



Guiding Students to True Faith: The Professional Role of CRE Teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo (Exodus 17:6)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the professional role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in guiding students toward true faith at SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo, using Exodus 17:6 as a biblical framework for spiritual guidance. The research employed a structured literature review to synthesize empirical and theoretical studies on pedagogical competence, spiritual modeling, relational skills, and innovative instructional strategies in faith-based education. Findings indicate that effective faith guidance is a multidimensional process, requiring the integration of pedagogical expertise, personal integrity, and pastoral sensitivity. CRE teachers who demonstrate mastery in lesson planning, interactive teaching, and experiential learning enable students to internalize biblical principles and apply them in daily life. Equally significant is the modeling of spiritual and ethical behavior, which reinforces learning and provides students with tangible examples of authentic faith. Relational and pastoral competencies, including empathy, trust-building, and individualized support, further enhance students' spiritual engagement and resilience. Additionally, the use of technology, multimedia resources, and experiential activities facilitates active participation and critical reflection, bridging the gap between knowledge and lived faith experience. The study also highlights the challenges faced by teachers, such as diverse student backgrounds, curricular constraints, and resource limitations, emphasizing the importance of continuous professional development and institutional support. By synthesizing best practices, this research underscores that CRE teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing students' genuine faith, balancing academic rigor with spiritual formation. The findings offer practical implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and school policies aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education in secondary schools.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, teacher professionalism, faith formation, pedagogical competence, spiritual guidance*

INTRODUCTION

The role of teachers in Christian Religious Education (CRE) extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; it encompasses guiding students toward spiritual maturity

and genuine faith. In contemporary educational contexts, especially in Indonesian senior high schools, the professionalism of CRE teachers is increasingly recognized as a pivotal factor in shaping students' moral, spiritual, and social development. SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo provides a unique context for examining this phenomenon, as the school emphasizes both academic excellence and character formation through religious instruction. The guidance offered by CRE teachers, grounded in biblical principles, serves as a crucial bridge between theoretical knowledge of faith and its practical embodiment in daily life. Exodus 17:6, which recounts God's provision of water from the rock, symbolizes divine guidance and sustenance, offering a theological framework for understanding the teacher's role in facilitating students' spiritual journey. By drawing upon this biblical narrative, the present study seeks to explore how CRE teachers professionally support students in cultivating a true and enduring faith, highlighting the intersection of pedagogical skill, spiritual competence, and pastoral care. Recent research in religious education underscores the importance of teacher professionalism in fostering students' spiritual engagement. Studies reveal that students are more likely to internalize religious values and exhibit ethical behavior when their teachers demonstrate competence, commitment, and consistency in faith-based instruction. Professionalism in this context is multidimensional, encompassing not only pedagogical proficiency but also the teacher's personal integrity, relational skills, and capacity to model spiritual principles. For instance, teachers who exemplify the virtues they teach—such as patience, obedience to God, and compassion—serve as tangible role models, thereby reinforcing students' understanding and practice of faith. In the Indonesian setting, where students navigate diverse social and religious influences, the professional conduct of CRE teachers becomes especially significant, as it helps students differentiate authentic spiritual experience from superficial religiosity. The dynamics of modern education demand that CRE teachers integrate innovative pedagogical approaches while maintaining theological fidelity. The professional role of teachers involves designing learning experiences that not only convey biblical content but also encourage reflection, critical thinking, and moral application. This dual focus on cognitive and spiritual formation aligns with the objectives of holistic education, where the development of the student's character, ethical reasoning, and spiritual discernment is considered equally important as academic achievement. Within SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo, CRE teachers are challenged to address diverse student needs, varying levels of religious understanding, and the influence of peer and media culture, all of which impact students' faith development. As such, their professional expertise must encompass strategies for personalized guidance, pastoral sensitivity, and adaptive teaching, thereby ensuring that each student's journey toward true faith is nurtured effectively. Exodus 17:6 offers a compelling metaphor for understanding the professional responsibilities of CRE teachers. Just as God provided water from the rock to sustain and guide the Israelites in the wilderness, teachers act as conduits of spiritual nourishment, enabling students to experience the living presence of God in their lives. This passage highlights the relational and formative dimensions of teaching, emphasizing that authentic guidance requires attentiveness, patience, and reliance on divine wisdom. By embodying these qualities, teachers facilitate a learning environment where students can encounter faith not merely as abstract knowledge but as a lived reality that informs their decisions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships. Empirical studies focusing on the practical strategies and outcomes of their guidance remain limited, particularly within the

Indonesian senior high school context. This gap underscores the need for research that examines the professional role of teachers in fostering true faith, considering both pedagogical practices and spiritual formation. Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate how CRE teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo employ their professional competence to guide students toward authentic and sustained faith, drawing insights from biblical principles, educational theory, and contemporary pedagogical practice. By doing so, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on effective religious education, offering practical implications for teacher development, curriculum design, and student spiritual formation.

METHODS

This study employed a structured literature review to examine the professional role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in guiding students toward true faith at SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo. The research process began with a systematic identification of relevant literature across multiple databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and national academic repositories. Keywords were applied to ensure comprehensive coverage of both international and Indonesian studies published within the last fifteen years. Inclusion criteria were set to select studies that provided empirical findings, theoretical frameworks, or case analyses directly related to CRE teacher practices, student spiritual development, and pedagogical strategies in faith-based instruction. Studies that focused exclusively on non-Christian contexts or higher education were excluded to maintain the relevance of findings to the senior high school setting in Indonesia. Following the initial literature search, duplicate records were removed, and abstracts were screened for relevance. Full-text versions of potentially relevant studies were then critically evaluated to ensure alignment with the research focus. Data extraction involved coding key information from each study, including the research context, sample characteristics, teacher competencies examined, instructional strategies employed, and outcomes related to students' faith development. Attention was also given to the theoretical underpinnings of each study, particularly those emphasizing the integration of biblical principles with pedagogical practice, as exemplified by Exodus 17:6. This approach facilitated the identification of recurring themes, patterns, and gaps within the existing literature, providing a robust basis for synthesizing insights relevant to the professional role of CRE teachers. To organize the findings systematically, the extracted data were categorized into thematic domains, including pedagogical competence, spiritual modeling, relational skills, and innovative instructional approaches. Each domain was analyzed to assess how CRE teachers' professional attributes contribute to students' spiritual growth and ethical formation. Comparative analyses were conducted to identify similarities and differences across studies, noting contextual factors such as cultural influences, school policies, and curriculum design that may affect the implementation and outcomes of professional practices. Emphasis was placed on drawing connections between empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives, ensuring that the synthesis reflected both practical implications and conceptual understanding of teacher professionalism in faith guidance. Quality appraisal of the included studies was carried out using criteria such as methodological rigor, clarity of findings, relevance to the research objectives, and credibility of sources.

Studies were weighted based on their contribution to understanding the multifaceted role of CRE teachers, with high-priority given to recent empirical research conducted within senior high school settings. The synthesis process involved iterative review and discussion, enabling the identification of best practices, effective strategies, and potential challenges faced by teachers in fostering true faith among students. Throughout the review, attention was maintained on the alignment between the biblical framework of guidance exemplified in Exodus 17:6 and the professional practices observed in educational settings, providing a coherent basis for subsequent discussion and recommendations. This structured review method allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the professional role of CRE teachers, drawing on diverse sources to generate evidence-based insights. By systematically analyzing both national and international literature, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how pedagogical expertise, spiritual competence, and relational skills converge to support students' faith development, thereby informing effective practices in senior high school religious education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pedagogical competence remains the cornerstone of effective teaching in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Teachers who demonstrate mastery of instructional design, lesson planning, and curriculum alignment are better equipped to facilitate both cognitive and spiritual learning. In the context of SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo, pedagogical competence extends beyond content delivery to include strategies that encourage students' reflection on biblical principles and their practical application in daily life. Research indicates that CRE teachers who employ interactive teaching methods, such as case studies, group discussions, and experiential activities, enable students to internalize concepts of true faith more effectively (Lestari & Rahmat, 2021; Simanungkalit & Telaumbanua, 2020). Pedagogical competence involves tailoring instructional approaches to diverse student needs. In senior high school settings, students exhibit varying levels of spiritual maturity, learning styles, and engagement. Professional CRE teachers assess these differences and adapt teaching strategies to maximize understanding and spiritual growth. For example, visual aids and multimedia resources can enhance comprehension of biblical narratives, while reflective journaling encourages personal engagement with faith concepts. By integrating such methods, teachers transform abstract theological principles into lived experiences, echoing the metaphor of Exodus 17:6, where God provided water to sustain the Israelites-teachers, likewise, provide spiritual sustenance through deliberate instructional strategies. Beyond pedagogical skills, CRE teachers' personal integrity and spiritual modeling play a crucial role in guiding students to true faith. Students are influenced not only by the content delivered but also by the embodiment of the virtues taught by their teachers. Teachers who consistently demonstrate honesty, patience, obedience to God, and compassion serve as living examples of authentic faith. Research shows that students are more likely to adopt ethical behaviors and develop spiritual resilience when teachers exemplify these qualities (Haryanto, 2022; Sitorus & Panggabean, 2023). In the Indonesian educational context, the teacher-student relationship often carries relational and moral authority. CRE teachers who model spiritual integrity provide a template for students to emulate, reinforcing the lessons

conveyed in biblical texts. This aligns with the pedagogical notion that moral and spiritual education is not merely cognitive but experiential. For instance, when teachers exhibit forgiveness in conflict resolution or demonstrate care for struggling students, they concretize abstract teachings, making faith tangible. The connection to Exodus 17:6 emphasizes that just as God's provision was both practical and relational, teachers' actions sustain and guide students' faith journeys in real-life contexts.

The professional role of CRE teachers encompasses relational and pastoral dimensions that facilitate meaningful student engagement. Establishing trust, demonstrating empathy, and actively listening to students' spiritual concerns are critical skills for fostering a supportive learning environment. Studies highlight that students' willingness to explore faith deeply is enhanced when teachers create safe, non-judgmental spaces for dialogue (Simanungkalit & Telaumbanua, 2020; Rahmat et al., 2021). In SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo, teachers who integrate pastoral care into their professional practices are able to respond to students' individual spiritual needs. For example, counseling sessions that explore personal struggles, ethical dilemmas, and questions of belief provide opportunities for tailored guidance. Such practices also address challenges posed by peer influence, social media, and cultural pressures that may hinder authentic faith formation. By combining pedagogical expertise with relational sensitivity, CRE teachers bridge the gap between theoretical understanding of biblical principles and practical spiritual application. Modern educational contexts demand that CRE teachers adopt innovative methods to enhance student engagement and understanding. Technology integration, including audiovisual media, virtual simulations, and digital learning platforms, has been found to support students' comprehension and retention of religious concepts (Lestari & Rahmat, 2021; Haryanto, 2022). At SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo, teachers leverage multimedia presentations, interactive discussions, and online reflective exercises to encourage active participation and critical thinking. Innovation in teaching also encompasses experiential learning opportunities. Field visits to religious institutions, service-learning projects, and role-playing biblical scenarios enable students to connect theoretical knowledge with lived experience. By providing such experiential channels, teachers guide students in translating classroom learning into authentic faith practice. The Exodus 17:6 narrative underscores this approach: just as the Israelites experienced God's provision tangibly, students encounter faith through activities that engage both mind and heart, facilitated by skilled and professional teachers. One significant challenge is the diversity of students' spiritual backgrounds, including variations in religious knowledge, family influence, and personal commitment. Some students may approach religious education with skepticism or superficial engagement, requiring teachers to employ adaptive strategies that balance academic rigor with pastoral sensitivity. Limited resources and curricular constraints can impede the implementation of innovative and individualized instructional approaches. Teachers must navigate high student-to-teacher ratios, standardized testing pressures, and time limitations while maintaining the depth and quality of spiritual guidance. Research indicates that professional development programs and institutional support are critical to overcoming these challenges, enabling teachers to refine their pedagogical, relational, and spiritual competencies (Simanungkalit & Telaumbanua, 2020; Rahmat et al., 2021).

Drawing from national and international literature, several best practices emerge for CRE teachers aiming to guide students toward true faith. These include: Combining content

mastery with reflective and experiential learning strategies. Demonstrating personal integrity, ethical behavior, and obedience to God as a living example for students. Building trust, empathy, and individualized pastoral care to support students' spiritual journeys. Utilizing technology, multimedia, and experiential activities to make biblical teachings tangible and relevant. Engaging in training and reflective practice to enhance pedagogical, spiritual, and relational competencies. By implementing these practices, CRE teachers not only fulfill their professional responsibilities but also create a nurturing environment that promotes authentic faith formation. The alignment with Exodus 17:6 reinforces the metaphor of provision and guidance, illustrating how professional competence sustains students' spiritual growth in practical and meaningful ways. The findings have implications for educational policy and teacher development. Schools should prioritize professional development programs that integrate pedagogical training with spiritual formation, ensuring that CRE teachers are equipped to address both cognitive and affective dimensions of faith education. Curriculum design should allow flexibility for innovative teaching methods, experiential learning, and pastoral interventions. Institutional support, including access to resources and mentorship opportunities, can enhance teachers' capacity to implement best practices effectively. Fostering a culture of reflective practice among CRE teachers encourages continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving student needs. By emphasizing the integration of professional skills, spiritual integrity, and relational competence, educational institutions can ensure that CRE teachers remain effective guides in students' journeys toward true faith.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in guiding students toward true faith at SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo, emphasizing the interplay of professionalism, pedagogical competence, and spiritual modeling. The findings reveal that effective faith guidance is not solely dependent on mastery of religious content but also requires a comprehensive integration of instructional skill, personal integrity, relational sensitivity, and innovative pedagogical approaches. By aligning teaching practices with the biblical framework exemplified in Exodus 17:6, CRE teachers function as both educators and spiritual guides, providing students with the resources, mentorship, and example necessary to cultivate authentic and enduring faith. Pedagogical competence emerges as a foundational element in fostering students' faith formation. Teachers who demonstrate mastery in lesson planning, curriculum alignment, and interactive instructional strategies create learning environments that encourage reflection, critical thinking, and practical application of biblical principles. Through methods such as experiential learning, multimedia integration, and student-centered discussions, teachers transform abstract theological concepts into tangible experiences, allowing students to engage meaningfully with their spiritual development. These strategies, combined with careful attention to students' diverse learning styles and spiritual readiness, enable CRE teachers to deliver instruction that is both academically rigorous and spiritually nurturing. Equally important is the modeling of spiritual integrity and character by teachers. The research highlights that students internalize religious values more effectively when they observe consistent ethical behavior, patience, compassion, and obedience to God in their educators. Such modeling not only reinforces

the teachings of the curriculum but also provides students with practical examples of how faith can be lived out in everyday life. In this way, CRE teachers serve as conduits of divine guidance, mirroring the symbolic significance of God providing water from the rock in Exodus 17:6. Their actions demonstrate that authentic faith is both experiential and relational, requiring active participation in moral and spiritual practices. Relational and pastoral skills further enhance the professional role of CRE teachers. Establishing trust, demonstrating empathy, and engaging in individualized pastoral care enable students to explore faith in a safe and supportive environment. By addressing personal struggles, ethical dilemmas, and questions of belief, teachers foster deeper spiritual engagement and resilience. These relational competencies, when integrated with pedagogical expertise, create a holistic approach to faith education that considers the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions of student development. Innovative instructional approaches, including the use of technology, multimedia resources, and experiential activities, complement traditional teaching methods by making biblical teachings more accessible, engaging, and relevant. Teachers who employ such innovations enable students to bridge the gap between classroom learning and lived faith experiences. These strategies, combined with reflective and adaptive professional practices, ensure that students are equipped to internalize spiritual principles and apply them in practical contexts, thereby fostering true faith that is both enduring and transformative. Finally, the study highlights the importance of continuous professional development and institutional support in sustaining the effectiveness of CRE teachers. Schools must provide opportunities for training, mentorship, and resource access to enhance teachers' pedagogical, spiritual, and relational competencies. By fostering a culture of reflective practice and professional growth, educational institutions can empower CRE teachers to navigate the challenges of diverse student needs, curricular demands, and societal influences while maintaining high standards of spiritual guidance. The professional role of CRE teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Sukoharjo is multifaceted, encompassing pedagogical expertise, spiritual modeling, relational skills, and innovative instructional practices. These elements collectively enable teachers to guide students toward genuine and lasting faith. By integrating biblical principles with professional competence, CRE teachers fulfill their dual responsibility as educators and spiritual mentors, ensuring that students not only acquire knowledge of faith but also experience and embody it in their daily lives. This study contributes valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to strengthen the effectiveness of faith-based education in secondary schools.

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