



The Professionalism of Christian Religious Education Teachers and Christian Work Ethic: A Study of Philippians 3:13-14 at SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola

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ABSTRACT

Teacher professionalism has become an essential issue in contemporary education, particularly in relation to ethical responsibility, work commitment, and moral integrity. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), professionalism is inseparable from faith-based values that shape teachers' understanding of vocation, service, and excellence. This study aims to examine the professionalism of CRE teachers through the lens of Christian work ethic as articulated in Philippians 3:13-14, focusing on the context of SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola, South Tapanuli. Employing a qualitative design, this research integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of international scholarly sources with semi-structured interviews conducted with two Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. The SLR provides a theoretical framework emphasizing commitment, perseverance, ethical responsibility, and continuous professional growth, while interview data offer contextual insights into professional practice within a public-school environment. The findings indicate that teacher professionalism is understood not merely as technical competence or compliance with institutional standards, but as a faith-informed vocation grounded in responsibility, resilience, and dedication. Philippians 3:13-14 emerges as a significant theological foundation, shaping teachers' professional identity through the values of perseverance, purposeful striving, and lifelong growth. This study concludes that Christian work ethic functions as a sustaining moral foundation for professionalism in CRE, enabling teachers to serve with integrity and excellence. The findings contribute to the discourse on teacher professionalism by bridging educational theory and Christian theology, offering implications for CRE teacher development in public-school contexts.

Keywords: *The Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Ethic*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professionalism has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in relation to ethical responsibility, work commitment, and instructional quality. In modern education systems, professionalism is no longer defined solely by pedagogical competence or academic qualifications, but also by teachers'

attitudes, work ethic, and moral responsibility toward students and society. Research in international educational literature consistently emphasizes that professional teachers demonstrate commitment, responsibility, continuous self-improvement, and ethical integrity in carrying out their duties (Campbell, 2017; Day et al., 2006). These dimensions of professionalism are especially significant in religious education, where teachers are expected to integrate moral values into both teaching practice and personal conduct. Within Christian Religious Education (CRE), professionalism is inseparable from faith-based values that shape teachers' understanding of vocation, service, and excellence. CRE teachers are not only educators but also moral agents who embody Christian principles in their daily work. One of the foundational values in Christian pedagogy is the Christian work ethic, which emphasizes diligence, perseverance, responsibility, and wholehearted dedication as expressions of faith. Studies in character and moral education indicate that when teachers internalize ethical values as part of their professional identity, they are more likely to demonstrate consistency, resilience, and commitment in their educational roles (Arthur et al., 2015; Carr, 2018). The biblical text of Philippians 3:13-14 provides a strong theological foundation for understanding Christian work ethic in relation to professionalism. In this passage, the Apostle Paul speaks of forgetting what lies behind and pressing forward toward the goal, emphasizing perseverance, focus, and commitment to a higher calling. Biblical scholars interpret this text as an expression of disciplined effort and purposeful living rooted in faith (Fee, 2011). When applied to the educational context, Philippians 3:13-14 offers a framework for understanding teaching as a calling that requires continuous growth, self-discipline, and dedication to excellence. For CRE teachers, professionalism can thus be understood not merely as compliance with institutional standards but as faithful stewardship of one's vocation.

In public school contexts such as SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola, South Tapanuli, the professionalism of CRE teachers gains particular importance. With approximately 150 Christian students and only two Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher, these educators carry significant responsibility in nurturing students' spiritual and moral development within a diverse educational environment. In such settings, teacher professionalism is closely linked to how teachers demonstrate work ethic, responsibility, and ethical behavior in ways that are inclusive and respectful. Educational research highlights that teachers working in minority contexts often serve as key role models whose professional conduct shapes students' attitudes toward learning, discipline, and moral responsibility (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). International studies published in Taylor & Francis and SpringerLink further indicate that work ethic is a core dimension of teacher professionalism. Teachers who exhibit perseverance, self-regulation, and commitment to continuous improvement tend to foster positive learning environments and higher student motivation (Day et al., 2006; Campbell, 2017). From a moral education perspective, professionalism grounded in ethical conviction contributes to students' character formation by modeling values such as responsibility, diligence, and purposefulness (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). Much of the existing research approaches professionalism from secular or policy-driven frameworks, leaving a gap in understanding how scriptural values inform teachers' professional identity and work practices. This gap suggests the need for research that bridges educational theory and Christian theology, offering a more holistic understanding of professionalism in CRE. This study aims to

examine the professionalism of Christian Religious Education teachers and Christian work ethic through the lens of Philippians 3:13-14, focusing on SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola, South Tapanuli. By integrating theological reflection with insights from international educational research, this study seeks to contribute to the discourse on teacher professionalism, Christian pedagogy, and ethical work practices. The findings are expected to provide valuable implications for CRE teacher development, emphasizing professionalism as a faith-informed commitment to excellence, perseverance, and responsible service in education.

METHODS

A combination of qualitative and SLR approach was chosen to ensure both conceptual rigor and contextual relevance in examining the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the embodiment of Christian work ethic. The SLR provided a strong theoretical foundation derived from international scholarly literature, while interviews offered empirical insights into how professionalism and work ethic are understood and practiced in a real educational setting. The Systematic Literature Review was conducted following established qualitative synthesis procedures in educational research. Academic sources were retrieved exclusively from reputable international publishers and databases. Search keywords included combinations of: teacher professionalism, Christian work ethic, teacher ethics, moral commitment in education, Christian education, and professional identity of teachers. Only English-language publications with full-text availability were included. Selected literature was analyzed, focusing on recurring concepts such as professional commitment, perseverance, responsibility, and ethical motivation. These themes were later used as analytical categories for interpreting interview data and aligning empirical findings with the theological framework of Philippians 3:13-14. To complement the SLR, simple semi-structured interviews were conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola, South Tapanuli. The participants consisted of two Christian teachers, including one Christian Religious Education teacher, selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in Christian education and their responsibility for guiding Christian students. The interviews aimed to explore teachers' perspectives on professionalism and Christian work ethic in their daily educational practice. Interviews were conducted in an informal and reflective manner to encourage honest responses. Data from the SLR and interviews were analyzed using an integrated thematic analysis approach. Themes identified from the literature, such as perseverance, professional commitment, ethical responsibility, and vocational calling, were used to guide the interpretation of interview findings. This integrative process enabled meaningful comparison between theoretical insights and practical experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an integrated discussion of the findings derived from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews conducted with Christian teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola, South Tapanuli. The analysis focuses on how teacher professionalism is shaped and expressed through Christian work ethic, interpreted through the theological lens of Philippians 3:13-14. The integration of theoretical insights

and empirical data allows for a comprehensive understanding of professionalism as both a pedagogical and faith-informed construct. One of the dominant themes emerging from both the literature review and interview findings is professionalism as a form of committed responsibility. Interviewed teachers consistently described professionalism as faithfulness in carrying out teaching duties, including lesson preparation, classroom management, assessment, and student mentoring. Professionalism was perceived not merely as adherence to institutional regulations but as moral responsibility toward students' academic and personal development. This finding aligns with international educational research emphasizing that professionalism involves a strong sense of responsibility and accountability grounded in ethical commitment (Campbell, 2017; Day et al., 2006). Studies reviewed in the SLR highlight that teachers who internalize professionalism as a moral obligation demonstrate greater consistency, discipline, and reliability in their work. In this study, teachers linked their professional commitment to a sense of calling, reflecting the Christian understanding of work as service rather than mere occupation. Philippians 3:13–14 provides a theological framework that reinforces this understanding. Paul's exhortation to "press on toward the goal" reflects perseverance and unwavering commitment, which teachers interpreted as motivation to remain responsible despite challenges. Thus, professionalism emerges as a sustained commitment rooted in faith-driven responsibility.

Interview data reveal that teachers view perseverance as essential in facing challenges such as limited resources, high workloads, and the responsibility of guiding Christian students within a public-school environment. Teachers emphasized that professional endurance is strengthened by faith and a clear sense of purpose. The SLR supports this finding by highlighting perseverance as a central dimension of work ethic and professional identity. Research published in Taylor & Francis and SpringerLink indicates that teachers who demonstrate resilience and long-term commitment tend to maintain higher professional standards and foster stable learning environments (Day et al., 2006; Carr, 2018). Perseverance, in this sense, is not passive endurance but active striving for continuous improvement. Philippians 3:13-14 strongly resonates with this theme, portraying perseverance as an intentional pursuit of growth and excellence. Teachers in this study interpreted the biblical text as encouragement to move forward without being hindered by past failures or limitations. This theological perspective reinforces the understanding of professionalism as an ongoing process rather than a fixed achievement. Findings also indicate that continuous professional growth is perceived as an integral part of professionalism and Christian work ethic. Teachers acknowledged the importance of self-reflection, learning from experience, and improving instructional practices. Professional growth was understood not only in terms of technical competence but also moral maturity and spiritual discipline. This perception is consistent with international literature emphasizing lifelong learning as a hallmark of professional teachers (Arthur et al., 2015). The SLR highlights that professional identity is strengthened when teachers engage in reflective practice and remain open to development. In Christian education, this growth is often motivated by a desire to honor God through excellence in work. The theological motif of "pressing on" in Philippians 3:13-14 supports the idea of continuous development. Teachers interpreted this passage as a call to avoid complacency and to pursue higher standards in teaching practice. Thus, Christian work ethic functions as an

internal motivation for professional growth rather than external compliance. The context of SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola, with approximately 150 Christian students and only two Christian teachers, adds a distinctive dimension to the findings. Teachers emphasized that professionalism includes maintaining ethical conduct, respect, and inclusivity within a pluralistic environment. Professionalism was expressed through respectful communication, fairness, and cooperation with colleagues of different religious backgrounds. This finding aligns with studies on teacher professionalism in diverse educational contexts, which emphasize ethical sensitivity and social responsibility as key professional attributes (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). The SLR indicates that faith-based values, when expressed through professional conduct, contribute positively to school culture without fostering exclusivity. Christian work ethic, grounded in Philippians 3:13-14, was interpreted by teachers as motivation to serve with humility and integrity rather than assert religious identity overtly. This reinforces the idea that professionalism in Christian Religious Education is best demonstrated through ethical excellence and responsible service.

Although this study did not directly measure student outcomes quantitatively, interview findings suggest perceived positive influences on students' learning attitudes. Teachers observed that consistent professionalism and disciplined work habits encouraged students to develop responsibility, perseverance, and respect for learning. Teachers noted that students were more motivated and disciplined when teachers modeled commitment and dedication. These observations align with character education research emphasizing that students learn work-related values through modeling rather than instruction alone (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). The integration of professional behavior and Christian work ethic thus contributes indirectly to students' character formation. The integrated findings demonstrate that the professionalism of Christian Religious Education teachers is deeply intertwined with Christian work ethic. Commitment, perseverance, continuous improvement, and ethical responsibility emerged as key dimensions of professionalism, reinforced by the theological message of Philippians 3:13-14. The convergence of SLR insights and interview data confirms that professionalism in Christian education is not merely technical competence but a faith-informed pursuit of excellence and responsible service. This study contributes to the discourse on teacher professionalism by highlighting the relevance of biblical perspectives in shaping professional identity, particularly within public-school contexts. The findings affirm that Christian work ethic functions as a sustaining moral foundation for professionalism, enabling teachers to serve with dedication, resilience, and integrity.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the embodiment of Christian work ethic through the theological lens of Philippians 3:13-14, situated at SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola, South Tapanuli. By integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with simple semi-structured interviews, the research provides both theoretical depth and contextual insight into how professionalism is understood and practiced within a public senior high school environment. The findings reveal that teacher professionalism is closely linked to Christian work ethic, particularly in

the dimensions of commitment, perseverance, responsibility, and continuous self-improvement. Professionalism was not perceived merely as technical competence or institutional compliance, but as a faith-informed vocation characterized by dedication and ethical responsibility toward students. Teachers demonstrated that professional conduct is sustained by internal motivation rooted in Christian values, enabling them to remain resilient and focused despite challenges inherent in public-school contexts. Grounded in Philippians 3:13-14, this study highlights perseverance and purposeful striving as central theological foundations for professional identity. The biblical exhortation to “press on toward the goal” was interpreted by teachers as encouragement to pursue excellence, avoid complacency, and engage in lifelong professional growth. This theological framework enriches contemporary discussions of professionalism by framing work not only as obligation but as meaningful service and stewardship. The context of SMA Negeri 1 Batang Angkola further underscores the relevance of professionalism grounded in Christian work ethic. With a limited number of Christian teachers serving a substantial population of Christian students within a diverse school environment, professionalism expressed through ethical conduct, inclusivity, and disciplined work practices contributes positively to school culture. Such professionalism demonstrates that Christian values can be lived out authentically through respectful and responsible engagement in public education. This study is limited by its small number of interview participants and the absence of direct measurement of student outcomes. Future research may expand this inquiry by employing mixed-method approaches, larger samples, or longitudinal designs to further examine the relationship between teacher professionalism, Christian work ethic, and student development. This study affirms that Christian work ethic, as articulated in Philippians 3:13-14, provides a meaningful foundation for teacher professionalism in Christian Religious Education. When professionalism is grounded in perseverance, commitment, and ethical responsibility, it becomes a powerful expression of faith in action, contributing to both educational quality and character formation within contemporary schooling contexts.

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