the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers and the dynamics of joy reflected in classroom learning. By reflecting on the theological message of the Epistle to the Philippians and analyzing students' perceptions of their learning experience, the research seeks to provide insights into how teacher spirituality contributes to the creation of a positive and spiritually enriching educational environment. Ultimately, the study highlights the importance of integrating biblical spirituality with professional teaching practice in order to foster both academic learning and spiritual growth among students.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding the role of teacher spirituality in shaping the learning atmosphere. The research was conducted at SDN 1 Katanjung, where Christian Religious Education is implemented as part of the formal curriculum for Christian students. The participants in this study consisted of 19 Christian students and four Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education teacher, who were selected as key informants because of their direct involvement in the teaching and learning process. Data were collected through several qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Christian Religious Education teacher and several students to obtain detailed information about their experiences related to the teaching of biblical values and the presence of joy in classroom learning. Classroom observations were carried out to examine the interaction patterns between teachers and students, the teaching methods used, and the emotional and relational atmosphere that emerged during the learning process. In addition, documentation such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and school records related to Christian Religious Education activities were analyzed to support and contextualize the findings obtained from interviews and observations. The data analysis process followed qualitative thematic analysis procedures, which included data reduction, data categorization, and interpretation. The collected data were carefully reviewed and organized to identify relevant information related to teacher spirituality, expressions of joy in teaching, and students' responses to the learning process. The data were grouped into thematic categories that reflect key aspects of joyful spirituality in education, such as teacher attitudes, relational interactions, encouragement of students, and the integration of biblical teachings from the Epistle to the Philippians into classroom practice. Finally,

the themes were interpreted in relation to the broader theoretical framework of Christian education and teacher spirituality. Through this methodological approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive description of how the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to the dynamics of joy within the educational environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers significantly influences the learning atmosphere and the emotional dynamics experienced by students in the classroom at SDN 1 Katanjung. Through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and the analysis of learning documentation, several important themes emerged regarding how teacher spirituality contributes to the development of joy within the educational environment. These themes include the expression of spiritual authenticity in teaching, the creation of a joyful learning atmosphere, the relational dimension of Christian education, the integration of biblical teachings into daily learning, and the impact of teacher spirituality on students' attitudes and motivation. Together, these findings illustrate that teacher spirituality is not merely an internal personal quality but a dynamic force that shapes classroom interaction, student engagement, and the broader experience of learning. One of the most prominent findings relates to the expression of spiritual authenticity demonstrated by the Christian Religious Education teacher. Students consistently described the teacher as someone who teaches with sincerity, patience, and enthusiasm. This authenticity is visible in the way the teacher communicates biblical teachings, responds to students' questions, and demonstrates a caring attitude toward students' personal development. Interviews with students revealed that they perceive the teacher's spiritual life as genuine and consistent with what is taught during lessons. For example, students noted that the teacher often begins classes with short reflections or prayers that emphasize gratitude and encouragement. These practices help students recognize that learning about faith is not limited to theoretical discussion but is connected to real-life attitudes and experiences. Such authenticity is an important component of teacher spirituality because it establishes credibility and trust within the learning relationship. The findings also indicate that the presence of joyful spirituality strongly influences the classroom atmosphere. Classroom observations revealed that lessons in Christian Religious Education are characterized by an environment of openness, encouragement, and positive interaction. The teacher frequently uses storytelling, dialogue, and simple illustrations to help students understand biblical teachings. These methods not only make the learning process more engaging but also create opportunities for students to express their thoughts and experiences. The sense of joy experienced in the classroom is not merely emotional excitement but a deeper sense of encouragement and appreciation that emerges when students feel valued and respected. This dynamic closely reflects the theological message of joy emphasized in the Epistle to the Philippians, where joy is presented as a spiritual attitude rooted in faith and gratitude rather than external circumstances.

Another important theme that emerged from the data is the relational dimension of teacher spirituality. In Christian education, the relationship between teacher and student

plays a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of the learning process. Interviews with students indicated that they feel comfortable approaching the teacher with questions or personal concerns related to their faith and daily life. This sense of relational closeness creates an atmosphere of trust that allows meaningful dialogue to occur. The teacher does not simply deliver lessons but actively listens to students and encourages them to reflect on how biblical teachings relate to their own experiences. Such relational engagement reflects the pastoral dimension of Christian teaching, in which educators guide students with compassion and understanding. The development of this supportive relationship contributes to the overall experience of joy in learning because students feel that their voices and perspectives are valued. The integration of biblical teachings from the Epistle to the Philippians into everyday classroom discussions also emerged as a central aspect of the teacher's spiritual practice. The teacher frequently highlights passages that emphasize joy, gratitude, humility, and perseverance. Rather than focusing solely on memorization or doctrinal explanation, the teacher encourages students to interpret these teachings in relation to their daily interactions with friends, family, and the wider community. For example, lessons often include discussions about how expressions of gratitude, kindness, and cooperation reflect the values emphasized in Paul's letter. Through these discussions, students begin to understand that biblical teachings are relevant to their everyday lives. The teacher's emphasis on practical application helps students recognize that faith is not limited to religious activities but influences attitudes and behavior in all aspects of life.

Observational data further reveal that the teacher's joyful spirituality influences students' participation in classroom activities. Students were observed to be attentive and responsive during lessons, frequently raising questions and contributing ideas during discussions. This active participation suggests that students feel motivated and comfortable engaging with the material being presented. The teacher's encouragement and positive feedback play an important role in fostering this engagement. When students share their thoughts or attempt to interpret biblical passages, the teacher responds with affirmation and constructive guidance. Such interactions help build students' confidence and reinforce the idea that learning is a collaborative process. In this way, teacher spirituality contributes to the creation of a learning environment that supports both intellectual exploration and emotional well-being. Another important aspect highlighted by the findings is the influence of teacher spirituality on students' attitudes toward Christian Religious Education. Several students indicated during interviews that they look forward to attending CRE classes because they feel that the lessons are meaningful and enjoyable. They described the learning environment as welcoming and supportive, noting that the teacher often encourages them to express gratitude and appreciation for one another. This atmosphere of mutual respect aligns with the broader message of unity and encouragement found throughout the Epistle to the Philippians. In the epistle, Paul repeatedly calls believers to rejoice in the Lord and to support one another in faith. By emphasizing these themes during classroom discussions, the teacher helps students understand the relational nature of Christian joy and its connection to community life. The study also identified several challenges associated with maintaining joyful spirituality in the teaching context. One challenge relates to the limited resources and facilities available for Christian Religious Education activities. Although the teacher demonstrates

strong commitment and creativity in presenting lessons, the absence of varied learning materials sometimes limits the range of activities that can be implemented in the classroom. Nevertheless, the teacher attempts to overcome these limitations by using simple storytelling techniques, visual illustrations, and group discussions. These efforts demonstrate that joyful spirituality in teaching does not necessarily depend on sophisticated resources but can emerge through genuine enthusiasm and meaningful interaction. Another challenge involves the diversity of students' backgrounds and levels of familiarity with biblical teachings. Some students come from families that actively practice Christian traditions, while others have less exposure to regular religious instruction outside of school. This variation can influence how students interpret and respond to the lessons presented in Christian Religious Education. The teacher addresses this challenge by emphasizing inclusive dialogue and encouraging students to share their perspectives without fear of judgment. By creating an environment where all students feel accepted and supported, the teacher helps bridge differences in experience and promotes a shared sense of community within the classroom.

The findings also highlight the broader implications of teacher spirituality for the development of school culture. Although Christian Religious Education is taught specifically to Christian students, the values expressed through joyful teaching, such as gratitude, kindness, and cooperation, can influence interactions across the wider school environment. Students who learn to practice these values in the classroom often demonstrate them in their relationships with peers and teachers from different backgrounds. As a result, the impact of teacher spirituality extends beyond the boundaries of the CRE classroom and contributes to the development of a more positive and respectful school climate. The results of this study suggest that joyful spirituality enhances the effectiveness of teaching by strengthening both emotional and relational aspects of learning. When teachers approach their work with gratitude and enthusiasm, they model attitudes that encourage students to view learning as a meaningful and rewarding experience. This perspective aligns with contemporary educational research that emphasizes the importance of emotional engagement in promoting student motivation and academic success. In Christian education, the cultivation of joy also reflects a theological commitment to recognizing God's presence in everyday experiences. The teacher's ability to connect biblical teachings with practical expressions of gratitude and encouragement helps students see faith as an active and life-giving reality. The findings underscore the importance of viewing teacher spirituality as an integral component of professional identity in Christian education. Rather than separating spiritual life from professional responsibility, the teacher integrates both dimensions in daily practice. This integration is evident in the teacher's commitment to guiding students not only academically but also spiritually. By embodying the values expressed in the Epistle to the Philippians, particularly joy, humility, and encouragement, the teacher demonstrates how Christian spirituality can shape educational practice in meaningful ways. Such integration strengthens the authenticity of teaching and reinforces the role of educators as mentors who influence students' holistic development. The results and discussion of this study illustrate that the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers plays a vital role in shaping the dynamics of joy within the classroom. At SDN 1 Katanjung, the teacher's joyful spirituality contributes to the creation of a supportive

learning environment characterized by positive relationships, active participation, and meaningful engagement with biblical teachings. Through authentic expression of faith, relational interaction, and practical application of Scripture, the teacher helps students experience learning as both spiritually enriching and emotionally encouraging. These findings highlight the importance of nurturing teacher spirituality as a foundational element of effective Christian education, emphasizing that the joy described in the Epistle to the Philippians can become a transformative force within the educational process.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of joy within the learning environment. The findings indicate that the teacher's spiritual attitudes, authenticity, and commitment significantly influence the emotional and relational atmosphere experienced by students at SDN 1 Katanjung. Through practices such as prayer, reflective dialogue, and the consistent demonstration of positive attitudes, the teacher creates a classroom environment that encourages students to experience learning as both meaningful and uplifting. In this context, teacher spirituality becomes a vital element that supports not only academic learning but also the formation of students' moral and spiritual character. The study also highlights that the message of joy found in the Epistle to the Philippians provides a strong theological foundation for understanding the role of teachers in Christian education. The emphasis on rejoicing in the Lord, cultivating gratitude, and maintaining unity in the Christian community offers practical guidance for teachers in shaping a positive learning atmosphere. By integrating these biblical values into classroom teaching and interaction, Christian Religious Education teachers help students understand that faith is not merely a theoretical concept but a lived experience expressed through attitudes of gratitude, encouragement, and compassion toward others. The research findings reveal that joyful spirituality contributes to stronger teacher-student relationships and increased student engagement in the learning process. Students feel more comfortable participating in discussions, expressing their ideas, and reflecting on biblical teachings when they experience a supportive and encouraging environment. The teacher's example of joyful faith also inspires students to develop similar attitudes in their interactions with peers and in their daily lives. As a result, Christian Religious Education becomes a space not only for intellectual exploration of biblical teachings but also for the cultivation of positive emotional and spiritual experiences. The integration of teacher spirituality with pedagogical practice plays a fundamental role in fostering the dynamics of joy in Christian Religious Education. The example observed at SDN 1 Katanjung illustrates how teachers who embody the values of joy, gratitude, and encouragement reflected in the Epistle to the Philippians can contribute to students' holistic development. Therefore, strengthening teacher spirituality should be considered an essential aspect of professional development in Christian education, as it supports the creation of learning environments that nurture both academic understanding and spiritual growth.

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