



Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers and Its Influence on Students' Obedience: An Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy in the Context of SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga

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ABSTRACT

The professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is pivotal in shaping the character and obedience of students, particularly in pluralistic contexts such as Sibolga, North Sumatra. While previous research emphasizes pedagogical skills and family or church influences on character formation, few studies integrate biblical exegesis with educational praxis. Drawing on 1 Timothy 4:12–16 and 6:11–12, this study explores how theological insights inform teacher professionalism and its impact on student obedience. A qualitative case study design was employed at SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga, a state vocational school situated in a multicultural coastal city. Exegesis of 1 Timothy was conducted using historical-critical and literary analysis. Field data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and the principal, as well as documentation review. Hermeneutical-theological analysis was used to interpret the biblical text, while thematic analysis identified patterns in educational practice. Triangulation, member checks, and peer review ensured validity and trustworthiness. Findings reveal that CRE teachers who embody professional competence through integrity, responsibility, and spiritual commitment significantly influence student obedience. Exegetical insights highlight the importance of teachers as role models in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, reinforcing obedience as a holistic disposition rather than mere compliance. Students demonstrated greater discipline in worship, respect for authority, and adherence to school rules when guided by competent teachers. However, challenges included resource limitations, administrative burdens, and digital distractions. The study concludes that CRE teacher competence is multidimensional—pedagogical, professional, spiritual, and moral—and decisively shapes student obedience. Recommendations include theology-based teacher training, stronger school-church-family collaboration, and contextually relevant pedagogical innovations.

Keywords: Professional Competence, Christian Religious Education, Obedience

INTRODUCTION

The professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a vital role in shaping the moral character and obedience of students. In the Indonesian educational context, particularly at the secondary vocational level, teachers are not only expected to transfer knowledge but also to nurture values that cultivate responsible, disciplined, and faithful individuals. Within Christian pedagogy, this responsibility takes on a deeper dimension because education is inherently linked with spiritual formation. Students are guided to embody Christian virtues such as respect, discipline, humility, and integrity, which are indispensable for both personal growth and social harmony. Professional competence therefore extends beyond technical mastery of pedagogical skills to include moral integrity, theological depth, and the ability to inspire students to live out their faith in concrete actions (Permendiknas, 2007). In the case of CRE teachers, professionalism entails consistency between words and deeds, ensuring that teachers serve as role models for obedience in both academic and spiritual dimensions of life. From a biblical perspective, the apostle Paul's pastoral letters provide a rich theological foundation for understanding the role of teachers in fostering obedience and spiritual maturity. In 1 Timothy 4:12-16, Paul urges Timothy to set an example for believers "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity," while persistently devoting himself to teaching and exhortation. These verses highlight the centrality of exemplary living in the credibility and effectiveness of a teacher. Furthermore, Paul emphasizes perseverance and vigilance in teaching, underscoring that the salvation and growth of both teacher and students are interwoven with the integrity of instruction. Similarly, 1 Timothy 6:11-12 calls believers to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness," while fighting the good fight of faith. These exhortations frame the teacher's vocation as not merely cognitive but profoundly spiritual, demanding holistic dedication that equips others to obey Christ in daily life (Marshall, 2004; Towner, 2006). In this sense, the professional competence of CRE teachers cannot be separated from their spiritual calling as shepherds and equippers of the next generation. The relevance of this theological perspective becomes particularly pressing in contexts such as SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga, a state vocational school located in the multicultural coastal city of Sibolga. As a port city in North Sumatra, Sibolga is marked by ethnic and religious plurality, creating both opportunities and challenges for education. On the one hand, students are exposed to diverse cultural and religious traditions, which enrich their worldview. On the other hand, this plurality can generate tensions, peer pressure, and moral ambiguity, particularly among adolescents navigating identity formation in a rapidly changing society (Suryadi, 2021). Within such an environment, CRE teachers bear the responsibility of guiding students toward obedience, not only in terms of academic discipline but also in faithfulness to Christian values. Obedience here refers to an integrated disposition of respecting authority, practicing discipline, and adhering to Christian ethical principles, which provide stability in the midst of pluralistic influences. However, teachers often face competing expectations: to achieve academic targets aligned with the national curriculum, while simultaneously ensuring the cultivation of spiritual and moral values.

Despite the significance of these challenges, few studies have explicitly examined the intersection of professional competence of CRE teachers and the obedience of students, especially through the lens of biblical exegesis. While research on teacher competence is abundant in educational literature (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; König et al., 2020), most studies focus on general pedagogical skills, professional development, or digital literacy in the post-pandemic era. Likewise, research on Christian character formation in Indonesia tends to emphasize the role of family and church rather than the school context (Rohandi, 2021). What remains underexplored is how theological insights, particularly from 1 Timothy, can illuminate the professional responsibilities of CRE teachers and their influence on student obedience within pluralistic educational settings such as Sibolga. This research gap underscores the need for integrative studies that bridge exegesis and educational practice, thereby offering a holistic framework for teacher professionalism in CRE. The present study seeks to examine how the exegesis of 1 Timothy informs the professional competence of CRE teachers and its influence on student obedience at SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga. Specifically, the research is guided by three questions. First, what theological insights can be drawn from 1 Timothy concerning the role of teachers in guiding obedience? Second, how is the professional competence of CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga manifested in their classroom practices and interactions with students? Third, in what ways does this competence shape the obedience of students in both academic and spiritual domains? Addressing these questions will not only contribute to the development of contextual strategies for CRE teachers but also enrich the broader discourse on the integration of biblical exegesis with educational praxis in Indonesia. By situating biblical exegesis within the lived realities of a pluralistic urban school, this study aims to highlight that professional competence in CRE is not an abstract ideal but a practical necessity for shaping student obedience in contemporary contexts. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for teacher training, educational policy, and church-based initiatives that support Christian educators in fulfilling their dual role as professionals and spiritual mentors. In doing so, the study affirms that obedience, as envisioned in 1 Timothy, remains a vital marker of Christian education—one that bridges the ancient biblical mandate with the pressing demands of twenty-first-century schooling.

METHODS

A case study design was used in order to explore the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and its influence on student obedience within a specific contextual setting. A case study method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth and holistic investigation of a bounded system, namely the pedagogical practices and theological orientation of CRE teachers in a particular school environment (Yin, 2018). By focusing on SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga, a state vocational school located in the multicultural port city of Sibolga, the research situates the interplay of biblical exegesis and educational practice within a concrete and diverse social reality. This locus is particularly relevant because Sibolga's pluralistic context poses unique challenges for CRE, requiring teachers to cultivate student obedience while maintaining respect for diversity and fostering Christian identity (Suryadi, 2021). An exegetical study of 1 Timothy was conducted using both historical-critical and literary methods. The historical-critical analysis sought to understand the socio-religious context of the Pastoral Epistles, particularly the challenges

of false teaching, spiritual leadership, and moral conduct addressed by Paul. Meanwhile, the literary analysis examined key passages such as 1 Timothy 4:12–16 and 6:11–12, focusing on themes of example, perseverance, and responsibility as they relate to the vocation of teachers (Marshall, 2004; Towner, 2006). These exegetical insights provided the theological framework for interpreting the field data. Classroom observations were carried out to examine how CRE teachers translated their professional competence into practice. Attention was given to lesson delivery, integration of biblical values, classroom management, and strategies for nurturing student discipline and obedience. Observations also included extracurricular activities such as spiritual formation programs, which often serve as extensions of formal classroom teaching. Interviews were conducted with multiple stakeholders, including CRE teachers, students, and the school principal. Semi-structured interview guides were used to explore perceptions of teacher competence, experiences of classroom instruction, and the observable influence on student behavior and obedience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method allowed participants to articulate their perspectives while also enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific themes. The documents provided complementary evidence regarding the alignment between curriculum design, teaching practices, and the objectives of character formation. The exegetical findings from 1 Timothy were analyzed through a hermeneutical-theological approach, ensuring that the interpretation remained faithful to the biblical text while drawing connections to contemporary pedagogy (Wright, 2013). This theological layer of analysis provided normative insights into the role of teachers as exemplars and mentors of obedience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The integration of these two streams of analysis allowed for a dialogue between the biblical text and the lived experiences of teachers and students at SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga. Informants were conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm accuracy and credibility of interpretations. Deep review was carried out by consulting with colleagues in theology and education to evaluate both the exegetical conclusions and the educational implications, thereby minimizing researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These measures enhanced the trustworthiness of the research and ensured that the findings faithfully represented both the biblical foundation and the practical realities of CRE in a pluralistic context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The pastoral letters, particularly 1 Timothy, provide an indispensable theological framework for understanding the responsibilities of Christian educators and the moral-spiritual outcomes expected from their students. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul exhorts Timothy to be an example “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.” This exhortation captures the holistic nature of leadership in Christian education, emphasizing that a teacher’s life cannot be divorced from their teaching. Speech is central because it frames the moral imagination of learners. When Christian teachers consistently use language that reflects truth, compassion, and encouragement, they create a moral and spiritual environment that fosters obedience to God’s word and to legitimate authority structures in the school setting (Marshall, 1999). Conduct complements speech, demonstrating that values are not only taught but lived. Students are more likely to internalize obedience when they see congruence between the values taught in Christian Religious Education

(CRE) classes and the personal integrity of their teachers (Mounce, 2000). The dimension of love, mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:12, underscores the relational ethos of Christian education. For students in vocational schools such as SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga, who navigate academic and professional challenges within a pluralistic society, experiencing genuine love and care from their CRE teachers becomes a formative catalyst for obedience and character formation. Similarly, faith is not only personal conviction but also a pedagogical posture. A teacher who demonstrates trust in God amid challenges communicates a model of perseverance and reliance that encourages students to embody obedience as faith in action (Knight, 2006). Finally, purity functions as an essential virtue for teachers who minister to young people vulnerable to moral relativism and external influences, particularly in urban, multicultural settings like Sibolga. Teachers who embody purity provide a countercultural witness that inspires students to resist temptations and live obediently to biblical principles (Fee & Stuart, 2014). Paul's later admonition in 1 Timothy 4:16 - "watch your life and doctrine closely" - adds an essential emphasis on perseverance and doctrinal fidelity. In the teaching ministry, perseverance ensures that instruction is consistent, not sporadic or reactive. A CRE teacher who embodies perseverance models for students that obedience is not a temporary behavioral adjustment but a lifelong spiritual discipline (Towner, 2006). Integrity of doctrine also ensures that what is transmitted is faithful to the biblical witness rather than diluted by external pressures or pragmatic concerns. This alignment between sound teaching and consistent living functions as a safeguard for both teacher and student, as Paul promises that by doing so, Timothy will "save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16). 1 Timothy 6:11–12 exhorts believers to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness while fighting "the good fight of faith." This passage situates obedience not as passive conformity but as an active pursuit of virtues that characterize Christian discipleship. For CRE teachers, this text implies that instilling obedience in students is not achieved through authoritarian demands but through cultivating habits of spiritual struggle and moral discipline. Students learn that obedience involves resisting negative peer influence, digital distractions, and moral compromise, while positively embodying discipline, respect, and faithfulness in both school and home contexts (Johnson, 2010). Taken together, these exegetical insights form a theological foundation for CRE teachers in Sibolga, clarifying that their professional competence must extend beyond technical mastery to include the embodiment of biblical virtues. Students' obedience is not merely behavioral compliance but the fruit of a consistent spiritual and pedagogical witness rooted in Scripture.

Professional Competence of CRE Teachers

The professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers encompasses both pedagogical and spiritual dimensions, forming an integrated foundation for effective teaching and student formation (Panjaitan, 2016). Pedagogically, teachers are required to master biblical content and communicate it through methods that are both contextually relevant and pedagogically sound. In Sibolga's vocational school context, where students are prepared for practical careers, CRE teachers need to creatively integrate biblical principles with vocational relevance, showing students how Christian obedience applies in workplaces, communities, and family life. For instance, lessons on integrity are directly connected to vocational ethics, helping students realize that faithfulness in small tasks,

punctuality, and honesty are not merely institutional demands but reflections of biblical obedience (Palmer, 1998). From a professional perspective, integrity, responsibility, and spiritual commitment are essential. Integrity manifests in aligning professional responsibilities with personal convictions, ensuring that teachers avoid duplicity between their public teaching and private lives. Responsibility reflects in their dedication to lesson preparation, classroom management, and student mentoring. In turn, spiritual commitment ensures that teaching is not reduced to secular moralism but remains rooted in Christ-centered transformation (Knight, 2006). This holistic professionalism is vital because students in transitional adolescence are sensitive to inconsistencies in adult authority. Teachers who display consistency between word and deed are more likely to gain credibility, which in turn nurtures student obedience. Several challenges hinder the full realization of professional competence. Teachers in Sibolga face limited access to updated theological resources and professional development opportunities. Administrative burdens often consume time that could otherwise be invested in spiritual mentoring or innovative teaching practices. Furthermore, the pluralistic environment poses challenges in communicating Christian distinctiveness without appearing intolerant or exclusive. Teachers must balance affirming Christian identity with fostering interreligious respect, a tension that requires wisdom, humility, and professional skill (Banks, 2016).

Students' Obedience

The influence of competent CRE teachers on students' obedience manifests in observable behavioral and attitudinal outcomes. Field evidence from classroom observations and interviews at SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga indicates that students taught by teachers who model integrity and spiritual commitment demonstrate higher levels of discipline in worship practices. For example, students regularly attend devotional gatherings, participate actively in class prayers, and display a readiness to apply biblical principles to peer interactions. This behavioral pattern affirms that obedience is not limited to formal compliance but emerges as a lived expression of Christian values (Lickona, 1991). Respect for authority also emerges as a significant indicator. Students consistently report that they feel respected by their teachers, which in turn motivates reciprocal respect for teachers and parents. The relational dynamic modeled by CRE teachers - marked by patience, empathy, and firmness - becomes a mirror for students' relationships within their families and communities. As Paul highlighted in 1 Timothy 4:12, exemplary conduct is as influential as doctrinal teaching in shaping obedience. The influence of digital technology introduces distractions that compete with biblical teachings, encouraging instant gratification and weakening attention spans. Students also face peer pressure that normalizes disobedience, whether in the form of neglecting school rules or resisting parental guidance. These external factors highlight the need for CRE teachers to integrate digital literacy and critical reflection into lessons, equipping students to resist harmful influences while remaining rooted in biblical obedience (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). The holistic nature of student obedience requires more than classroom teaching. Interviews reveal that students whose families and church communities actively support Christian education demonstrate higher consistency in obedience. This finding confirms

that CRE teachers alone cannot shoulder the entire burden; rather, obedience emerges through a collaborative ecosystem of school, church, and family (Astika, 2021).

The multicultural setting of Sibolga presents both challenges and opportunities for Christian Religious Education. On one hand, pluralism requires teachers to carefully articulate the uniqueness of Christian obedience while fostering respect for peers from different religious backgrounds. Tensions may arise when Christian convictions about obedience conflict with societal norms or peer behaviors. For instance, students may struggle to reconcile school rules grounded in biblical principles with external pressures that trivialize discipline or integrity. Teachers, therefore, must cultivate an inclusive classroom ethos where tolerance and respect coexist with Christian distinctiveness (Clarke, 2006). Resource limitations also challenge CRE delivery at SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga. With limited textbooks, insufficient access to digital resources, and modest facilities for spiritual formation, teachers often rely on creativity and personal commitment to sustain effective learning. However, these limitations also open opportunities for innovation. Teachers have developed contextualized teaching methods such as storytelling, role-playing, and community service projects that integrate character education with biblical obedience (Palmer, 1998). These methods align well with Indonesia's national curriculum emphasis on character education, creating synergies between state educational goals and Christian spirituality. The church and family play a vital supportive role. Churches in Sibolga, despite denominational diversity, provide supplementary programs such as youth fellowships, Bible study groups, and community outreach, which reinforce school-based CRE lessons. Families that intentionally practice Christian devotions and model obedience in daily life contribute to students' holistic formation. The partnership of these institutions highlights that while CRE teachers are pivotal, obedience as a spiritual virtue requires an ecosystem of support (Lickona, 1991).

Conclusion

The exegetical study of 1 Timothy provides a compelling theological framework for understanding the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in shaping the obedience and character of students. Paul's exhortations to Timothy underscore that the essence of teaching ministry is not confined to academic competence or intellectual authority alone, but is inseparably linked with the teacher's spiritual and moral integrity. By calling Timothy to be an example "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12), and to persevere in life and doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), the biblical text emphasizes that educators are first and foremost witnesses of the faith they proclaim. Similarly, the exhortation in 1 Timothy 6:11–12, which speaks of pursuing righteousness and fighting the good fight of faith, reinforces that obedience cannot be transmitted through mere words but must be embodied in the life of the teacher. For CRE in contemporary Indonesian schools, these exegetical insights remind us that competence is multidimensional: it is intellectual, professional, spiritual, and moral. The findings from the locus of SMK Negeri 1 Sibolga affirm the practical relevance of this biblical vision. Teachers who demonstrate professionalism in both their pedagogical practices and their personal lives exert a significant influence on students' obedience. Observations and interviews show that students respond positively to teachers who embody integrity, responsibility, and commitment. Their obedience is not only manifested in compliance

with school regulations but also in the cultivation of deeper habits of respect, discipline, and faithfulness. In a multicultural urban context such as Sibolga, where students are exposed to diverse values, digital distractions, and peer pressures, the consistency of teachers' professional and spiritual witness becomes an anchor for students seeking moral direction. Thus, the study concludes that the professional competence of CRE teachers is not a peripheral factor but a central determinant in fostering student obedience. Teachers face resource limitations, heavy administrative responsibilities, and the complexities of navigating a pluralistic learning environment. These realities highlight the urgent need for strategic interventions that support and strengthen the role of CRE teachers. Based on the insights gained, three recommendations are proposed. First, there should be systematic teacher training programs that are grounded in theological and exegetical reflection. Rather than treating professional development as merely technical, such programs should cultivate the integration of biblical virtues with pedagogical skills, enabling teachers to teach with depth and authenticity. Second, collaboration among schools, churches, and families must be intentionally fostered. Obedience and character formation cannot be the task of the classroom alone but require a shared responsibility across the wider Christian community. Strengthening this triadic partnership ensures that the values taught in school are reinforced in church and practiced in the family setting. Third, pedagogical innovation should be pursued to make CRE both contextually relevant and engaging. Storytelling, project-based learning, and the integration of character education with vocational training are promising pathways that can address the unique challenges of vocational students in Sibolga. This study highlights that CRE teachers carry a sacred and strategic responsibility that transcends technical instruction. Their professional competence, deeply rooted in Scripture and embodied in moral-spiritual integrity, plays a decisive role in shaping students who are not only obedient to school norms but also committed to living faithfully as disciples of Christ. By investing in theological training, collaborative support systems, and innovative pedagogy, the vision of 1 Timothy for Christian educators can be realized in contemporary contexts, enabling CRE to be a transformative force in both education and society.

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