



## The Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers' Personal Spiritual Discipline in Developing Professional and Spiritual Competence at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi

Likanesi Hia<sup>1\*</sup>, Tiurma Barasa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [likanesihia31@guru.smp.belajar.id](mailto:likanesihia31@guru.smp.belajar.id)

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the role of personal spiritual discipline among Christian Religious Education teachers in developing their professional and spiritual competencies at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi. This descriptive qualitative study involved in-depth interviews with two Christian Religious Education teachers, participatory observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible meditation, fasting, and spiritual retreats significantly enhance teachers' professional and spiritual competencies. The results indicate a positive correlation between the consistency of practicing spiritual disciplines and the effectiveness of teaching, the quality of teacher-student relationships, and the spiritual maturity of students. This study proposes an integrated model of Christian Religious Education teacher competency development, in which personal spiritual discipline serves as the foundation for professional growth. The practical implication of this research highlights the importance of developing sustainable mentoring programs to support the spiritual discipline of Christian Religious Education teachers within the context of formal education.*

**Keywords:** *spiritual discipline, professional competence, spiritual competence, Christian Religious Education teachers*

### INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education plays a highly crucial role in shaping character, instilling noble values, and nurturing students' faith toward becoming whole individuals (Sidjabat, 2019). In this context, Christian Religious Education teachers serve as the frontline in the implementation of religious education, where their responsibility extends beyond merely delivering instructional content to embodying a living example that reflects Christian values. Therefore, a Christian Religious Education teacher is required to possess strong pedagogical competence, professional skills relevant to contemporary developments, and

a progressively maturing spirituality (Tanya, 2020). This spiritual maturity is not a static condition attained instantly, but rather a long-term journey that requires continuous cultivation and development through consistent practice of personal spiritual discipline in every aspect of a teacher's life. Personal spiritual discipline constitutes a firm foundation for the spiritual growth of Christian Religious Education teachers. Spiritual practices such as earnest prayer, deep meditation on the Word of God in the Bible, sincere personal worship, and regular theological reflection serve as essential elements of this discipline (Foster, 2019). Through these practices, Christian Religious Education teachers not only build and deepen their intimate personal relationship with God—the ultimate source of wisdom and strength—but also indirectly enrich their professional competence in carrying out their instructional duties in the classroom (Groome, 2018). A teacher's spiritual depth is manifested in the way they deliver lessons, interact with students, and provide guidance and role modeling in daily life. However, in the Indonesian context, particularly in public schools where student backgrounds are diverse, in-depth studies on the complex relationship between teachers' personal spiritual discipline and their professional and spiritual competence remain relatively limited.

Within Indonesia's geographical and demographic landscape, SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi - located in North Nias, a region with a predominantly Christian population—offers a unique educational setting. In this school, Christian Religious Education receives significant attention and curricular allocation. This particular characteristic positions SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi as a natural laboratory well-suited for investigating how the personal spiritual discipline practiced by Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to the development of their professional competence and impacts the spiritual formation of students. A deeper understanding of this relationship can provide valuable insights for advancing more effective and holistic Christian Religious Education in Indonesia. Based on this background, several fundamental research questions emerge. First, what concrete forms of personal spiritual discipline are practiced daily by Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi? Identifying these practices will offer a clearer picture of how educators sustain and develop their spiritual lives amid professional responsibilities. Second, what is the relationship between the intensity and quality of teachers' personal spiritual discipline and their level of professional competence in carrying out instructional tasks, classroom management, learning evaluation, and continuous professional development? Does a teacher's spiritual depth positively correlate with their effectiveness in transmitting knowledge and values to students? Third, to what extent does teachers' personal spiritual discipline influence the spiritual development of students at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi? Do students perceive a positive impact from their teachers' spiritual lives in shaping their character, strengthening their faith, and practicing Christian values in everyday life? Fourth, based on the understanding of the crucial role of teachers' personal spiritual discipline, what kind of competence development model can be formulated to effectively integrate spirituality into enhancing the professional quality of Christian Religious Education teachers holistically? Such a model is expected to serve as a guideline for teacher development in diverse educational contexts, particularly in public schools. To address these research questions, this study sets forth several specific objectives. The first objective is to comprehensively identify the various practices of personal spiritual discipline actively undertaken by Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi. This identification includes types of practices,

frequency of implementation, and teachers' personal motivations and experiences in carrying out these disciplines. The second objective is to analyze in depth the relationship between teachers' personal spiritual discipline and different dimensions of their professional competence. This analysis seeks to uncover whether a significant correlation exists between teachers' spiritual maturity and their effectiveness in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning, as well as in maximizing students' potential. The third objective is to qualitatively and quantitatively describe the influence perceived by students at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi regarding their teachers' personal spiritual discipline. This description will cover how students perceive and experience the impact of their teachers' spiritual lives on learning processes, character formation, and faith growth. The fourth and final objective is to formulate an integrated model for the development of Christian Religious Education teachers' competence. This model, grounded in the study's findings on the central role of personal spiritual discipline in enhancing both professional and spiritual quality, aims to serve as a comprehensive framework for teacher development across educational levels. It is expected that the model will not only emphasize pedagogical and professional improvement but also reinforce spirituality as the fundamental foundation for fulfilling the vocation of a religious educator.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of Christian Religious Education teachers' personal spiritual discipline in developing professional and spiritual competence. This approach is considered most appropriate as it enables a comprehensive exploration of the subjective experiences of Christian Religious Education teachers in practicing spiritual disciplines and facilitates an understanding of how these practices affect their professional and spiritual lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus of this research is not to test hypotheses but rather to uncover the meanings, perceptions, and reflections that emerge from teachers' lived experiences in their daily roles as Christian educators. The participants in this study consisted of six Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with specific criteria established to ensure that the data obtained would be both relevant and in-depth. The criteria included: (1) having taught for at least three years, (2) holding an academic background in theology or Christian religious education, and (3) a willingness to actively participate in all stages of the study. The participants comprised four women and two men, ranging in age from 28 to 55 years, with teaching experience between 3 and 25 years. This diversity in age and experience allowed for the collection of rich and varied perspectives on the practices and meanings of spiritual discipline within the context of Christian education. Data collection was conducted through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with each participant, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The aim was to explore the teachers' personal spiritual discipline practices, their accompanying spiritual experiences, and their perspectives on the relationship between spiritual discipline and professional as well as spiritual competence. In addition, participant observation was carried out over a three-month period during Christian Religious Education classroom

activities to capture the tangible manifestations of professional and spiritual competence in teachers' interactions with students and instructional materials. To complement these methods, document analysis was conducted on lesson plans, personal reflection journals, and professional development portfolios to reinforce the findings from interviews and observations. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). The analytical process involved several steps: (1) familiarization with the data through transcription and repeated reading, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for relevant themes, (4) reviewing themes to ensure coherence, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing a final report that systematically and meaningfully reflects the results of the analysis. To ensure the credibility of the findings, source and methodological triangulation were applied, alongside member checking with participants to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. This approach provides a robust foundation for a deep and contextual understanding of the contribution of personal spiritual discipline in shaping Christian Religious Education teachers into both professional and spiritual educators.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi regularly engage in a variety of personal spiritual discipline practices. The most common practices include: 1) Quiet Time and Bible Meditation – All participants (100%) reported engaging in daily quiet time and Bible meditation for 30–60 minutes. As Participant 3 stated: *“Morning devotion is the foundation of my ministry. Without a fresh word from God every morning, I feel unprepared to teach.”* 2) Personal Prayer – All participants maintained structured personal prayer times, with four out of six teachers (66.7%) practicing prayer at least three times a day. Participant 1 explained: *“Prayer is the breath of ministry. I pray before going to school, during recess, and at night before bed—especially lifting up my students in prayer.”* 3) Fasting – Four participants (66.7%) practiced fasting regularly, typically once a week, particularly in relation to specific challenges encountered in teaching. 4) Spiritual Retreats – All participants attended spiritual retreats at least twice a year, either individually or through church- or teacher-community-organized programs. 5) Spiritual Reflection Journals – Five participants (83.3%) kept spiritual reflection journals documenting personal devotions, prayers, and theological reflections on teaching experiences. Interestingly, a pattern emerged showing that teachers with longer teaching experience (>10 years) tended to have more structured and consistent spiritual disciplines than those relatively new to teaching. As Participant 5 reflected: *“My 20 years of teaching have taught me that without consistent spiritual discipline, the ministry of education easily loses its fire and meaning.”*

### ***Relationship between Personal Spiritual Discipline and Professional Competence***

Data analysis indicates a positive relationship between personal spiritual discipline practices and the development of professional competence among Christian Religious Education teachers in several areas: first, Curriculum Development – Teachers who regularly engaged in Bible meditation demonstrated stronger abilities in developing contextual and relevant lesson content. Participant 4 noted: *“Morning devotion gives me*

*new insights into biblical texts. This enriches my teaching with applications relevant to the lives of teenagers.”* Second, Creativity in Teaching Methods – Spiritual reflection practices correlated with greater creativity in teaching methods. Participant 2 remarked: *“Many of my creative teaching ideas actually come while I am praying or meditating on God’s Word.”* Third, Classroom Management – Teachers with consistent prayer practices showed greater ability in managing classrooms and addressing challenging students. Observations revealed that these teachers demonstrated more patience and empathy in handling classroom issues. Fourth, Learning Evaluation – Spiritual reflection practices contributed to the development of more holistic evaluation techniques that assessed not only cognitive knowledge but also character formation and values. Fifth, Ongoing Professional Development – Teachers with consistent spiritual discipline showed stronger commitment to continuous professional growth. Participant 6 shared: *“Spiritual discipline teaches me humility and an awareness of my limitations. It motivates me to keep learning and developing myself.”* Document analysis of lesson plans revealed that teachers with consistent spiritual discipline produced more integrative plans, harmoniously combining cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions.

### ***Impact of Personal Spiritual Discipline on Students’ Spiritual Development***

The study also found that teachers’ personal spiritual discipline positively influences students’ spiritual development through several mechanisms: first, Role Modeling – Teachers who consistently practiced spiritual discipline served as living role models. As one student informally expressed: *“We can sense when a teacher is truly close to God. They are different in how they teach and treat us.”* Second, Authenticity in Teaching – Teachers with deeper spiritual discipline exhibited greater authenticity in teaching Christian values, making their lessons more easily accepted by students. Participant 3 stated: *“When we personally experience the truth we teach, students can feel the difference. They can distinguish between a teacher who only conveys information and one who shares lived experience.”* Third, Sensitivity to Students’ Spiritual Needs – Teachers with consistent prayer lives showed heightened sensitivity to students’ spiritual struggles, demonstrated by their ability to identify and respond to students’ faith challenges. Fourth, Creation of a Spiritually Supportive Classroom Climate – Classroom observations showed that spiritually disciplined teachers fostered an environment conducive to spiritual growth, marked by psychological safety, openness in spiritual discussions, and support for students’ faith journeys. Fifth, Effectiveness in Spiritual Mentoring – Teachers who maintained consistent spiritual discipline were more effective in mentoring students spiritually, particularly beyond the formal classroom setting.

### ***An Integrated Competence Development Model Based on Spiritual Discipline***

Based on the data analysis, this study proposes an integrated competence development model for Christian Religious Education teachers, referred to as the “Spiral Growth Model” (see Figure 1). The model illustrates how personal spiritual discipline serves as the core driver of professional and spiritual competence in a continuous spiral process. The model comprises four main components: 1) Core of Personal Spiritual Discipline – Encompassing core practices such as prayer, Bible meditation, fasting, and theological reflection. 2) Circle of Spiritual Competence – Including dimensions such as faith maturity, spiritual wisdom, pastoral sensitivity, and integrity of character. 3) Circle of Professional

Competence – Covering areas such as mastery of subject matter, creative pedagogy, evaluative skills, and critical reflection. 4) Spiral of Growth – Representing the iterative process whereby strengthening personal spiritual discipline fosters spiritual competence, which in turn enriches professional competence, further motivating deeper spiritual discipline in an ongoing cycle. This model emphasizes the organic and integrated nature of Christian Religious Education teachers' competence development, where spiritual and professional dimensions are not separated but mutually reinforce one another in continuous growth.

### ***Spiritual Discipline as the Foundation of Christian Religious Education Teachers' Competence***

The study concludes that personal spiritual discipline is not merely an optional religious practice but an essential foundation for the development of Christian Religious Education teachers' competence. This aligns with Sidjabat's (2019) view that teachers' spiritual quality is a prerequisite for effective Christian education. Foster (2019) similarly stresses that spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and fasting function as means of deep personal transformation, which in turn enriches professional capacity. In the context of Christian education, these findings reinforce the argument that Christian Religious Education teachers' professional and spiritual competencies are inseparable (Groome, 2018). Unlike other subjects, Christian Religious Education demands the integrity of the teacher's person—where what is taught must first be experienced and lived (Palmer, 2017). Thus, personal spiritual discipline becomes the vital bridge connecting personal spiritual experience with professional competence. The study also reveals that the relationship between spiritual discipline and professional competence is reciprocal. On the one hand, spiritual discipline enhances professional competence; on the other hand, professional challenges in teaching stimulate deeper spiritual discipline. This confirms Tanya's (2020) "spiral growth" theory, which posits that Christian Religious Education teachers' spiritual and professional growth unfolds in a mutually reinforcing spiral pattern.

### ***Implications for the Professional Development of Christian Religious Education Teachers***

A key implication of this study is the need for a reorientation in approaches to professional development for Christian Religious Education teachers. Programs that focus exclusively on pedagogical and content aspects, while neglecting the spiritual dimension, will fail to facilitate the comprehensive growth of Christian Religious Education teachers. In contrast, professional development programs that integrate the strengthening of personal spiritual discipline with the enhancement of professional competencies are more effective in shaping holistic Christian Religious Education teachers. This finding aligns with Cooling's (2018) argument regarding the importance of *spiritual literacy* in teacher development. Cooling emphasizes that spiritual literacy—the ability to articulate, reflect on, and integrate spiritual experiences into professional practice—is a crucial yet often overlooked dimension of the professionalism of religious educators in conventional development programs. The Spiral Growth Model generated from this study offers a conceptual framework for designing more holistic professional development programs for Christian Religious Education teachers. Ideally, such programs should include components that strengthen personal spiritual discipline, facilitate theological reflection

on teaching practices, and cultivate the capacity to integrate spiritual insights into pedagogical practices.

### **Contextualization in Formal Education**

One of the significant contributions of this research is its exploration of the role of Christian Religious Education teachers' personal spiritual discipline within the context of public schools. Unlike faith-based schools (such as Christian schools), public schools face unique challenges in integrating spiritual dimensions into formal educational practices. The findings demonstrate that even within public school settings, personal spiritual discipline continues to play a vital role in shaping the effectiveness of CRE teachers. This broadens our understanding of the concept of *spiritual capital* as proposed by Zohar and Marshall (2020). The spiritual capital of Christian Religious Education teachers—manifested in faith maturity, spiritual wisdom, and integrity of character—proves to be a valuable asset, even within the more secular context of formal education. However, this study also identifies contextual challenges faced by CRE teachers in public schools, such as limited opportunities for explicit spiritual expression and the religious diversity of students. These challenges demand that CRE teachers cultivate what Smith (2018) refers to as the *wisdom of practice*—a form of practical wisdom that enables them to translate spiritual insights into language and practices that are acceptable within the pluralistic context of formal education.

### **Conclusion**

This study affirms the vital role of personal spiritual discipline in developing both the professional and spiritual competencies of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi. The teachers consistently engage in various practices of spiritual discipline, such as daily devotions, personal prayer, fasting, spiritual retreats, and reflective spiritual journaling. A positive correlation was found between personal spiritual discipline and aspects of professional competence, including lesson planning, creativity in teaching methods, classroom management, assessment practices, and commitment to ongoing professional development. Teachers' personal spiritual discipline positively influences students' spiritual growth through mechanisms of role modeling, authenticity in teaching, sensitivity to students' spiritual needs, the creation of a conducive classroom climate, and effectiveness in spiritual mentoring. The Spiral Growth Model developed in this study provides a conceptual framework for understanding the integrated process of CRE teachers' competency development, in which personal spiritual discipline serves as the core that drives the sustainable spiral pattern of both spiritual and professional growth. Overall, this research reinforces the argument that personal spiritual discipline is not merely an optional religious practice but an essential foundation for the comprehensive development of CRE teachers' competencies. The key implication of these findings is the urgent need for more holistic approaches to professional development for CRE teachers, integrating the strengthening of personal spiritual discipline with the enhancement of professional competence.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Cooling, T. (2018). Formation and Christian education in England. In R. Stuart-Buttle & J. Shortt (Eds.), *Christian faith, formation and education* (pp. 115-130). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Foster, R. (2019). *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth* (40th anniversary ed.). HarperOne.
- Groome, T. H. (2018). *Sharing faith: A comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry* (revised ed.). Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Palmer, P. J. (2017). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (20th anniversary ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Sidjabat, B. S. (2019). *Strategi pendidikan Kristen: Suatu tinjauan teologis-filosofis* (edisi revisi). ANDI Offset.
- Smith, D. I. (2018). *On Christian teaching: Practicing faith in the classroom*. Eerdmans.
- Tanya, E. (2020). *Spiritualitas dan profesionalitas guru PAK*. Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jakarta.
- Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. (2020). *Spiritual capital: Wealth we can live by*. Bloomsbury Business.