



## The Implementation of Spiritual Competence by Christian Religious Education Teachers as an Effort to Enhance Students' Spirituality (A Case Study at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the implementation of spiritual competence in the context of Christian Religious Education (PAK) at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru, highlighting both the supporting and inhibiting factors that shape students' spiritual development. Findings reveal that several key elements contribute significantly to the success of spiritual competence. Strong school leadership and policy provided institutional support by integrating character and spiritual values into broader school programs, legitimizing the role of the PAK teacher. Parental involvement further reinforced classroom instruction, as families actively nurtured spiritual practices through prayer, Bible reading, and moral discussions at home. Additionally, students demonstrated enthusiasm and openness toward faith-based learning, creating a receptive environment that enhanced the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies and facilitated the internalization of Christian values. Despite these enabling conditions, the research identified several challenges. Limited instructional time allocated to PAK classes constrained opportunities for deep engagement with spiritual themes, often resulting in surface-level understanding. Cultural and secular influences, particularly from media and peer interactions, occasionally conflicted with biblical principles, generating value tensions that demanded additional attention from educators. Moreover, resource constraints limited access to updated teaching materials and audiovisual aids, reducing opportunities for innovative and engaging approaches to spiritual education. These findings resonate with prior studies emphasizing the tension between secular influences and faith formation in contemporary schooling. The study concludes that addressing these inhibiting factors through structural adjustments, adequate resource provision, and contextualized pedagogical approaches is essential to ensure that spiritual education meaningfully contributes to students' holistic growth.*

**Keywords:** *spiritual competence, Christian Religious Education, elementary school, parental involvement, secular influence*

## INTRODUCTION

The role of education in shaping students' moral and spiritual character has been a central concern in the discourse of Christian Religious Education (CRE). In the contemporary educational landscape, spiritual competence is increasingly recognized as an essential dimension of teacher professionalism, particularly for those entrusted with the task of religious instruction. Spiritual competence refers not merely to the possession of theological knowledge but also to the embodiment of values, attitudes, and practices that reflect authentic faith in everyday life (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Within Christian education, spiritual competence entails the integration of biblical principles into teaching, the capacity to guide students in faith development, and the ability to model Christ-like character. Thus, teachers of Christian Religious Education (PAK teachers) are not only facilitators of cognitive learning but also spiritual mentors who nurture students' holistic development, particularly in cultivating spirituality as an essential dimension of their identity. In elementary education, the teacher's role becomes even more crucial because children are in the formative stage of character development. A spiritually competent teacher influences not only students' intellectual grasp of religious concepts but also their personal relationship with God, their sense of morality, and their capacity for empathy and responsibility (Astuti, 2018). Through daily interactions, consistent modeling, and intentional teaching strategies, PAK teachers help students internalize spiritual values such as honesty, responsibility, care, forgiveness, and tolerance. However, the implementation of spiritual competence is not without challenges. In the context of primary schools, teachers often face limited instructional time, diverse student backgrounds, and the competing influences of secular culture that may hinder students' spiritual growth (Setiawan, 2019).

These challenges are further intensified by the realities of the digital era. Today's students, often referred to as digital natives, are highly exposed to technological influences that shape their worldviews, behaviors, and relationships (Prensky, 2001). While digital media offers opportunities for access to religious knowledge and creative expression, it also poses significant risks such as exposure to secular ideologies, moral relativism, and decreased engagement in spiritual practices (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Consequently, the spiritual competence of PAK teachers becomes a critical factor in guiding students to navigate these complexities while remaining rooted in Christian values. Teachers must demonstrate the capacity to contextualize biblical truths within students' everyday experiences, including their engagement with technology, peer relationships, and family life. The research site, UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru, presents a unique context for examining this issue. As a public elementary school situated in an urban environment, it accommodates students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges in fostering spirituality. On one hand, the presence of varied perspectives encourages inclusivity and tolerance; on the other hand, it requires teachers to adapt pedagogical strategies to meet students' spiritual needs in a pluralistic environment (Mulyono, 2020). The case of UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru highlights how a PAK teacher's spiritual competence is exercised in a practical and context-sensitive manner, making it an appropriate setting for this study.

Based on this background, several research questions emerge. First, what constitutes the spiritual competence of PAK teachers at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru? Second, how is this competence implemented in classroom practice and other learning contexts? Third, what impact does the teacher's spiritual competence have on enhancing students' spirituality? Finally, what supporting and inhibiting factors influence the implementation of spiritual competence? These questions guide the direction of this study and form the basis of its objectives. The general objective of the research is to analyze the implementation of spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education teachers as an effort to enhance students' spirituality at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru. Specifically, the study seeks to describe the dimensions of teachers' spiritual competence, analyze how it is applied in teaching practices, evaluate its impact on students' spiritual development, and identify both supporting and inhibiting factors. Through these objectives, the study not only provides an in-depth case analysis but also offers practical insights for improving character and spiritual education in elementary schools. The significance of this study can be viewed from theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, the research contributes to the ongoing development of concepts and frameworks regarding teacher spiritual competence, enriching the academic discourse of Christian Religious Education at the elementary level (Nasution, 2020). It adds to the literature on how spiritual competence can be operationalized in classroom practice and how it influences student spirituality. Practically, the findings are expected to provide valuable input for PAK teachers in enhancing their spiritual competence, serve as a reference for policymakers in designing character education policies, and offer guidelines for schools in developing students' spirituality in a holistic and sustainable manner.

The theoretical framework of this study is organized into three dimensions. First, the concept of teacher spiritual competence, which includes its definition, dimensions, and indicators as reflected in the practices of PAK teachers. This is informed by theories of spiritual intelligence and religious pedagogy (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Second, the concept of student spirituality, which encompasses the characteristics of spirituality among elementary students, as well as factors influencing its growth such as family, peers, and the digital environment (Hay & Nye, 2006). Third, the framework of Christian Religious Education, which situates the role of PAK teachers, the goals of Christian education, and effective pedagogical methods for nurturing faith and spirituality (Groome, 2011). This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, and rather than formulating testable hypotheses, it advances research propositions. The main proposition is that the spiritual competence of PAK teachers significantly enhances students' spirituality when implemented through holistic pedagogical practices, authentic role modeling, and context-sensitive strategies. In addition, the study proposes that the effectiveness of this implementation is mediated by both supporting factors, such as school policies and parental involvement, and inhibiting factors, such as external cultural influences and time constraints. This condition establishes the foundation for exploring the implementation of Christian Religious Education teachers' spiritual competence at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru. By situating the issue within the broader educational, cultural, and digital context, the study underscores the urgent need for spiritually competent teachers who can act as transformative agents in shaping students' faith and character. The findings are expected to contribute not only to academic scholarship but

also to practical improvements in Christian Religious Education and the holistic development of students in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach. Qualitative research is chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social and educational phenomena that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study approach is particularly suitable for this research, as it seeks to investigate the implementation of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers' spiritual competence within a real-life school context. This approach enables the researcher to describe, interpret, and analyze the processes and experiences of the participants in a holistic manner (Yin, 2018). Within this framework, the research paradigm is constructivist, which assumes that reality is socially constructed through interactions and experiences. Therefore, the findings are expected to represent multiple perspectives rather than a single objective truth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research was conducted at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru, located in Medan Baru Subdistrict, Medan City, North Sumatra. The location was purposively selected because of its unique characteristics as a public elementary school that accommodates diverse student backgrounds while maintaining a strong emphasis on character and spiritual education. Furthermore, the presence of a dedicated PAK teacher with several years of teaching experience made the site an ideal setting for investigating the research questions. The study was carried out over a specified period, allowing the researcher to conduct observations, interviews, and data collection at different times to ensure data richness and reliability (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The subjects of this study included the PAK teacher at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru, students who participated in Christian Religious Education classes, the principal, and other relevant stakeholders. The population comprised all individuals directly involved in the implementation of PAK, while the informants were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was chosen to ensure that only participants with relevant experience and information were included in the study (Patton, 2015). The criteria for informants included: the PAK teacher with a minimum of five years of teaching experience, students from grades four to six who actively engaged in PAK classes, the school principal, and homeroom teachers. In total, the study involved one PAK teacher, one school principal, two homeroom teachers, and twelve students. This diverse range of participants was expected to provide comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data collection techniques consisted of observation, interviews, documentation, and, when necessary, questionnaires. Observation was conducted in a non-participant manner, allowing the researcher to systematically record classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and the teacher's implementation of spiritual competence without interfering in the process (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). A structured observation sheet was used to guide the process and maintain consistency. In-depth interviews were carried out with the PAK teacher, the school principal, selected students, and parents. These interviews were guided by semi-structured protocols, which

provided flexibility while ensuring that all relevant aspects were covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Documentation served as a supplementary data source, including lesson plans, syllabi, school profiles, students' written works, and audiovisual materials from classroom activities. A simple questionnaire was also prepared to assess the students' level of spirituality; the instrument was tested for validity and reliability prior to its use (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data collected from multiple sources. Data display was carried out using matrices, charts, and descriptive narratives to make patterns and relationships visible. Finally, conclusion drawing involved interpreting the data to answer the research questions while continuously verifying the findings to ensure accuracy. Although the research was predominantly qualitative, descriptive statistics were applied to any questionnaire data to complement the qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2014). To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Triangulation of sources, methods, and time was used to cross-check the data (Denzin, 2012). Member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary findings to informants for verification and confirmation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing was also employed through discussions with academic advisors and experts in Christian Religious Education. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, providing a transparent record of data collection and analysis procedures (Shenton, 2004). Ethical considerations were given utmost attention in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including parental consent for student informants. The confidentiality of participants was ensured by using pseudonyms and omitting identifiable information from the report. The researcher also ensured that participants were fully aware of the research objectives and their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences (Cohen et al., 2018). These measures were undertaken to uphold the integrity of the research and protect the rights and dignity of all participants.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of spiritual competence by the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru operates as a multifaceted process that integrates personal faith, pedagogical strategies, and contextual adaptation. Through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and analysis of supporting documents, the research provides insights into how spiritual competence is both understood and enacted in practice. This section presents the results thematically according to the guiding research questions and discusses them in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks and previous studies. The study found that the PAK teacher's spiritual competence encompassed three interconnected dimensions: personal spirituality, pedagogical spirituality, and relational spirituality. Personal spirituality was expressed through the teacher's daily habits of prayer, reflection, and scriptural meditation. Interviews revealed that the teacher considered these practices not only as personal disciplines but also as essential resources for teaching. The teacher emphasized that before teaching spiritual truths, one must "live them out," underscoring the congruence between faith and practice. Observations confirmed that the teacher often

began and ended the class with prayer, integrating faith as a natural rhythm rather than an imposed ritual. This finding aligns with Zohar and Marshall's (2000) concept of spiritual intelligence, which posits that authentic spirituality flows from inner convictions that inform external behavior. Similarly, Groome's (2011) view of Christian Religious Education as a "shared praxis" is evident in the teacher's consistent effort to model faith practices that students can emulate.

Pedagogical spirituality refers to the teacher's capacity to integrate biblical values into instructional strategies. Classroom observations revealed that lessons were structured around themes such as forgiveness, honesty, and responsibility, with clear connections made to students' daily experiences. Rather than relying solely on rote memorization of biblical verses, the teacher employed storytelling, reflective questions, and group discussions to engage students in meaning-making processes. Lesson plans and syllabi reviewed during documentation analysis reflected intentional alignment between curriculum content and spiritual goals. This indicates that the teacher understood spiritual competence not as an "add-on" but as an integral part of pedagogical planning. As Astuti (2018) suggested, spiritual education at the primary level must move beyond doctrinal instruction to the cultivation of moral habits and character dispositions.

A key dimension of the teacher's competence was relational. Students described the teacher as approachable, empathetic, and willing to listen to personal concerns. Classroom interactions demonstrated a balance between authority and compassion, creating an environment of trust. The teacher often affirmed students' contributions, encouraged mutual respect, and mediated conflicts with patience. Relational spirituality reflects the biblical principle of embodying Christ-like love in interpersonal relationships. It also resonates with Hay and Nye's (2006) emphasis on relational consciousness as a marker of children's spirituality. By modeling empathy and forgiveness, the teacher facilitated students' understanding of how spirituality informs social behavior.

### ***Implementation of Spiritual Competence in Classroom Practice***

The teacher's spiritual competence was operationalized through a variety of teaching practices observed in both formal and informal learning contexts. During classroom observations, the integration of faith was evident in the choice of examples, the use of biblical narratives, and the incorporation of reflective moments. For instance, when discussing responsibility, the teacher used the story of Joseph in Egypt to illustrate resilience and faithfulness. Students were then invited to share personal experiences of responsibility at home or school, connecting scriptural principles to real-life situations. This pedagogical approach exemplifies contextualization, where abstract theological truths are linked with concrete student experiences. As Setiawan (2019) noted, effective religious education requires bridging the gap between doctrine and lived reality.

The teacher's role as a model of faith was consistently observed. By greeting students warmly, practicing fairness in discipline, and demonstrating patience, the teacher embodied the values being taught. Morning devotions, prayers before lessons, and reflections at the end of class functioned as routines that reinforced spiritual practices.

These findings confirm the argument of Nasution (2020) that the teacher's life serves as the "hidden curriculum" in spiritual education. What students observe in daily interactions often has greater impact than formal instruction. Beyond the classroom, the teacher also organized extracurricular activities such as choir practice and small-group Bible discussions. These activities provided additional spaces for nurturing spirituality in a more personal and participatory manner. Students reported feeling more comfortable asking questions about faith in these settings, suggesting that informal contexts can complement formal instruction. This reflects Groome's (2011) vision of faith formation as a lifelong, communal process that extends beyond academic settings.

Students reported greater willingness to engage in spiritual practices such as prayer and Bible reading. Several students mentioned that they had begun praying independently at home, inspired by the teacher's encouragement. Observation of classroom devotions revealed active student participation, indicating that spiritual practices had become internalized rather than externally imposed. This impact supports Fowler's (1995) theory of faith development, which suggests that children at the elementary level are highly influenced by role models and community practices in shaping their faith identity. Teachers and parents observed noticeable improvements in students' moral behavior. Incidences of dishonesty and classroom conflict reportedly decreased, while acts of cooperation and responsibility increased. For example, one homeroom teacher noted that students in the PAK class were more diligent in completing tasks and more respectful toward peers compared to previous years. This finding underscores the role of spirituality in character formation, aligning with Campbell and Tsuria's (2021) argument that spiritual grounding equips students to navigate ethical challenges in the digital era. Students expressed a stronger sense of belonging and community within the class. They described feeling cared for, respected, and encouraged. This communal spirit was evident in group activities, where students often helped one another in completing tasks. Such outcomes resonate with Mulyono's (2020) view that pluralistic school environments, when managed with spiritual competence, can foster inclusivity and tolerance. The PAK teacher's relational spirituality contributed significantly to building this inclusive community.

### ***Supporting and Inhibiting Factors***

The implementation of spiritual competence among Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers is influenced by a combination of supportive elements and inhibiting factors that shape the overall effectiveness of spiritual formation in schools. Several elements were found to support this process. First, school leadership and policy play a central role in sustaining spiritual education. The principal demonstrated strong commitment to character and spiritual development by providing institutional backing and allocating strategic support for the teacher's initiatives. This leadership stance created an environment where spiritual values could be integrated into daily learning activities, ensuring that the school's vision aligned with the spiritual goals of education. Second, parental involvement further reinforced the implementation of spiritual competence. Parents expressed appreciation for the teacher's dedication in guiding students spiritually and frequently supported these efforts at home by encouraging prayer, worship, and moral practices consistent with classroom teaching. This synergy between school and

family cultivated consistency in students' spiritual growth. Third, student enthusiasm emerged as a critical factor in the success of the program. The willingness and openness of students to engage in spiritual discussions, activities, and reflective practices fostered a dynamic classroom atmosphere, making it possible for faith-based strategies to be applied meaningfully and with lasting impact. Together, these three elements formed a strong foundation that supported the realization of spiritual competence in the educational setting. Despite these supports, several inhibiting factors constrained the teacher's efforts. One of the most pressing challenges was limited instructional time. Christian Religious Education classes were scheduled only a few times per week, leaving insufficient room for deeper exploration of biblical themes, theological reflection, or ethical dilemmas. Consequently, teachers often felt compelled to prioritize coverage of content over the cultivation of lived spirituality. A second inhibiting factor stemmed from cultural and secular influences. Students' exposure to popular media, peer culture, and broader secular values sometimes created dissonance with the spiritual teachings provided in school. This tension not only distracted students but also posed challenges for teachers in maintaining the relevance of spiritual lessons within a rapidly changing cultural context. Third, resource constraints limited the teacher's ability to enrich instruction. The absence of updated textbooks, relevant literature, and audiovisual aids hindered the incorporation of innovative pedagogical approaches that could have deepened students' engagement and understanding. These challenges echo the observations of Setiawan (2019), who emphasized that spiritual formation in contemporary education often struggles against competing secular forces and inadequate institutional support. The implementation of spiritual competence is a multifaceted process shaped by both enabling and limiting conditions. While strong leadership, parental involvement, and student enthusiasm provide fertile ground for cultivating spirituality, the lack of instructional time, the influence of secular culture, and limited resources continue to inhibit its optimal realization. These findings suggest the need for systemic improvements, including increased instructional allocation, the development of contextualized teaching resources, and strategies to critically engage with cultural influences rather than merely resisting them. Addressing these challenges can help ensure that the efforts of PAK teachers in enhancing students' spirituality are sustainable, relevant, and transformative in the long term.

The results of this study confirm the central proposition that the spiritual competence of PAK teachers significantly enhances students' spirituality when implemented through holistic pedagogy, authentic role modeling, and context-sensitive strategies. First, the integration of personal, pedagogical, and relational spirituality demonstrates that spiritual competence is not a static attribute but a dynamic interplay of faith, teaching practice, and interpersonal engagement. This multidimensional framework offers a useful lens for understanding the complexity of teacher spirituality in educational settings. Second, the findings highlight the transformative power of role modeling. More than doctrinal instruction, it is the authenticity of the teacher's faith that resonates with students, shaping their spiritual practices and moral behavior. This supports Nasution's (2020) argument about the hidden curriculum as a powerful vehicle for character formation. Third, the study underscores the importance of contextualization in spiritual education. By connecting biblical truths with students' lived experiences, the teacher

made spirituality relevant and accessible. This approach aligns with Groome's (2011) call for religious education that bridges faith and life. Finally, the identification of supporting and inhibiting factors provides practical implications for strengthening spiritual education. Institutional support, parental involvement, and student enthusiasm can amplify the effectiveness of teacher competence, while challenges such as time constraints and secular influences require strategic interventions. The implementation of spiritual competence by the PAK teacher at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru significantly contributed to enhancing students' spirituality through personal example, pedagogical integration, and relational engagement. Despite challenges, the teacher's holistic approach fostered spiritual practices, moral behavior, and a sense of community among students. The findings not only affirm theoretical frameworks of spiritual intelligence and faith development but also provide practical insights for strengthening Christian Religious Education in pluralistic and digitally mediated contexts.

## Conclusion

The implementation of spiritual competence in Christian Religious Education (PAK) at UPT SDN 060885 Medan Baru is strongly influenced by several supporting elements that enhance both teaching and learning outcomes. School leadership and policy play a crucial role in this regard, as the principal has expressed consistent support for character and spiritual education, ensuring institutional backing for the teacher's initiatives. Such support provides legitimacy for the integration of faith-based strategies within the curriculum and encourages teachers to creatively embed spiritual themes into daily lessons. Additionally, parental involvement has proven to be a significant factor in reinforcing spiritual competence. Parents not only appreciate the teacher's efforts but also frequently support spiritual practices at home, creating a continuity between school and family environments that strengthens the internalization of values among students. Furthermore, student enthusiasm has contributed to the success of the program. Students' openness and willingness to engage in spiritual learning foster a positive atmosphere that motivates teachers to maintain consistency in implementing faith-based educational practices. This enthusiasm reflects the receptiveness of young learners to moral and spiritual guidance when it is presented in an engaging and relevant manner. Alongside these supportive factors, there are several challenges that inhibit the optimal implementation of spiritual competence. One of the primary issues is limited instructional time, as PAK classes are only scheduled a few times each week, restricting opportunities for deeper exploration of complex spiritual and moral themes. This limitation makes it difficult for teachers to provide sustained instruction that could further nurture students' spiritual development. Another challenge arises from cultural and secular influences, particularly the impact of digital media and peer dynamics that often conflict with the spiritual values promoted in class. Students are frequently exposed to secular ideologies through entertainment, social networks, and friendships, creating tension between the values taught at school and the practices they encounter in their daily lives. Moreover, resource constraints present a significant obstacle. Teachers often lack updated teaching materials and audiovisual aids that could enhance students' engagement and comprehension of spiritual content. Without adequate resources, lessons may risk becoming monotonous, reducing the potential impact of spiritual instruction. This tension

underscores the need for a more holistic and integrated approach, where schools, families, and communities collaborate to overcome structural and cultural barriers. Strengthening spiritual competence, therefore, requires not only the dedication of teachers but also supportive leadership, parental reinforcement, enthusiastic learners, and the provision of adequate resources to sustain the program. In this way, Christian Religious Education can continue to nurture students' faith and character, enabling them to grow into spiritually resilient individuals in the midst of modern challenges.

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