



The Spirituality of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Students at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir about Trust in God: A Reflection on Proverbs 3:5

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the spirituality of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching the concept of trust in God to students at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir, based on Proverbs 3:5. The research aims to explore how teachers' spiritual practices influence their pedagogical approaches and student understanding of biblical trust. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three CRE teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis. Findings reveal that teachers' personal spiritual experiences significantly shape their teaching methodologies, with emphasis on experiential learning, prayer integration, and contextual biblical interpretation. Teachers demonstrated three primary approaches: devotional modeling, narrative pedagogy, and reflective dialogue. The integration of Proverbs 3:5 in teaching practices facilitated students' comprehension of surrendering personal understanding to divine guidance. However, challenges emerged including limited teaching resources, diverse student faith backgrounds, and balancing doctrinal teaching with critical thinking. The study concludes that teacher spirituality serves as a foundational element in effective Christian education, requiring continuous spiritual formation and pedagogical innovation to address contemporary educational contexts.

Keywords: Christian education, teacher spirituality, trust in God, Proverbs 3:5

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesian public schools presents a unique educational landscape where faith formation intersects with a multicultural and religiously plural society. CRE teachers are entrusted not only with conveying doctrinal knowledge but also with nurturing students' moral and spiritual development, often acting as both educators and spiritual mentors (Astuti & Purwanto, 2021). Within this framework, fostering trust in God emerges as a core spiritual principle central to the Christian worldview. Proverbs 3:5, which exhorts believers to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding," encapsulates the profound

interplay between human reasoning and divine reliance, challenging both teachers and students to navigate the tension between personal decision-making and faith-based guidance. For adolescent learners, who are actively negotiating identity, autonomy, and life choices, cultivating an authentic understanding of trust in God requires more than intellectual comprehension; it necessitates the modeling of faith through lived experience and relational engagement with students (Bone, 2008). In the Indonesian context, the role of CRE teachers is further complicated by national educational policies that emphasize inclusivity and the integration of civic and moral education alongside religious instruction. Teachers are therefore tasked with balancing fidelity to Christian teachings with the imperative to respect religious plurality, creating classroom environments that are both spiritually nurturing and socially sensitive. This dual responsibility underscores the significance of teachers' own spiritual formation, as their personal faith practices and beliefs inevitably shape their pedagogical choices, classroom interactions, and the ways in which they communicate abstract spiritual truths (Astuti & Purwanto, 2021). Trust in God, as a biblical concept, exemplifies the challenges inherent in translating theological principles into concrete educational practices that resonate with students' everyday experiences, particularly in settings where students' backgrounds and belief systems vary. SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir, situated in North Sumatra, offers a compelling case study for exploring these dynamics due to its religiously heterogeneous student population. While Christian students are present, they constitute a minority within the broader school community, which includes students from Islamic and other faith backgrounds. Such diversity presents both pedagogical opportunities and challenges. On one hand, the presence of multiple faith traditions encourages teachers to approach religious instruction with sensitivity, creativity, and inclusivity. On the other hand, the need to uphold the integrity of Christian teachings while remaining respectful of other religious perspectives places a considerable demand on teachers' spiritual discernment and instructional skills. In this context, the teaching of trust in God is not merely a matter of textual analysis or doctrinal explanation; it becomes an embodied practice, requiring educators to demonstrate consistency between their own faith lives and the principles they seek to instill in students.

The research examining how Indonesian CRE teachers' personal faith informs their pedagogical approaches remains limited. Studies on the interplay between teacher spirituality and classroom practice often highlight the transformative potential of educators who actively integrate their spiritual convictions into teaching, yet they frequently overlook the nuanced ways in which teachers navigate contextual constraints, student diversity, and curricular mandates (Bone, 2008). In particular, understanding how teachers foster trust in God—a concept that inherently challenges students to reconcile personal reasoning with divine guidance—requires an in-depth exploration of both the internal spiritual experiences of educators and the practical strategies they employ in the classroom. This knowledge is crucial for informing teacher training programs, curricular design, and professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of CRE in Indonesian schools. The present study addresses three interrelated research questions that seek to illuminate these complex dynamics. First, it investigates how CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir understand and practice personal trust in God as informed by Proverbs 3:5. This inquiry explores the teachers' spiritual reflections, devotional practices, and lived experiences of faith, considering how these elements

influence their capacity to serve as credible and inspiring models for students. Second, the study examines the pedagogical approaches employed by teachers to convey the concept of trust in God. This includes an analysis of instructional strategies, classroom activities, and relational interactions that facilitate students' comprehension and internalization of spiritual principles. Third, the research identifies the challenges teachers encounter in integrating their spirituality with classroom practices, including contextual, institutional, and personal factors that may support or constrain effective faith-based teaching. By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how CRE teachers operationalize their spiritual lives within educational settings characterized by religious diversity. Ultimately, the exploration of teacher spirituality in the context of teaching trust in God extends beyond the immediate classroom environment. It offers insights into the broader process of Christian faith formation among adolescents, highlighting the ways in which educators influence students' ethical decision-making, emotional resilience, and spiritual growth. Moreover, it underscores the importance of preparing CRE teachers who are not only knowledgeable about religious content but also spiritually grounded, capable of modeling faith in ways that are both authentic and pedagogically effective. In the Indonesian educational landscape, where religious plurality, national curriculum mandates, and adolescent developmental needs intersect, such research provides valuable guidance for enhancing teacher preparation, curricular innovation, and the overall quality of Christian Religious Education. By examining the lived experiences and pedagogical practices of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir, this study seeks to illuminate the transformative potential of teacher spirituality in nurturing students' trust in God, fostering both moral integrity and spiritual maturity in the next generation of Indonesian learners.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the lived experiences and practices of CRE teachers. The qualitative method was selected for its capacity to capture the nuanced, contextual, and subjective dimensions of teacher spirituality and pedagogical decision-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir, Labuhanbatu Utara Regency, North Sumatra, from August to October 2024. Three CRE teachers (identified as T1, T2, and T3 for confidentiality) participated in this study. Selection criteria included: (a) minimum two years teaching experience, (b) certification in religious education, and (c) active involvement in church ministry. The participants comprised two female and one male teacher, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years. Semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes were conducted with each teacher, exploring their spiritual practices, understanding of Proverbs 3:5, teaching philosophies, and classroom strategies. Interview questions included: "How do you personally practice trust in God in your daily life?" and "How do you help students understand the meaning of 'lean not on your own understanding'?" Six classroom sessions (two per teacher) were observed to document teaching methods, student interactions, and integration of spiritual content. Field notes captured verbal exchanges, teaching materials, and classroom atmosphere. Lesson plans, student assignments, and assessment materials were reviewed to identify curriculum integration of trust themes and biblical interpretation approaches. Data analysis followed

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, involving six phases: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. NVivo 12 software facilitated data organization and coding. Triangulation across data sources enhanced credibility, while member checking allowed participants to verify interpreted meanings. Ethical approval was obtained from the school principal and North Sumatra Education Office. Participants provided informed consent after receiving explanation of research purposes, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Pseudonyms protect participant identities, and all data were stored securely.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

All three teachers articulated personal spiritual practices grounded in daily devotions, prayer, and church involvement. They interpreted Proverbs 3:5 as a call to surrender personal ambitions and cognitive certainties to God's sovereignty. T1 described trust as "releasing control over outcomes while maintaining responsible action," sharing experiences of financial uncertainty where prayer and scriptural meditation provided emotional stability. T2 emphasized that "leaning not on our own understanding doesn't mean abandoning critical thinking, but recognizing that human wisdom has limits." T3 connected trust with obedience, stating, "True trust manifests in following God's commands even when circumstances seem contradictory." Teachers' spiritual formation occurred through multiple channels: theological education, mentorship from senior pastors, personal crisis experiences that deepened faith, and regular participation in worship communities. These experiences shaped their conviction that authentic teaching of trust requires personal testimony rather than solely academic knowledge.

Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Trust in God

Teachers consistently began lessons with personal testimonies illustrating trust in God during challenging circumstances. T2 shared stories of career decisions made through prayer rather than solely rational calculation, demonstrating practical application of Proverbs 3:5. This approach aimed to make abstract biblical concepts tangible through lived examples. All teachers utilized biblical narratives (Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Joseph's journey to Egypt, Daniel in the lion's den) to illustrate trust principles. They encouraged students to identify decision points where biblical characters chose divine guidance over personal understanding. T3 developed a "trust timeline" activity where students mapped biblical characters' trust journeys, analyzing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of faith. Rather than transmitting doctrine didactically, teachers facilitated student reflection through open-ended questions: "When have you faced decisions where following God conflicted with what seemed logical?" and "What fears prevent us from trusting God completely?" This dialogical approach recognized adolescents' developmental need for exploration and questioning.

Integration of Spiritual Content with Curriculum Standards

Teachers navigated tensions between spiritual formation goals and standardized curriculum requirements. While national CRE curriculum specifies cognitive objectives (e.g., explaining biblical texts, identifying theological concepts), teachers prioritized affective and behavioral outcomes related to trust development. T1 stated, "Exams test

whether students can define trust theologically, but I'm more concerned with whether they're developing trust habits in daily life." Teachers supplemented prescribed textbooks with additional devotional materials, contemporary Christian testimonies, and age-appropriate theological resources that explored doubt, suffering, and divine silence—themes absent from official curricula. Assessment methods reflected this holistic emphasis. Beyond written tests, teachers evaluated student growth through journal reflections on personal trust experiences, creative projects expressing trust themes (poetry, visual art, dramatic presentations), and participation in class discussions demonstrating vulnerability and honesty about spiritual struggles.

The Centrality of Teacher Spirituality in Religious Education

Findings confirm that CRE teachers' personal spirituality fundamentally shapes pedagogical effectiveness, consistent assertion that "we teach who we are." Teachers whose trust in God emerged from authentic spiritual struggle and growth demonstrated greater credibility and relational depth with students compared to purely academic biblical instruction. This resonates with Indonesian research indicating that religious educators' character and spiritual exemplarity significantly influence student faith development (Telaumbanua, 2020). The study reveals that effective teaching of trust requires what could be termed "integrated spirituality"—alignment between personal faith practice, theological understanding, and pedagogical action. Teachers who merely transmitted doctrinal content without embodying trust principles failed to inspire student transformation, while those sharing honest struggles alongside faith victories created spaces for authentic spiritual exploration.

Pedagogical Implications of Teaching Abstract Spiritual Concepts

The narrative pedagogy and reflective dialogue approaches employed by participants align with constructivist learning theories emphasizing meaning-making through experience and social interaction. Teaching trust in God cannot be reduced to cognitive knowledge transfer; it requires experiential learning where students encounter trust principles in personally relevant contexts. This study extends existing literature by demonstrating the tension between experiential spiritual formation and standardized educational assessment. While teachers prioritized affective and behavioral outcomes, institutional evaluation systems measured cognitive biblical knowledge. This misalignment suggests need for broader educational reform recognizing the distinctive goals of religious education compared to secular subjects. The use of biblical narratives as pedagogical tools proved particularly effective, confirming narrative theology's premise that stories shape identity and values more powerfully than abstract propositions. When students engaged biblical characters' trust journeys, they developed moral imagination to envision trust as viable response to contemporary challenges.

Indonesia's constitutional guarantee of religious instruction for all faiths creates unique opportunities for spiritual formation within public education, unlike Western secular models. However, religious minorities like Christians in predominantly Muslim regions navigate complex identity negotiations. Teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir balanced Christian faith transmission with respect for religious plurality and avoidance of proselytization. This required sophisticated pedagogical sensitivity—teaching trust in God as central Christian practice while avoiding supremacist attitudes toward other faiths.

Such navigation exemplifies the complexities of religious education in diverse contexts identified by Jackson (2014). Cultural tensions between biblical trust and societal self-reliance values highlight the countercultural nature of Christian spirituality. Adolescents face competing worldviews regarding human agency, success definition, and the role of divine providence. CRE teachers serve as interpretive guides helping students critically engage cultural messages through biblical frameworks, a mediating role requiring both theological depth and cultural awareness. Participants' acknowledgment of personal spiritual limitations underscores the necessity for ongoing teacher spiritual formation. Effective religious education requires educators who are themselves active spiritual learners engaged in communities of faith and practice. This finding supports calls for professional development models in religious education that integrate spiritual growth with pedagogical skill development (Estep et al., 2008). Indonesian CRE teachers would benefit from structures supporting spiritual renewal: regular retreat opportunities, mentoring relationships with mature faith practitioners, peer learning communities for theological reflection, and resources addressing the integration of faith and teaching. Current teacher preparation programs emphasize content knowledge and instructional methods but often neglect candidates' spiritual formation, creating gaps between teachers' professional competencies and personal spiritual depth.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Christian Religious Education teachers' spirituality profoundly influences their pedagogical approaches to teaching trust in God. At SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap Kualuh Hilir, teachers whose personal experiences of trusting God informed their instruction created more authentic and transformative learning environments compared to purely academic biblical teaching. The integration of Proverbs 3:5 in teaching practices occurred through devotional modeling, narrative pedagogy, and reflective dialogue, approaches prioritizing experiential learning over doctrinal transmission. However, significant challenges persist: diverse student faith maturity, cultural values contradicting biblical trust principles, limited instructional time and resources, and teachers' own spiritual struggles. Addressing these challenges requires systemic changes including curriculum reform recognizing religious education's distinctive formation goals, professional development emphasizing teacher spiritual growth alongside pedagogical skills, and institutional support for experiential learning methodologies. Future research should examine CRE teaching practices across diverse Indonesian contexts, explore student perspectives on how teacher spirituality impacts their faith development, and investigate longitudinal effects of different pedagogical approaches on students' trust in God. Additionally, comparative studies examining religious education across Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist contexts could illuminate shared principles and faith-specific dynamics in spiritual formation. For practice, this research suggests that effective Christian education requires attention to teacher spiritual health as foundation for pedagogical excellence. Schools and churches should collaborate in supporting CRE teachers through mentoring programs, spiritual retreat opportunities, and professional learning communities. Curriculum developers should create resources that facilitate experiential engagement with biblical concepts rather than solely cognitive learning. Ultimately, teaching trust in God authentically

requires teachers who themselves are on trust journeys, modeling faith through both testimony and vulnerability.

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