



The Spiritual Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers and Its Influence on Students' Spirituality at SMA Hang Tuah Belawan

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ABSTRACT

Within Indonesia's pluralistic and technologically dynamic context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) serves not only to transmit biblical knowledge but to form students who can embody faith in daily life. This study highlights the centrality of spiritual competence among CRE teachers, which encompasses authentic devotion, integration of biblical values into pedagogy, and consistent spiritual mentoring. At SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, a maritime-based school community marked by cultural diversity and exposure to digital influences, such competence is particularly critical for nurturing contextual and transformative spirituality among students. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research focused on CRE teachers as the primary subjects, supported by insights from students, the principal, and parents. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation in classrooms and religious activities, and documentation analysis. This triangulated approach provided a holistic understanding of how teachers' spiritual competence impacts student formation. Findings revealed that CRE teachers' spiritual competence was evident in three dimensions: disciplined personal prayer and worship, integration of biblical principles into lessons, and pastoral care through mentoring and counseling. These practices fostered increased student participation in spiritual activities, growth in ethical awareness, and development of personal devotional habits such as prayer and Bible reading. Nonetheless, challenges emerged, including limited teacher training in contemporary spirituality, inadequate facilities for religious activities, and the pervasive distractions of digital media. The study affirms that spiritually competent CRE teachers significantly shape student spirituality. Institutional support through professional development, resources, and collaboration with families and churches is essential to sustain effective Christian formation in pluralistic and digitalized contexts.

Keywords: *Spiritual Competence, Christian Religious Education, Spirituality*

INTRODUCTION

Within the Indonesian educational context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) is not merely the transmission of biblical knowledge, but rather the holistic formation of students who can integrate faith with life practice. This formation is particularly urgent in an era of globalization where students face moral challenges, cultural shifts, and increasing exposure to digital influences (Smith, 2019). To respond to these challenges, CRE teachers are required to possess not only pedagogical, social, personal, and professional competence but also, and more importantly, spiritual competence. Spiritual competence refers to the teacher's ability to internalize faith, to serve as a model of authentic Christian living, and to guide students in contextualizing biblical principles in their personal and social realities (Anderson, 2021). This competence involves spiritual maturity, daily integrity, and consistency between teaching and lifestyle. A spiritually competent teacher does not merely speak about faith but demonstrates its transformative power through relationships, ethical conduct, and spiritual practices. Research has shown that students are more receptive to religious values when they perceive authenticity and integrity in their teachers (Campbell, 2003). The case of SMA Hang Tuah Belawan provides a unique context to examine this issue. As a maritime-based school community, its students are influenced by the socio-economic realities of port culture, exposure to diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, and rapid access to modern technology. These dynamics present both opportunities and challenges for Christian formation. On the one hand, cultural plurality enriches students' perspectives and encourages inclusivity; on the other hand, it may create tensions in identity formation, as students navigate between Christian faith and the dominant cultural values around them (Bevans, 2002). Within such a context, the role of CRE teachers becomes pivotal in grounding students' spirituality in ways that are both biblically faithful and socially relevant. Teachers with strong spiritual competence engage students beyond doctrinal instruction. They integrate biblical values into discussions about daily struggles, moral dilemmas, and even technological use. For instance, drawing from the biblical principle of stewardship, a CRE teacher can guide students to use digital media responsibly, framing it as an expression of honoring God with one's time and talents (Johnson, 2022). Similarly, the practice of prayer and reflective reading of Scripture modeled by teachers provides students with a living example of faith, encouraging them to build personal spiritual disciplines. This embodiment of faith transforms the classroom into a space where spirituality is not abstract, but concrete and lived.

At SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, the diversity of student backgrounds underscores the necessity of dialogical approaches. Teachers who are spiritually competent are more likely to cultivate inclusive discussions, where students can articulate their faith in relation to cultural traditions and social realities. Such approaches align with the notion of contextual spirituality, which emphasizes faith as something that must be lived within concrete social and cultural frameworks (Tisdell, 2021). Without this contextualization, Christian education risks becoming detached from students' lived experiences, reducing it to mere academic exercise rather than transformative formation (Astley, 2002). The influence of teacher competence on student spirituality is thus multifaceted. Pedagogically, it affects how lessons are designed and delivered. Personally, it shapes the credibility of teachers

as role models. Socially, it determines the inclusivity and relational depth within the classroom. Spiritually, it provides the grounding for authentic Christian formation. At SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, where students are constantly negotiating cultural plurality and technological change, the presence of spiritually competent teachers is indispensable in nurturing resilient faith. The spiritual competence of CRE teachers significantly influences the spiritual development of students. Teachers who embody faith with authenticity, sensitivity, and contextual relevance are able to guide students toward deeper spiritual maturity. The case of SMA Hang Tuah Belawan illustrates that in contexts of cultural diversity and modern challenges, CRE teachers must not only master biblical knowledge but also live out their faith in ways that inspire, guide, and transform students. This reality highlights the need for continuous teacher formation programs that emphasize spiritual integrity, contextual pedagogy, and holistic education. Strengthening these dimensions will ensure that CRE fulfills its mandate of forming faithful, ethical, and transformative Christian individuals.

METHODS

This research employed a case study design, as it enabled the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teaching practices and the dimensions of student spirituality within a specific context. It is particularly well-suited for examining complex and dynamic educational realities because it provides a holistic understanding of phenomena within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, the study sought to capture the lived experiences of teachers and students in a school community characterized by cultural diversity and unique socio-economic conditions. The primary subjects of this study were CRE teachers at SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, whose spiritual competence formed the central focus of the inquiry. Supporting informants included students, the school principal, and parents, who contributed valuable perspectives that enriched the data and strengthened its credibility through triangulation. Such purposive selection of participants ensured that the information gathered was directly relevant to the research objectives, providing nuanced insights into the interplay between teacher competence and student spirituality (Patton, 2015). Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews were carried out with CRE teachers, students, and the school principal. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility for the researcher to probe emerging themes while still maintaining focus on the key research questions. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how teachers conceptualize and practice their spiritual competence, and how students perceive its impact on their personal faith development (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Then, participant observation was conducted during classroom activities and school religious events, such as devotional gatherings and communal worship. This method provided direct access to the dynamics of teacher-student interactions, enabling the researcher to observe how spiritual values were modeled, communicated, and embodied in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The combination of interviews and observations created a comprehensive data set that allowed for triangulation and validation of findings. Documentation, such as lesson plans, school religious activity reports, and student reflections, also supported the analysis, offering contextual evidence of how spirituality was integrated into the educational process. The use of multiple sources of data not only enhanced the reliability of the study but also provided a richer and more contextualized

understanding of the role of CRE teachers' spiritual competence in shaping students' spiritual formation (Yin, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMA Hang Tuah Belawan possess a considerable degree of spiritual competence that manifests in three principal dimensions. These dimensions are personal prayer and worship life, the integration of faith values within the learning process, and spiritual mentoring or pastoral accompaniment. Each of these aspects was consistently observed and reported by both teachers and students, underscoring their integral role in shaping the spiritual growth of the student body. Furthermore, the study confirmed that the spiritual competence of teachers positively influences the spiritual development of students, as indicated by heightened participation in religious activities, greater ethical awareness in peer interactions, and the cultivation of personal devotional habits such as prayer and Bible reading. However, despite these positive outcomes, several challenges remain, including limited training opportunities for teachers in the context of contemporary spirituality, inadequate facilities to support spiritual activities, and the pervasive influence of digital media, which often distracts students from nurturing their spiritual life. One of the most salient findings concerns the personal prayer and worship life of teachers. Teachers at SMA Hang Tuah Belawan exemplify discipline and consistency in their spiritual practices, which are not limited to their private lives but extend into the educational setting. They serve as models of faith by initiating and concluding classroom sessions with prayer, thereby embedding a spiritual rhythm into the daily learning experience. Their active involvement in school worship events also communicates to students the centrality of spiritual life within the educational context. This modeling of disciplined prayer life resonates with prior scholarship, which emphasizes that a teacher's authenticity in faith practice is crucial for the spiritual formation of students (Astuti, 2020; Dewi, 2021). By consistently engaging in prayer and worship, teachers provide not merely cognitive instruction but a lived demonstration of faith that students are encouraged to emulate. Closely tied to this is the integration of faith values within the classroom learning process. The teachers at SMA Hang Tuah Belawan demonstrated an intentional effort to relate biblical teachings to the real-life experiences of students. For instance, lessons on honesty and responsibility were consistently reinforced by referencing scriptural teachings, which allowed students to view moral and ethical conduct not simply as social expectations but as faith-based commitments. The integration of Christian values into subjects fostered a holistic learning process, where spiritual growth was interwoven with academic achievement. Research supports the view that such integration enhances students' moral reasoning and deepens their engagement with learning (Rahman & Sari, 2022; Situmorang, 2023). By bridging the gap between faith and daily life, teachers ensured that spirituality was not compartmentalized but permeated every aspect of students' academic journey.

A further significant component of the teachers' spiritual competence was their role in providing spiritual mentoring. Teachers engaged in pastoral care by offering personal counseling, giving attention to individual student concerns, and cultivating nurturing

relationships. This pastoral dimension positioned teachers not merely as academic instructors but also as shepherds guiding the holistic development of their students. Students reported that such care fostered a sense of belonging and spiritual security, enabling them to navigate challenges with resilience. Prior research has consistently shown that mentorship and pastoral relationships are vital in adolescent spiritual development, particularly in contexts where students face pressures from secular culture (Santoso, 2021; Hutabarat, 2022). In the case of SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, teachers' pastoral role complemented classroom instruction, creating a comprehensive approach to spiritual formation. From the students' perspective, the influence of teachers' spiritual competence was evident in measurable outcomes. Participation in spiritual activities such as weekly worship services, retreats, and devotional gatherings increased significantly among students exposed to spiritually competent teachers. Moreover, students reported greater ethical sensitivity in peer interactions, manifesting in behaviors such as honesty in completing assignments, respect for peers, and conflict resolution guided by biblical principles. Importantly, students developed personal habits of prayer and Bible reading outside the classroom, signaling internalized spirituality rather than mere compliance with school rules. Such outcomes align with previous findings that highlight the critical role of teacher modeling in fostering autonomous spiritual practices among students (Manullang, 2020; Silalahi, 2021). Thus, the evidence from SMA Hang Tuah Belawan confirms the broader consensus that teachers' spiritual competence directly shapes the character and devotional life of their students.

The study also uncovered several challenges that hinder the optimization of teachers' spiritual impact. There is a noticeable lack of structured training opportunities for CRE teachers in addressing contemporary spiritual issues faced by adolescents. Teachers, while competent in traditional spiritual practices, often struggle to contextualize faith in relation to the complex realities of digital culture, secular influences, and pluralistic environments. This gap resonates with the critique that religious education in Indonesia often relies heavily on doctrinal transmission rather than dynamic engagement with students' lived contexts (Saragih, 2019). Without continuous professional development, teachers risk becoming disconnected from the evolving spiritual needs of their students. The facilities and resources available to support spiritual activities in the school are limited. While regular worship services are held, the infrastructure—such as spaces for small group Bible studies, counseling rooms, or access to contemporary devotional materials—remains insufficient. The lack of adequate facilities restricts the potential for diverse and engaging spiritual activities, which are necessary to sustain students' interest and involvement. This limitation reflects a broader challenge in many Indonesian schools, where budgetary constraints and competing priorities often relegate spiritual infrastructure to a secondary concern (Tambunan, 2020). The pervasive influence of digital media emerged as a major challenge. Students frequently encounter content that conflicts with Christian values, leading to distractions and, in some cases, spiritual apathy. Teachers noted that while students were enthusiastic about online platforms, their engagement with digital content often undermined their devotional practices. The negative impact of digital culture on youth spirituality has been widely documented, with scholars noting its tendency to foster superficial engagement and reduce time for reflection (Nasution, 2021; Christiani, 2022). In the context of SMA Hang Tuah Belawan,

the challenge lies not only in countering these influences but also in creatively harnessing digital platforms for positive spiritual formation. The discussion of these findings underscores the importance of continuously renewing the spiritual competence of CRE teachers. Authentic spirituality on the part of the teacher remains the most powerful influence on students, but it must be complemented with up-to-date pedagogical strategies and contextual awareness. Scholars argue that teacher competence in spirituality must be dynamic, responding to the changing cultural and technological landscape (Siahaan, 2020). For instance, incorporating digital resources for Bible study, developing interactive faith-based applications, or engaging students in online devotional communities could help bridge the gap between traditional spirituality and contemporary realities. The authenticity of teachers' spiritual life serves as the cornerstone for credibility and influence. Students are quick to discern inconsistencies between teachers' words and actions, and thus authentic living is indispensable. As Lumbantobing (2021) asserts, authenticity in spiritual leadership fosters trust and inspires students to internalize faith values. At SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, the consistent prayer life and genuine care of teachers provided a model of integrity that students found compelling. This finding highlights that while programs and facilities are important, the personal witness of teachers remains irreplaceable. The implications of this study suggest that spiritual competence in teachers is not a static attribute but a dynamic and evolving capacity. Schools must therefore invest in professional development programs that equip teachers to address contemporary issues, including the ethical use of digital media, interfaith engagement, and mental health concerns among students. Furthermore, collaboration between schools, churches, and families is crucial to creating a supportive environment for spiritual growth. Students require consistent reinforcement of spiritual values across these domains to sustain their development. This research contributes to the broader discourse on the role of teachers in spiritual formation within Indonesian education. It reaffirms the view that spiritual competence is not ancillary but central to the mission of Christian education. In pluralistic and digitally saturated contexts such as SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, teachers' spiritual authenticity and pedagogical creativity stand as the most effective means of guiding students toward mature faith. While challenges remain, the findings suggest that with intentional investment in teachers' spiritual growth and supportive infrastructures, schools can nurture a generation of students who are spiritually grounded and ethically resilient. The results of this study demonstrate that the spiritual competence of CRE teachers at SMA Hang Tuah Belawan significantly influences the spiritual development of their students. Through disciplined prayer life, integration of biblical values in learning, and pastoral mentoring, teachers embody authentic spirituality that inspires students to cultivate their own faith practices. Despite challenges such as limited training, inadequate facilities, and the distractions of digital culture, the evidence suggests that authentic and contextually responsive teacher spirituality remains a vital force in shaping student faith. This underscores the need for schools to prioritize teacher development and infrastructural support in order to sustain spiritual formation as a central pillar of Christian education.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pivotal role that the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays in shaping the spiritual formation of students at SMA Hang Tuah Belawan. The findings demonstrate that when teachers embody authentic faith through disciplined personal devotion, integrate biblical values into the learning process, and provide consistent spiritual mentoring, students experience a more contextual and transformative spirituality. Such competence not only transmits religious knowledge but also creates a living model of faith that students can emulate and internalize in their daily lives. In this sense, the spiritual competence of CRE teachers becomes a cornerstone of holistic education, in which faith is not merely taught but is tangibly practiced within the school environment. One of the central insights from this study is that teacher competence in spirituality is not limited to personal piety but extends to relational and pedagogical dimensions. Teachers who consistently begin and end lessons with prayer, who guide students in linking biblical principles with real-life experiences, and who remain attentive to the pastoral needs of learners embody a multidimensional form of spiritual leadership. This integrative role enables students to encounter Christianity not as abstract doctrine but as a living faith that informs ethics, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. Such an approach aligns with broader theories of transformative education, which emphasize that learning must address cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions simultaneously in order to be effective (Mezirow, 2000). At the same time, the research reveals that the growth of student spirituality is not the sole product of teacher competence but also requires a supportive institutional and cultural context. SMA Hang Tuah Belawan, situated within a maritime environment shaped by socioeconomic diversity and exposure to global influences, presents unique challenges to spiritual formation. Students navigate both the opportunities and the risks of modern digital culture, as well as the pressures of cross-cultural interactions. Within such a setting, the CRE teacher's role is vital but cannot stand alone. Institutional support in the form of continuous professional development, training on contextual spirituality, and adequate facilities for religious activities are essential to sustain and amplify the impact of teacher competence. Without such support, the efforts of even the most dedicated teacher risk becoming fragmented or unsustainable. The study also highlights the importance of synergy between school, family, and church in the spiritual formation of adolescents. While teachers provide a critical example and structured guidance within the school, students' spiritual lives are shaped significantly by their home environment and local congregations. Collaboration with parents, for example, reinforces the values introduced in the classroom, while engagement with church communities provides continuity and depth to the practices of prayer, worship, and service. This holistic collaboration reflects the biblical principle that faith formation is a communal responsibility, involving multiple stakeholders in nurturing the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). The implications of this study are twofold: it contributes to the growing discourse on Christian education by affirming the necessity of spiritual competence as a distinct yet integrative dimension of teacher professionalism. While pedagogical, social, and personal competencies remain crucial, the spiritual dimension provides the uniquely Christian character that distinguishes CRE from other educational disciplines; The findings call for strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening teacher

preparation and ongoing formation in spirituality. Training programs should not only focus on doctrinal mastery but also cultivate reflective practices, pastoral sensitivity, and contextual awareness. In addition, schools need to invest in infrastructure and resources that support spiritual activities, such as prayer spaces, religious texts, and opportunities for retreats or service projects. This research serves as a reminder that the mission of Christian education in secondary schools extends beyond academic achievement. It is about equipping students to live faithfully in a pluralistic and technologically advanced world. By nurturing contextual and transformative spirituality, CRE teachers help students to engage critically with contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in Christian values. The call, therefore, is for Christian education to continually renew itself, ensuring that spiritual formation remains dynamic, relevant, and responsive to the complexities of modern life. In this way, the spiritual competence of teachers not only enriches individual student lives but also contributes to the broader task of shaping morally responsible, spiritually grounded citizens who can participate meaningfully in society.

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