



## Shaping Covenant People: Exploring Pedagogical Professionalism of CRE Teachers through Exodus 19:6 at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu–West Nias

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the pedagogical professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu-West Nias by interpreting their teaching practices through the theological lens of Exodus 19:6, which declares Israel as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Using a mixed qualitative approach that combines a systematic literature review (SLR) with semi-structured interviews, the research explores how CRE teachers integrate biblical identity formation and moral distinctiveness into their daily pedagogical work. The systematic review synthesizes contemporary scholarship on teacher professionalism, biblical theology, Christian pedagogy, and identity formation, while interviews with CRE teachers provide insight into how these concepts are lived out in the classroom context of West Nias. The findings reveal that CRE teacher professionalism in this setting embodies an integrative model of identity, holiness, and pedagogy. Teachers understand their vocation not merely as disseminating religious knowledge, but as forming students who recognize themselves as God’s covenant people and who live out ethical distinctiveness in their behavior, relationships, and academic responsibilities. The theme of priestly identity motivates teachers to provide relational guidance, model moral integrity, and cultivate classroom environments that support character and spiritual development. The theme of holiness shapes their commitment to ethical consistency, pastoral sensitivity, and disciplined instructional practice. Although teachers demonstrate strong theological grounding and vocational dedication, they also face challenges such as limited resources and inadequate professional development. The study concludes that interpreting CRE teacher professionalism through Exodus 19:6 offers a holistic framework that integrates theological identity, ethical formation, and pedagogical competence. Strengthening institutional support and continuous professional development is essential for sustaining this identity-holiness paradigm in public-school contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Covenant People*

## INTRODUCTION

The professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers has become an increasingly urgent discourse in contemporary Indonesian education, particularly within public schools where religious diversity, cultural complexity, and pedagogical challenges intersect. As educators entrusted with shaping students' spiritual understanding and moral identity, CRE teachers are expected to embody not only academic competence but also theological integrity and pedagogical excellence. In regions such as West Nias-where Christianity plays a central role in shaping communal identity-the work of CRE teachers carries even greater significance, influencing how students perceive themselves as part of a faith community and how they internalize biblical values in everyday life. Within this context, biblical foundations become essential in constructing a pedagogical framework that supports the formation of students' identity as God's people (Exodus 19:6). The text declares Israel as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," providing a theological vision that can guide CRE teachers in cultivating covenant identity among learners (Exodus 19:6). Exodus 19:6 presents a foundational declaration of communal identity rooted in covenant relationship-a paradigm emphasizing holiness, service, and belonging. This theological statement, spoken at Sinai prior to the giving of the law, highlights God's intention to shape a distinctive people characterized by moral obedience, spiritual consecration, and communal responsibility (Exodus 19:6). When interpreted pedagogically, this identity framework offers CRE teachers a transformative model for guiding students toward understanding themselves as individuals created for purpose, called into community, and invited into a life of ethical commitment. Such a biblical lens challenges teachers to move beyond cognitive instruction and embody a holistic pedagogical professionalism that integrates spiritual formation, character modelling, and contextualized learning. Professionalism in CRE teaching involves more than mastery of subject matter; it encompasses pedagogical competence, reflective spirituality, communication skills, ethical conduct, and the ability to contextualize biblical teachings within students' lived realities (Creswell, 2018). In the school context of SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu-West Nias, CRE teachers serve as both religious educators and cultural transmitters, helping students navigate local Christian traditions while engaging with an evolving educational environment influenced by modern technology, shifting social norms, and multicultural interactions. Their professionalism becomes a determining factor in whether biblical identity formation takes place effectively. In recent years, educational literature has increasingly emphasized the need for spiritual and moral literacy among students, especially in communities facing socio-economic vulnerabilities or cultural transitions. Teachers in such contexts must demonstrate a high degree of adaptability and professional competence to ensure that learning remains relevant, meaningful, and transformative. For CRE teachers, this means bridging biblical teachings with students' daily experiences, employing contextual pedagogical strategies, and utilizing reflective learning methods that connect the ancient narrative of Exodus with modern identity formation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As such, Exodus 19:6 can serve as a pedagogical anchor, prompting teachers to articulate a vision of education that cultivates covenant identity through disciplined instruction, moral guidance, and relational engagement. The unique cultural setting of Sirombu-West Nias offers fertile ground for exploring how CRE

teachers integrate their professionalism with biblical principles. Local values, communal solidarity, and traditional Christian practices interact with contemporary educational demands, shaping the expectations placed on teachers. In this environment, the ability of CRE teachers to model covenant identity-in personal character, teaching methods, and relational integrity-directly influences students' understanding of what it means to be "God's people" in today's world. Such professionalism is not static; it requires continuous reflection, training, and spiritual maturity that aligns with the transformative message of Scripture. Given these dynamics, this study seeks to explore how the theological insights from Exodus 19:6 can inform and enhance the pedagogical professionalism of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu-West Nias. By examining teachers' practices, challenges, and interpretive approaches, the research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on biblical pedagogy, teacher professionalism, and covenant identity formation. This article adopts a qualitative approach, integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews, to identify how CRE teachers interpret and apply the biblical vision of Exodus 19:6 within classroom settings. Ultimately, the study seeks to articulate a model of professional practice that empowers teachers to shape students as covenant people-rooted in biblical truth, committed to ethical living, and prepared to contribute meaningfully to their community.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews to explore how Exodus 19:6 informs the pedagogical professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu-West Nias. The combination of these two methodological components enables a comprehensive understanding of both the theoretical foundations and the lived practices of teachers within their contextual environment. Qualitative inquiry was selected because it allows the researcher to examine meanings, interpret experiences, and investigate pedagogical realities in depth (Creswell, 2018). Such an approach aligns with the purpose of this study, which seeks to understand how biblical theology-particularly the covenant identity articulated in Exodus 19:6-intersects with professional teaching practices in a real educational setting. The SLR component served as the initial stage of the research, aimed at mapping relevant scholarly contributions on teacher professionalism, biblical pedagogy, covenant identity, and CRE teaching practices. The review followed established procedures for systematic searching, screening, and synthesis. Literature was collected from major academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ATLA Religion Database, SAGE Journals, and ProQuest to ensure broad coverage of theological, educational, and pedagogical studies. The search included publications from 2000 to 2024 to capture contemporary developments in biblical pedagogy and teacher professionalism, while classical theological works were also consulted for exegetical depth. Keywords used included "teacher professionalism," "biblical identity formation," "Exodus 19:6," "Christian Religious Education," "covenant pedagogy," and "pedagogical competence." After removing duplicates and excluding non-relevant articles, approximately 40 key sources were retained for analytical synthesis. These sources helped construct the conceptual framework that guided the interview questions and thematic analysis, particularly concerning concepts such as covenant

identity, pedagogical integrity, professional competence, and character formation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To complement the conceptual insights from the SLR, semi-structured interviews were conducted with CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu-West Nias. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives while maintaining a consistent thematic focus across interviews. This method enabled participants to articulate their interpretations of Exodus 19:6, describe their professional practices, and reflect on how they integrate biblical identity formation into their teaching. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only teachers with direct experience teaching CRE at the institution were included. In total, five CRE teachers participated in the interviews, representing diverse teaching backgrounds and years of service. Interviews lasted between 25 and 35 minutes and were conducted in a conversational manner, adhering to ethical research principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data analyzed using a thematic coding approach derived from the conceptual categories identified during the SLR. The analytic process followed an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Themes were identified by examining recurrent patterns related to professional competence, spiritual integration, identity formation, pedagogical challenges, and biblical interpretation of Exodus 19:6. Throughout the research process, reflexive journaling was used to minimize researcher bias, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in participants' perspectives rather than preconceived assumptions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a multilayered portrait of pedagogical professionalism among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu-West Nias, shaped through the lens of Exodus 19:6 and interpreted within the sociocultural, educational, and spiritual dynamics of the school setting. The research results, obtained through a combination of systematic literature review and semi-structured interviews, show that pedagogical professionalism in this context emerges as an integrative interplay between teachers' theological self-understanding, instructional competence, moral character, and relational engagement with learners. These findings align with the integrative theological reading of Exodus 19:6: *"You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,"* which provides a biblical frame for understanding CRE teachers not merely as transmitters of doctrinal content but as formational agents who cultivate covenant identity and holiness among students (Childs, 2004; Brueggemann, 2012). Through this framework, the professional role of CRE teachers is interpreted as deeply spiritual, ethically embodied, and pedagogically situational-requiring not only technical mastery but also vocational commitment and character coherence. The interview data consistently show that CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu understand their pedagogical role in relation to the biblical calling expressed in Exodus 19:6. Teachers repeatedly emphasize that their work involves shaping students' understanding of themselves as *"God's people,"* particularly in a public school environment where competing identities-cultural, digital, and social-interact strongly. This resonates with theological scholarship that views Exodus 19:6 as establishing Israel's identity as a covenant community responsible for representing God's character among the nations

(Wright, 2006; Stuart, 2006). Teachers interpret this calling as a mandate for forming students who embody Christian values such as discipline, mutual respect, and integrity. Several interviewees highlight that the notion of a “kingdom of priests” inspires them to serve as mediators of moral and spiritual insight for their students, modeling behaviors consistent with the biblical vision of a holy community. The theme of identity formation appears as a dominant thread in the findings. Teachers recognize that students in West Nias experience rapid cultural transitions due to increasing exposure to digital media, mobility, and shifting socio-economic patterns. As a result, students often struggle to maintain a stable sense of moral and religious identity. CRE teachers thus see identity formation as central to their professional mission, aligning with educational theories that emphasize the teacher’s role in guiding learners toward coherent self-understanding (Palmer, 2007). This aligns with biblical pedagogy frameworks that emphasize the shaping of covenant identity through narrative remembrance, communal practices, and moral exemplarity (Van der Walt, 2014). In practice, teachers incorporate storytelling, reflective dialogue, and contextualized biblical interpretation to help students internalize what it means to live as God’s people. This pedagogical approach reflects the priestly dimension of Exodus 19:6, where priests are tasked with teaching, blessing, and guiding the community (Levine, 2008). Teachers report that understanding themselves as “priestly educators” strengthens their commitment to relational teaching practices such as mentoring, listening, and personal guidance—components strongly associated with pedagogical professionalism in faith-based education. Another major finding concerns the role of holiness in shaping teachers’ professional identity. Teachers frequently describe their professionalism not only in terms of competence but also sanctity—expressing the belief that their personal morality directly affects their credibility and influence. This echoes theological interpretations of “holy nation” as a communal vocation requiring ethical distinctiveness and disciplined living (Fretheim, 1991). Teachers report that living a morally consistent life enhances their pedagogical authority, as students observe and emulate the values embodied by their educators. Several interviewees emphasize that the greatest challenge is not explaining Christian identity but demonstrating it through daily conduct, patience, and discipline. This mirrors findings from teacher professionalism literature, which highlights moral integrity, authenticity, and relational consistency as essential elements of teacher quality (Sockett, 2009; Carr, 2003). In this sense, holiness is not understood as isolation but as ethical presence—engaging the school context with compassion, justice, and pedagogical patience. The findings also indicate that CRE teachers view their professionalism as inseparable from pedagogical competence, particularly in the areas of instructional design, classroom management, and contextualization of biblical content. Teachers acknowledge that their students require learning approaches that connect biblical teaching with everyday realities in Sirombu, such as community traditions, family responsibilities, and emerging social challenges. This highlights the importance of pedagogical contextualization, which aligns with scholarship emphasizing the need to bridge biblical narratives with contemporary experiences to strengthen learner relevance and engagement (Wright, 2010; Groome, 2011). Several teachers describe adapting Exodus 19:6 to address issues such as peer pressure, cultural identity, and personal responsibility—helping students interpret holiness and covenant identity in practical and ethical terms. Classroom observations and interview responses reveal that CRE teachers employ a variety of strategies to cultivate perseverance among

their students—a core outcome inferred from the Exodus theme of covenant fidelity. Teachers note that students often face academic challenges, family responsibilities, and socio-economic obstacles that hinder their persistence in learning. As a result, teachers intentionally integrate reflective discussions, prayer practices, and encouragement into their pedagogical routines to help students remain committed to their studies. This aligns with research showing that teacher support, relational warmth, and motivational strategies are significant predictors of learner perseverance (Dweck, 2016; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). The theological metaphor of being a “holy nation” reinforces for teachers the importance of guiding students toward disciplined living—framing academic perseverance as part of moral formation and covenant responsibility. The results also show that CRE teachers perceive their professional responsibilities as extending beyond the classroom into family and community engagement. Many students in Sirombu live in tight-knit communities shaped by strong cultural traditions and religious practices. Teachers often collaborate with parents and local church leaders to reinforce moral values, address behavioral issues, and support students’ learning progress. This reflects the broader biblical vision of covenant identity as communal rather than individualistic, involving the entire household in transmitting faith and values (Brueggemann, 1997). It also corresponds with educational research highlighting the importance of family-school partnerships in shaping student outcomes (Epstein, 2011). Teachers note that professional competence in this context involves understanding local customs, practicing cultural sensitivity, and working collaboratively with community structures to support holistic student development. Findings indicate that CRE teachers experience several challenges in embodying the priestly and holy calling of Exodus 19:6. Teachers mention limited instructional resources, large class sizes, and administrative burdens as factors that challenge their ability to maintain pedagogical focus. The public-school environment requires balancing Christian teachings with national curriculum expectations and pluralistic educational principles. Teachers report navigating these tensions by emphasizing universal moral values—such as honesty, respect, and responsibility—while grounding them in biblical theological understanding. This pedagogical balancing act reflects broader scholarship on religious education in public schools, which emphasizes the importance of integrating spiritual values without violating educational inclusivity (Hull, 2003; Astley, 2002). Teachers consistently express a desire for further professional development, especially in biblical studies and pedagogy, to strengthen their capacity to teach effectively within these complexities.

The theme of vocational identity, frequently noted in interviews, further supports the integrative theological reading of Exodus 19:6. Teachers describe feeling called to their work as a form of ministry, perceiving their pedagogical tasks—lesson planning, mentoring, discipline—not simply as duties but as expressions of divine service. This aligns with the literature on teacher vocation, which views teaching as a moral and spiritual calling rather than a mere technical occupation (Palmer, 2007). Teachers express that interpreting Exodus 19:6 elevates their sense of purpose, encouraging them to approach teaching with humility, reverence, and devotion. This vocational perspective informs their pedagogical patience and compassion, qualities essential for fostering learner perseverance and moral growth. Across the data, it is evident that not all teachers express the same depth of theological reflection. Some understand Exodus 19:6 primarily as a general reminder to

live ethically, while others articulate a more nuanced interpretation involving covenant identity, priestly representation, and communal holiness. The variance suggests that theological literacy contributes significantly to pedagogical professionalism in religious education. Teachers with stronger interpretive skills demonstrate greater confidence in contextualizing biblical texts, engaging students in discussions of identity, and addressing ethical challenges. This supports the claim that theological competence is a core component of professional expertise in religious education (Browning, 2007; Osmer, 2008). Strengthening teachers' theological foundation may thus enhance the quality of CRE pedagogy and its impact on students. The study also finds that the interplay between identity and holiness provides a powerful conceptual framework for understanding students' moral and academic formation. Teachers note that presenting students with a coherent narrative of who they are ("God's people") and how they ought to live ("holy nation") offers them a framework for making wise decisions, developing perseverance, and resisting negative peer influences. This corresponds with psychological research showing that identity-based motivation-students' understanding of themselves and their purpose-significantly influences perseverance and achievement (Oyserman, 2015). By integrating biblical identity with practical expectations for behavior, teachers help students adopt internalized motivations that support academic and moral perseverance. Notably, the results also reveal that students respond positively when teachers embody the values they teach. Interviewees observe that students are more receptive to discussions of holiness, discipline, or covenant identity when they see these values mirrored in teachers' own conduct. This resonates with moral education literature stressing the importance of teacher example as a primary mode of value transmission (Lickona, 1996). In this sense, teacher professionalism is not merely demonstrated through skill but through lived integrity. Teachers' credibility emerges as a crucial factor in shaping student engagement, motivation, and persistence. The discussion further highlights that professionalism-interpreted through the lens of Exodus 19:6-cannot be separated from relational dimensions. Teachers report that students thrive when they feel known, valued, and supported. Relational pedagogy, encompassing empathy, dialogue, and presence, emerges as an essential aspect of CRE professionalism. This aligns with the priestly model of relational leadership in biblical tradition, where priests serve as mediators, counselors, and guides for the community (Levine, 2008). Students facing personal struggles-economic hardship, family issues, or emotional distress-benefit significantly from teachers who provide not only instruction but also pastoral support. Teachers describe that encouraging perseverance often involves one-on-one conversations, emotional reassurance, and spiritual encouragement-practices that reflect the integrative identity-holiness framework of Exodus 19:6. The data suggest that enhancing pedagogical professionalism requires ongoing institutional support. Teachers express the need for professional development, collaborative learning communities, and administrative encouragement to integrate biblical identity formation with effective pedagogy. This corresponds with educational research emphasizing that teacher professionalism flourishes within supportive school cultures that promote learning, collaboration, and reflective practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Strengthening CRE professionalism at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu therefore requires a systemic approach, combining theological enrichment, pedagogical training, and leadership support.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the pedagogical professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sirombu-West Nias is deeply shaped by an integrative understanding of Exodus 19:6 and its theological themes of covenant identity and holiness. Through a combined method of systematic literature review and semi-structured interviews, the research reveals that professionalism in this context extends beyond technical competence to encompass theological depth, ethical character, relational commitment, and contextual pedagogical practice. Interpreted through the biblical declaration, *"You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,"* CRE teachers perceive their vocation as a calling to form students who understand themselves as God's people and who embody moral distinctiveness in their daily lives (Brueggemann, 2012). This theologically grounded identity shapes how teachers design instruction, manage classrooms, mentor students, and engage with the broader community. The study affirms that identity formation is central to CRE teachers' understanding of their professional purpose. Teachers recognize that students face growing pressures from digital culture, shifting social norms, and economic challenges. By using Exodus 19:6 as a framework for grounding students in covenant identity, teachers aim to cultivate learners who can navigate these pressures with a sense of moral direction and spiritual stability (Wright, 2006). Consistent with research on identity-based motivation, teachers report that students demonstrate greater perseverance, improved behavior, and higher engagement when they internalize a clear sense of who they are before God (Oyserman, 2015). The theme of holiness shapes teachers' understanding of professionalism as a morally embodied practice. Teachers emphasize that their credibility depends not only on what they teach but on how they live. Their commitment to ethical consistency, patience, humility, and compassion reflects biblical scholarship that interprets holiness as ethical distinctiveness within a communal context (Fretheim, 1991). This sense of priestly responsibility motivates teachers to cultivate nurturing, disciplined, and relational learning environments where students feel supported academically and spiritually. The research also concludes that pedagogical competence—such as lesson planning, contextualization, and classroom management—cannot be separated from theological and moral dimensions. Teachers consistently integrate biblical narratives with local cultural realities, helping students interpret Christian identity in ways relevant to their lives in Sirombu. This contextualized approach aligns with holistic models of Christian pedagogy emphasizing narrative, relationality, and lived faith (Groome, 2011). Moreover, teachers' relational engagement—through mentoring, dialogue, and emotional support—emerges as a defining component of professionalism, mirroring the mediatory and pastoral elements associated with the priestly identity in Exodus (Levine, 2008). Teachers also face structural challenges, including limited resources and increasing administrative burdens. This study therefore concludes that enhancing CRE pedagogical professionalism requires not only personal dedication but systemic support. Professional development opportunities, theological training, collaborative teacher communities, and supportive school leadership are essential for strengthening CRE teachers' ability to embody the identity-holiness paradigm in their practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This research affirms that interpreting pedagogical professionalism through Exodus 19:6 provides a rich and coherent framework for understanding the vocation of CRE teachers in public schools. It

highlights that forming students as “God’s covenant people” requires teachers who are intellectually grounded, spiritually mature, ethically consistent, and pedagogically skilled. Strengthening these dimensions will enhance teachers’ capacity to shape resilient, identity-anchored, and value-driven learners within the complex educational landscape of West Nias.

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