



The Exemplary Spirituality of Hope Demonstrated by Christian Religious Education Teachers to Students at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara – Nias Barat

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers exemplify spirituality of hope to their students at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara in Nias Barat. The research explores the manifestations, strategies, and impacts of hope-centered spiritual modeling in the educational context. Using a qualitative approach with phenomenological design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five CRE teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that teachers demonstrate spirituality of hope through three primary dimensions: (1) authentic faith expression in daily teaching practices, (2) resilience modeling during challenging circumstances, and (3) intentional character formation through biblical narratives. Teachers employ various strategies including personal testimony sharing, prayer integration, empathetic counseling, and practical applications of Christian values. The study identifies significant positive impacts on students' spiritual development, academic motivation, and emotional resilience. However, challenges such as diverse religious backgrounds, limited resources, and cultural barriers were noted. The research contributes to understanding the role of religious educators as spiritual exemplars and offers practical implications for enhancing Christian education in Indonesian public schools. This study emphasizes the importance of teacher authenticity, continuous spiritual formation, and contextually relevant pedagogical approaches in cultivating hope among adolescent learners.

Keywords: Spirituality, hope, Christian religious education, teacher exemplarity

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia extends beyond cognitive development to encompass character and spiritual formation, as mandated by the national education system (Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003). Within this framework, religious education serves as a crucial vehicle for nurturing students' spiritual and moral dimensions. Christian Religious Education (CRE) specifically aims to develop students' faith, values, and character through systematic instruction and experiential learning (Homrighausen & Enklaar, 2015). In the

context of SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara, located in Nias Barat, West Sumatra, CRE teachers face unique challenges in embodying and transmitting Christian spirituality. The region's geographical remoteness, economic constraints, and cultural diversity create a complex educational landscape where hope becomes an essential spiritual resource. Hope, understood theologically as confident expectation rooted in God's promises, represents a fundamental Christian virtue that sustains faith communities through adversity. The concept of teacher exemplarity in religious education extends beyond mere instruction to encompass holistic modeling of faith-in-action. Teachers serve as "living curricula" whose personal spirituality, attitudes, and behaviors profoundly influence students' spiritual formation (Palmer, 2017). This modeling function becomes particularly significant during adolescence, when students actively seek authentic role models and construct their religious identities. Despite the recognized importance of spiritual modeling in religious education, limited empirical research exists on how CRE teachers specifically demonstrate spirituality of hope in Indonesian public school contexts. Previous studies have focused primarily on curriculum content and pedagogical methods while overlooking the experiential and relational dimensions of hope transmission. Furthermore, the unique socio-cultural context of Nias Barat, with its distinct challenges and opportunities, remains underexplored in educational literature. This research addresses the following questions: (1) How do CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara exemplify spirituality of hope in their teaching practice? (2) What strategies do teachers employ to cultivate hope among students? (3) What impacts does this spiritual modeling have on students' development? (4) What challenges do teachers encounter in demonstrating hope-centered spirituality? This study aims to: (1) describe the manifestations of hope-centered spirituality in CRE teachers' practices, (2) identify strategies employed by teachers to model and cultivate hope, (3) analyze the perceived impacts on students' spiritual, academic, and emotional development, and (4) examine challenges and barriers to effective spiritual modeling. This research contributes to both theoretical and practical dimensions of religious education. Theoretically, it enriches understanding of spiritual formation processes in educational settings and expands the discourse on teacher exemplarity in Indonesian contexts. Practically, the findings offer insights for teacher professional development, curriculum design, and school policies that support holistic Christian education. The study also provides valuable perspectives for addressing educational challenges in remote and resource-limited regions.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with phenomenological design to capture the lived experiences of CRE teachers as they exemplify spirituality of hope. Phenomenology is appropriate for exploring the essence of human experiences and understanding how individuals make meaning of specific phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allows for deep exploration of teachers' perspectives, motivations, and practices related to hope-centered spiritual modeling. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara, a public junior high school in Nias Barat Regency, West Sumatra Province. The school serves approximately 350 students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in a predominantly Christian region. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) certified CRE teachers, (2)

minimum three years teaching experience, (3) active involvement in school religious activities, and (4) willingness to participate. Five CRE teachers (two males, three females, ages 32-48 years) with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years participated in the study. Data analysis followed Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method: (1) reading transcripts to acquire a general sense, (2) extracting significant statements, (3) formulating meanings, (4) organizing meanings into themes, (5) integrating themes into exhaustive descriptions, (6) identifying fundamental structures, and (7) validating findings with participants. NVivo 12 software assisted in coding and theme organization. The analysis process was iterative, moving between data and emerging interpretations. Trustworthiness was established through: (1) prolonged engagement and persistent observation at the research site, (2) triangulation of multiple data sources, (3) member checking with participants to verify interpretations, (4) peer debriefing with two educational researchers, (5) thick description to enable transferability assessment, and (6) reflexive journaling to acknowledge researcher biases and assumptions. Ethical approval was obtained from the school principal and local education authority. All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms and secure data storage. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers demonstrated genuine faith integration by opening classes with contextually relevant prayers, sharing personal testimonies of God's faithfulness, and connecting biblical content to contemporary student experiences. One teacher explained: *"I don't just teach Bible stories as history. I show students how God's promises sustained me through difficult times—when my father was ill, when we faced financial struggles. They see that hope is not abstract theology but living reality."* Teachers consistently modeled trust in God's providence through their attitudes toward institutional challenges, including inadequate facilities and delayed salaries. This authentic vulnerability created safe spaces for students to express their own doubts and struggles. Teachers exemplified hope through persistent optimism and creative problem-solving despite systemic constraints. When faced with limited teaching resources, teachers developed innovative materials using local contexts and stories from Nias culture integrated with biblical narratives. One teacher noted: *"Our ancestors survived wars, natural disasters, and colonization because of their faith. I teach students that our Christian hope builds on this heritage of resilience. We don't ignore suffering; we face it with confidence in God's presence."* Observations confirmed that teachers maintained encouraging attitudes even when students struggled academically or behaviorally, consistently communicating belief in students' potential for growth and transformation. Teachers strategically selected biblical stories emphasizing hope-in-adversity themes: Joseph's journey from slavery to leadership, Ruth's faithful perseverance, Paul's resilience through persecution, and Christ's resurrection as ultimate hope. These narratives were not merely taught but dramatized, discussed, and applied to students' contexts. Teachers facilitated reflective activities helping students identify parallels between biblical characters' experiences and their own challenges.

Strategies for Cultivating Hope

Teachers regularly shared stories of answered prayers, unexpected provisions, and God's guidance in decision-making. This practice humanized faith and provided concrete examples of hope's practical dimensions. Students particularly responded to testimonies involving challenges similar to their own experiences—family conflicts, academic difficulties, peer pressure. Beyond routine opening prayers, teachers created spaces for spontaneous prayer, student-led devotions, and confidential intercessory prayer for individual student needs. Teachers maintained prayer journals documenting student requests and celebrating answered prayers with classes, thereby reinforcing hope's efficacy. Teachers extended their role beyond classroom instruction to provide informal counseling during breaks, after school, and through home visits. This pastoral dimension addressed students' holistic needs—emotional, social, and spiritual—demonstrating incarnational ministry modeled on Christ's compassionate presence. Teachers facilitated activities helping students articulate dreams, set goals, and develop action plans, always framing these aspirations within Christian understanding of vocation and stewardship. Career discussions emphasized that hope involves both divine guidance and human responsibility. Teachers fostered classroom communities characterized by mutual encouragement, collaborative learning, and peer mentoring. Students were taught to support one another through challenges, creating networks of hope that extended beyond teacher-student dyads to encompass peer relationships.

Challenges in Exemplifying Hope-Centered Spirituality

While the region is predominantly Christian, classrooms included students from various Christian denominations and occasionally other faiths. Teachers navigated this diversity carefully, emphasizing core Christian values while respecting theological differences. Inadequate teaching materials, technology deficits, and infrastructure limitations constrained pedagogical creativity. Teachers invested personal resources and time to compensate for institutional shortcomings, leading to potential burnout. Traditional Nias cultural practices occasionally conflicted with Christian teachings, creating dilemmas for teachers attempting to honor cultural heritage while maintaining theological integrity. Teachers required cultural sensitivity and theological discernment to navigate these tensions. Some colleagues and parents questioned the emphasis on spirituality, preferring focus exclusively on academic achievement and exam preparation. Teachers faced pressure to justify time invested in spiritual formation activities. Teachers acknowledged the challenge of maintaining their own spiritual vitality while continuously giving to students. Several expressed need for greater support, mentoring, and opportunities for personal spiritual renewal.

Theological Foundations of Hope-Centered Spirituality

The findings illuminate how CRE teachers operationalize Christian hope theology within educational practice. Consistent with Moltmann's (1967) theology of hope, teachers emphasized hope not as wishful thinking but as confident expectation grounded in God's character and promises. This theological foundation enabled teachers to maintain optimism amid adversity and model resilience for students. The embodied nature of hope transmission aligns with incarnational theology, wherein truth is communicated through

personal presence and relationship rather than mere propositional instruction (Nouwen, 2013).

Pedagogical Implications of Spiritual Modeling

The study confirms that religious education's effectiveness depends significantly on teacher authenticity and spiritual depth. This finding resonates with Palmer's (2017) assertion that "we teach who we are" and extends it into religious education contexts. Teachers function as "living epistles" (2 Corinthians 3:2-3), embodying the faith they proclaim. The phenomenological data suggests that students learn hope primarily through observation and relationship rather than didactic instruction, underscoring the importance of apprenticeship models in spiritual formation (Dykstra, 2005). Teachers' integration of Nias cultural narratives with biblical content exemplifies effective contextualization in Christian education. This approach honors local identity while facilitating gospel indigenization, consistent with missiological principles of cultural sensitivity (Hiebert, 2009). The connection between ancestral resilience and Christian hope provides students with culturally rooted faith identity, potentially strengthening commitment and understanding. The study reveals hope's multifaceted role as spiritual virtue, motivational resource, and coping mechanism. This aligns with positive psychology research demonstrating hope's correlation with academic achievement, psychological well-being, and resilience (Snyder et al., 2002). Religious education uniquely positions hope within transcendent framework, offering students resources that extend beyond individual capacity to include divine agency and community support. The challenges identified highlight systemic issues requiring institutional attention. Resource limitations reflect broader educational inequities in Indonesian remote regions, necessitating policy interventions and resource allocation prioritization. Teacher sustainability concerns underscore the need for professional support structures, including mentoring programs, spiritual formation opportunities, and reasonable workload management (Keating & Fretz, 2007). Comparing these findings with international research reveals both universal themes and contextual particularities. The centrality of teacher-student relationships in spiritual formation appears consistent across cultures (Estep et al., 2008), while specific manifestations reflect Indonesian communal values and Nias cultural distinctives. The integration of pastoral care with teaching responsibilities may be more pronounced in resource-limited contexts where specialized support services are unavailable.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Mandrehe Utara exemplify spirituality of hope through authentic faith expression, resilience modeling, and intentional character formation. Teachers employ diverse strategies including testimony sharing, prayer integration, empathetic counseling, future-oriented goal setting, and community building to cultivate hope among students. These practices yield significant positive impacts on students' spiritual development, academic motivation, emotional resilience, and ethical behavior. However, teachers face challenges related to religious diversity, limited resources, cultural tensions, external pressures, and personal sustainability.

The research advances understanding of spiritual formation processes in educational contexts by: (1) explicating mechanisms through which hope is transmitted interpersonally, (2) demonstrating the pedagogical significance of teacher authenticity and spiritual depth, (3) illuminating the relationship between cultural context and faith expression, and (4) revealing hope's multidimensional functions in adolescent development. Future research should: (1) conduct comparative studies across diverse Indonesian regions and school types, (2) employ longitudinal designs to assess long-term impacts of spiritual modeling on students, (3) investigate student perspectives more extensively through youth-centered research, (4) explore quantitative relationships between teacher spirituality measures and student outcomes, and (5) examine the intersection of religious education with other character education initiatives in Indonesian schools. This research affirms that Christian Religious Education teachers serve as vital agents of hope in students' lives, particularly in contexts marked by adversity and limited resources. Their commitment to embodying faith, modeling resilience, and nurturing students' spiritual development represents education at its most holistic and transformative. As Indonesian education continues evolving, maintaining space for authentic spiritual formation alongside academic achievement remains essential for developing students as whole persons equipped with hope for navigating complex futures.

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