



Implementation of the Spiritual Ability of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching the Meaning of Sacrifice to Students at SMP Negeri 2 Lahewa Timur

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of spiritual ability among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching the meaning of sacrifice to junior high school students at SMP Negeri 2 Lahewa Timur. The research investigates how teachers integrate their spiritual competencies into pedagogical practices to convey the profound theological and practical dimensions of sacrifice. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three CRE teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that teachers implement their spiritual abilities through three primary strategies: modeling sacrificial living, utilizing contextual biblical narratives, and facilitating experiential learning activities. Teachers demonstrated strong spiritual competencies characterized by authentic faith expression, consistent devotional practices, and the ability to connect theological concepts with students' daily experiences. However, challenges emerged including limited instructional resources, varying student receptivity, and the complexity of translating abstract spiritual concepts into age-appropriate lessons. The study concludes that the effective implementation of spiritual ability significantly enhances students' comprehension of sacrifice as both a theological principle and practical lifestyle. Recommendations include developing structured spiritual mentoring programs for CRE teachers, creating contextualized teaching materials, and establishing collaborative learning communities to support ongoing spiritual and professional development.

Keywords: *Spiritual Ability, Christian Religious Education, Sacrifice, Pedagogical Practice*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a pivotal role in shaping students' spiritual and moral development within the Indonesian educational system. Beyond merely transmitting theological knowledge, CRE aims to cultivate virtuous character and instill biblical values that guide students' daily conduct. Among the essential Christian values taught in schools, the concept of sacrifice holds particular significance, representing the

core of Christian faith exemplified through Christ's redemptive work and calling believers to selfless service toward others. The teaching of sacrifice presents unique pedagogical challenges, as it encompasses both abstract theological dimensions and concrete practical applications. Teachers must bridge the gap between ancient biblical narratives and contemporary student experiences, making the concept relevant and transformative. This task requires more than academic expertise; it demands spiritual maturity and authentic faith expression from educators who serve as living epistles before their students. In the Indonesian context, particularly in regions with strong Christian traditions such as North Sumatra, the quality of religious education significantly influences community values and youth character development. SMP Negeri 2 Lahewa Timur, located in the Nias Islands, serves a predominantly Christian student population where religious education forms an integral component of the curriculum. However, limited research has explored how CRE teachers in such contexts actually implement their spiritual abilities when teaching complex concepts like sacrifice. The spiritual ability of teachers constitutes a critical competency that extends beyond pedagogical skills and subject mastery. It encompasses the teacher's personal relationship with God, spiritual disciplines, faith maturity, and capacity to model Christian virtues authentically. When teaching about sacrifice, teachers' spiritual depth becomes particularly evident as they must embody the very principles they teach, demonstrating sacrificial love through their commitment, patience, and selfless service to students. Several factors influence the effective implementation of spiritual ability in teaching sacrifice. These include the teacher's personal spiritual formation, pedagogical creativity, understanding of developmental psychology, cultural sensitivity, and institutional support. Furthermore, the contemporary educational environment presents competing values and distractions that challenge the transmission of spiritual concepts, requiring teachers to employ innovative and engaging approaches. Despite the recognized importance of spiritual competency in religious education, empirical studies examining its practical implementation remain scarce, particularly in Indonesian junior high school contexts. Most existing research focuses on pedagogical methods or curriculum development, with limited attention to the role of teachers' spiritual ability in shaping learning outcomes. This gap necessitates investigation into how CRE teachers translate their spiritual competencies into effective teaching practices. This study addresses this research gap by investigating the implementation of spiritual ability among CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Lahewa Timur specifically in teaching the meaning of sacrifice. The research seeks to understand the strategies teachers employ, the challenges they encounter, and the factors contributing to successful implementation. Understanding these dynamics provides valuable insights for improving CRE quality and developing more effective teacher training programs. The significance of this research extends beyond academic interest. Its findings contribute to the enhancement of religious education quality, inform teacher professional development initiatives, and provide practical guidance for educators seeking to strengthen their spiritual competencies. Moreover, it offers evidence-based recommendations for educational institutions committed to holistic character formation that integrates spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the implementation of spiritual ability among Christian Religious Education teachers. Qualitative methodology was selected because it allows for in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and practices in their natural educational context. The descriptive nature enables comprehensive documentation and interpretation of the phenomenon without manipulation of variables. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Lahewa Timur, a public junior high school located in Lahewa District, East Nias Regency, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The school serves approximately 240 students across grades 7-9, with predominantly Christian students from Nias ethnic backgrounds. The setting was selected purposively due to its representation of schools in Christian-majority regions where religious education forms a significant component of the curriculum. Participants comprised three Christian Religious Education teachers employed at the school, all of whom held undergraduate degrees in Christian Religious Education or Theology and possessed teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years. The participant selection followed purposive sampling criteria, ensuring that selected teachers actively taught CRE, had demonstrated commitment to spiritual formation, and were willing to participate in the study. All participants provided informed consent after receiving detailed information about the research objectives and procedures. Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of findings. Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents) and multiple participants, allowing cross-verification of information. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation and feedback. Prolonged engagement at the research site enabled the researcher to develop rapport and gain deeper understanding of the context. Reflexivity was practiced through maintaining a research journal documenting personal biases and assumptions that might influence interpretation. The research adhered to ethical principles governing qualitative research. Official permission was obtained from the school administration and local education authorities. Participants received comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from reports. Data were stored securely and accessible only to the research team.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All three participating teachers emphasized that their personal embodiment of sacrificial principles constituted the most powerful teaching method. Teachers recognized that students observe their behaviors, attitudes, and commitments beyond formal classroom instruction. Consequently, they intentionally demonstrated sacrificial love through their daily interactions and professional conduct. Teacher A, with 15 years of teaching experience, articulated this perspective: *"Students watch everything we do. I cannot merely talk about sacrifice if my life doesn't reflect it. When I arrive early, stay late to help struggling students, or use my own resources for class activities, they see sacrifice in action. This witness speaks louder than any lecture."* Classroom observations confirmed this approach. Teachers demonstrated patience when students struggled with concepts,

invested time in individual mentoring beyond class hours, and expressed genuine care for students' holistic wellbeing. One observed instance involved Teacher B spending the lunch break counseling a student facing family difficulties, illustrating practical sacrifice of personal time and comfort for student welfare. Teachers also shared personal testimonies of how their faith journey included learning sacrifice through challenges and service. Teacher C recounted: *"I share with students how God taught me sacrifice through difficult seasons—losing a family member, financial struggles. These testimonies help them see sacrifice isn't abstract theology but lived reality that shapes us."* The modeling approach extended to demonstrating consistent spiritual disciplines. Teachers described maintaining regular prayer, scripture study, and worship participation, occasionally inviting students into these practices. Teacher A explained: *"Sometimes I pray with students before exams or when they face problems. This shows that sacrifice includes interceding for others, giving our time to stand with them before God."* Document analysis of lesson plans revealed intentional inclusion of teacher testimonies and contemporary examples alongside biblical content, indicating systematic integration of modeling as pedagogy. Teachers' reflections on their lessons frequently included self-assessment of how well they embodied the principles taught.

Employing Contextual Biblical Narratives and Contemporary Applications

Teachers utilized biblical narratives as primary content for teaching sacrifice, particularly focusing on Christ's crucifixion, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, and the early church's communal sharing. However, teachers emphasized the necessity of contextualizing these ancient texts for contemporary junior high school students in Nias culture. Teacher B explained the contextual approach: *"We cannot simply tell the story of Jesus' sacrifice and assume students grasp its meaning for their lives. I connect it to their context—parents working hard to pay school fees, fishermen risking dangers to provide food, or someone sharing their lunch with a friend who forgot theirs. These are sacrifices they understand."* Observations revealed teachers employing various strategies to bridge biblical and contemporary contexts. In one lesson about Christ's sacrifice, Teacher A used a local folk story about a Nias hero who sacrificed himself to save his village, then drew parallels to Christ's redemptive work. This cultural bridge helped students recognize sacrifice as a transcendent value present in their heritage and Christian faith. Teachers also addressed modern challenges to sacrificial living, including materialism, individualism, and digital distractions. Teacher C discussed: *"Students live in a world that says 'prioritize yourself first.' Social media promotes self-promotion, not self-giving. I must help them see that Jesus' way—losing your life to find it—offers deeper fulfillment than what popular culture promises."* The use of discussion questions helped students apply biblical principles to their situations. Lesson plans included questions like: "What small sacrifices can you make for your family this week?" or "How might sacrificing study time to help a struggling classmate demonstrate Christ's love?" These applications made sacrifice tangible and achievable rather than overwhelming. Teachers reported that connecting sacrifice to students' developmental stages proved crucial. For seventh graders, sacrifice might mean sharing materials or including excluded classmates. For ninth graders, it could involve sacrificing leisure time for academic excellence that honors God, or standing up for marginalized peers despite social risks.

Facilitating Experiential and Reflective Learning Activities

Beyond cognitive instruction, teachers created experiential opportunities for students to practice sacrifice in safe, structured contexts. These activities aimed to transform understanding into embodied practice, recognizing that sacrifice is learned through doing, not merely knowing. Teacher A described a service-learning project: *"Each semester, students identify a need in our school or community and develop a service response. Last term, they organized a tutoring program for elementary students. They sacrificed recreation time, and through reflection, they discovered joy in serving others—a key lesson about sacrifice."* Observations documented various experiential activities. In one class, students participated in a "fast from technology" exercise, abstaining from mobile devices for 24 hours and using that time for prayer, family interaction, or helping neighbors. The subsequent reflection session revealed students' insights about how sacrificing entertainment created space for meaningful relationships and spiritual practices. Teachers facilitated regular reflection through journaling, group discussions, and creative expressions. Teacher C explained: *"After each lesson on sacrifice, I ask students to journal about where they saw sacrifice that week—in their families, community, or their own actions. This reflection helps them recognize sacrifice happening around them and within them."* Role-playing activities helped students explore sacrifice in complex situations. In one observed lesson, students enacted scenarios involving peer pressure, family conflicts, and ethical dilemmas, then discussed what sacrificial responses looked like in each context. Teacher B noted: *"Role-playing helps them practice sacrifice in low-stakes environments before facing real situations. It builds their moral imagination and courage."* The experiential approach included corporate worship and prayer experiences emphasizing thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice and commitment to sacrificial living. Teachers described organizing retreats where students engaged in extended worship, meditation on scripture, and covenant-making regarding specific sacrifices they would practice. Assessment methods aligned with the experiential emphasis. Rather than only testing cognitive knowledge through written exams, teachers evaluated students' participation in service activities, quality of reflections, and observable changes in behavior. Teacher A explained: *"I assess whether they're actually becoming more sacrificial, not just whether they can define sacrifice correctly."* The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted nature of implementing spiritual ability in Christian Religious Education, particularly when teaching the profound concept of sacrifice. The three major themes identified—modeling, contextual application, and experiential learning—represent interconnected dimensions of spiritually-informed pedagogy that transcends conventional instructional approaches. The central importance participants placed on modeling sacrificial living aligns with social learning theory, which posits that people learn behaviors through observing and imitating others, especially those they respect. In religious education contexts, teachers function not merely as information transmitters but as living curricula whose lives either validate or contradict their verbal teachings. This finding resonates with previous research indicating that teacher authenticity significantly influences students' receptivity to spiritual and moral instruction. The modeling approach observed in this study reflects an incarnational pedagogy where abstract theological concepts become concrete through embodied witness. Just as Christian theology affirms that God's love became tangible through Christ's incarnation, teachers make sacrifice

comprehensible by incarnating it in their relationships and practices. This pedagogical incarnation requires more than sporadic acts of generosity; it demands consistent, authentic demonstration of sacrificial attitudes across various contexts. However, the burden of constant modeling presents significant challenges for teachers' wellbeing. The expectation to perpetually exemplify spiritual ideals can create pressure and contribute to burnout, particularly when teachers face personal struggles or spiritual dryness. This reality underscores the necessity for institutional support systems that provide spiritual renewal opportunities, mentoring relationships, and realistic expectations that acknowledge teachers' humanity while upholding high standards. The teachers' emphasis on contextualizing biblical narratives reflects culturally responsive teaching that honors students' contexts while maintaining theological integrity. This approach addresses a persistent challenge in religious education: making ancient texts relevant to contemporary adolescents without distorting their original meanings or reducing them to mere moral lessons. The incorporation of Nias cultural elements, such as indigenous stories and local expressions of sacrifice, demonstrates cultural brokerage—the ability to navigate between students' cultural worlds and biblical texts, creating meaningful connections. This cultural responsiveness likely enhances student engagement and comprehension, as concepts resonate with familiar experiences and values embedded in their heritage. Furthermore, the teachers' attention to contemporary challenges facing students—materialism, individualism, digital distractions—indicates prophetic pedagogy that critiques cultural values contradicting Christian principles. By explicitly addressing these competing narratives, teachers equip students with critical thinking skills to evaluate messages they encounter and make intentional choices aligned with their faith commitments. The balance teachers maintained between biblical faithfulness and contextual relevance reflects sophisticated theological reasoning. They did not simply moralize or reduce scripture to practical tips but helped students encounter God's character and purposes revealed in biblical narratives, then considered implications for contemporary discipleship. This approach cultivates hermeneutical skills students need for lifelong faith formation. The emphasis on experiential learning activities reflects constructivist educational theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through active engagement rather than passive reception. In spiritual formation contexts, experiential learning proves particularly vital because Christian faith emphasizes orthopraxis (right practice) alongside orthodoxy (right belief). One can intellectually understand sacrifice while never practicing it; transformation requires moving from knowing to doing. The service projects, reflective exercises, and role-playing activities documented in this study create opportunities for students to experiment with sacrificial behaviors in developmentally appropriate ways. These experiences generate personal knowledge that exceeds propositional knowledge—students discover through practice how sacrifice feels, the joys and costs involved, and their own capacities for self-giving love. The integration of reflection practices aligns with Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which emphasizes that experience alone is insufficient; learners must reflect on experiences to extract meaning and insights. The journaling, discussions, and creative expressions facilitated by teachers help students process their service experiences, recognize God's work in and through their actions, and internalize lessons learned. However, the study reveals tension between the depth of transformation desired and the time constraints of formal schooling. Authentic spiritual formation occurs gradually

through sustained practice, mentoring relationships, and repeated cycles of action and reflection. The limited instructional time available for CRE creates frustration for teachers committed to holistic transformation rather than superficial learning.

Implications for Teacher Preparation

These findings carry significant implications for Christian Religious Education teacher preparation programs. Preservice training should extend beyond content knowledge and pedagogical methods to include intentional spiritual formation that cultivates teachers' own faith maturity and spiritual disciplines. Programs might incorporate spiritual direction, mentoring relationships, and practice in reflective spiritual disciplines. Additionally, teacher education should explicitly address the integration of spiritual ability with pedagogical practice. Prospective teachers need opportunities to observe master teachers modeling faith, practice contextualizing biblical content for diverse learners, and develop experiential activities that promote transformation. Practicum experiences in schools serving various contexts would expose candidates to the complexities of implementing spiritual abilities across settings. Ongoing professional development for practicing teachers represents an equally critical need. The teachers in this study expressed desire for continuing education addressing spiritual formation, culturally responsive religious education, and innovative pedagogies. Professional learning communities where CRE teachers collaborate, share resources, and encourage one another could provide sustainable support for continual improvement. Several limitations merit acknowledgment. The study's focus on a single school limits generalizability to other contexts with different demographics, resources, or cultural characteristics. The small sample size, while appropriate for qualitative research, means findings may not capture the full diversity of approaches CRE teachers employ. Additionally, the study relied partially on self-reported data from teachers, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research might employ longitudinal designs to examine how teachers' spiritual abilities and implementation strategies develop over time. Comparative studies across schools serving diverse populations could illuminate how context influences spiritual pedagogy. Student perspectives on how teachers' spiritual abilities impact their learning and formation would provide valuable complementary data to the teacher-focused findings of this study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Lahewa Timur implement their spiritual abilities in teaching the meaning of sacrifice to junior high school students. The findings reveal that effective implementation involves three interconnected dimensions: modeling sacrificial living through authentic witness, employing contextual biblical pedagogy that bridges ancient texts and contemporary experiences, and facilitating experiential learning activities that transform understanding into practice. The spiritual ability of teachers emerges not as a discrete skill but as an integrated competency encompassing personal faith maturity, authentic character, theological understanding, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical creativity. When teachers embody the sacrificial principles they teach, students encounter living demonstrations that make abstract concepts tangible and compelling. When teachers skillfully

contextualize biblical narratives, students discover the timeless relevance of scripture for their contemporary contexts. When teachers create opportunities for experiential learning, students develop embodied knowledge that shapes their identities and actions. However, implementing spiritual ability faces significant challenges including resource limitations, varying student receptivity, competing cultural values, time constraints, and teachers' own spiritual growth needs. Addressing these challenges requires multilevel support systems encompassing teacher spiritual formation, curriculum development, institutional commitment, and community partnerships. The study contributes to religious education scholarship by providing empirical evidence of how teachers translate spiritual competencies into pedagogical practices. It demonstrates that teaching sacrifice effectively requires more than curriculum content or instructional techniques; it demands teachers who have themselves embraced sacrificial living and can authentically mentor students in this countercultural journey. The implementation of spiritual ability in teaching the meaning of sacrifice represents a holistic endeavor that integrates teachers' personal faith, theological understanding, cultural awareness, and pedagogical skill. When implemented effectively, it transforms Christian Religious Education from information transmission into genuine spiritual formation, shaping students who not only understand sacrifice intellectually but embrace it as a way of life modeled after Christ's self-giving love.

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