



## Pedagogical Spirituality in Christian Religious Education: A Study Based on Matthew 6:21 on UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines pedagogical spirituality in Christian Religious Education (CRE) through the lens of Matthew 6:21 at UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil, Dairi, Indonesia. Pedagogical spirituality is understood as the integration of teachers' spiritual orientation, relational practices, character modeling, and the intentional integration of faith and learning. Grounded in biblical theology and Christian education theory, this study seeks to analyze how students perceive the manifestation of pedagogical spirituality in daily classroom practice and how such perceptions relate to the learning environment. A quantitative research design with a descriptive-correlational approach was employed. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 99 Christian students. The instrument measured four dimensions of pedagogical spirituality: spiritual orientation of teaching, relational spirituality, modeling of Christian character, and integration of faith and learning. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to identify patterns and relationships between pedagogical spirituality and students' engagement and perceived spiritual classroom climate. The findings indicate that students generally perceive high levels of pedagogical spirituality across all measured dimensions. Teachers are viewed as consistently integrating spiritual values into instruction, demonstrating relational care, modeling Christian character, and connecting faith with daily learning experiences. Inferential results suggest positive associations between pedagogical spirituality and students' engagement and sense of belonging, highlighting the pedagogical significance of spiritually grounded teaching. The findings underscore the importance of teacher development programs that intentionally integrate spiritual formation with pedagogical and relational competencies.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Spirituality, Christian Religious Education, Matthew 6:21*

### INTRODUCTION

Spirituality has long been recognized as a foundational dimension of Christian education, shaping not only what is taught but also how teaching itself is understood as a vocation and ministry. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), teaching is not merely a technical or cognitive activity; it is deeply rooted in spiritual formation, moral vision, and relational

commitment (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). Within this perspective, pedagogy is inseparable from spirituality, as the teacher's inner orientation, values, and sense of calling directly influence the learning environment and the formation of students' character. Matthew 6:21 "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (NRSV) offers a powerful theological lens for understanding pedagogical spirituality. This verse emphasizes the intimate relationship between inner commitment (the heart) and outward priorities (treasure), suggesting that what educators value most will inevitably shape their teaching practices, attitudes, and relational patterns. In the context of CRE, this text invites reflection on how teachers' spiritual priorities and inner dispositions become visible in their pedagogical decisions, classroom interactions, and modeling of Christian virtues (France, 2007; Wright, 2010). Contemporary scholarship in Christian education has increasingly highlighted the importance of spirituality as a core component of effective teaching. Palmer (1998) argues that good teaching flows from the identity and integrity of the teacher, emphasizing that teaching is not only about technique but about who the teacher is. Similarly, Nouwen (1981) underscores the role of spiritual formation in shaping authentic ministry and leadership, including educational contexts. These perspectives align with the biblical emphasis in Matthew 6:21, where the heart functions as the center of motivation, desire, and moral orientation. Pedagogical spirituality can be understood as the integration of spiritual commitment, theological vision, and pedagogical practice. It involves the teacher's awareness of teaching as a spiritual calling, the embodiment of Christian values in daily interactions, and the intentional cultivation of a learning environment shaped by love, integrity, humility, and care (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). In this sense, spirituality is not an abstract or private matter, but a lived reality that becomes visible through relational pedagogy, ethical consistency, and the modeling of Christian character.

In elementary school contexts, such as UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil in Dairi, the role of pedagogical spirituality is particularly significant. At the primary level, students are in critical stages of moral and spiritual development, where relational experiences with teachers strongly influence their understanding of faith, values, and identity (Lickona, 1991; Wright, 2010). Teachers do not only transmit religious knowledge; they serve as living examples of what it means to embody Christian faith in everyday life. As such, the spiritual orientation of teachers becomes a key factor in shaping how students perceive and internalize Christian teachings. Empirical and reflective studies that explicitly connect biblical texts, such as Matthew 6:21, with pedagogical practice remain limited, particularly in Indonesian public school contexts. Much of the existing literature focuses either on general teacher competence or on theological reflection, without sufficiently integrating spirituality as a lived pedagogical reality (Palmer, 1998; Groome, 2011). This gap highlights the need for context-specific studies that explore how pedagogical spirituality is understood, practiced, and experienced within real school settings. This study seeks to address this gap by examining pedagogical spirituality in Christian Religious Education through the lens of Matthew 6:21 at UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil. With 99 Christian students and 13 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers, this setting provides a relevant context for exploring how teachers' spiritual priorities and inner commitments shape their teaching practices and relational engagement. By focusing on the connection between heart, values, and pedagogy, this study aims to contribute to a deeper

understanding of how biblical spirituality informs everyday teaching. This research is grounded in the biblical conviction that spiritual orientation precedes and shapes ethical and pedagogical action (France, 2007; Wright, 2010). Pedagogically, it draws on Christian education theory that emphasizes formation, relationality, and the integration of faith and practice (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). By bringing these perspectives into dialogue with empirical observations from a concrete school context, this study seeks to offer both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of Christian Religious Education. In doing so, this research positions pedagogical spirituality not as an optional dimension of teaching, but as the heart of Christian pedagogy. In line with Matthew 6:21, it argues that where teachers place their spiritual “treasure” will inevitably shape their pedagogical “heart,” influencing how they teach, relate, and form students in faith and character.

## METHODS

The quantitative design was selected to enable systematic measurement of students’ perceptions of teachers’ pedagogical spirituality and to analyze patterns related to spiritual orientation, teaching practices, and relational dimensions in the classroom. This approach allows for the generation of empirical evidence regarding how pedagogical spirituality is manifested and perceived within a formal school setting (Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted at UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil, Dairi, Indonesia, a public elementary school with a predominantly Christian student and teacher population. At the time of the study, the school had 99 Christian students and 13 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education teachers. The student population constituted the primary respondents for this study, as students’ perceptions were considered a valid indicator of how pedagogical spirituality is experienced in daily classroom interactions. A census sampling technique was employed, whereby all 99 Christian students were invited to participate in the study. This approach was chosen to maximize representativeness and to reduce sampling bias, given the manageable population size. All participating students provided informed consent through school and parental approval in accordance with institutional and school-level ethical procedures. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed to measure key dimensions of pedagogical spirituality as reflected in teaching practices. The instrument was constructed based on relevant literature in Christian education and spirituality (Groome, 2011; Palmer, 1998; Pazmiño, 2008) and operationalized into measurable indicators, including: Spiritual orientation of teaching (e.g., teacher’s emphasis on spiritual values and priorities), Relational spirituality (e.g., expressions of care, respect, and empathy in teacher-student interactions), Modeling of Christian character (e.g., consistency between teaching and personal example), Integration of faith and learning (e.g., connecting biblical values with daily learning activities). The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Content validity was established through expert review by two scholars in Christian education and one experienced CRE teacher. Revisions were made based on their feedback to ensure theological and pedagogical relevance. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of students from a comparable school to assess the clarity and reliability of the instrument. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The overall reliability coefficient exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

(Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Construct validity was examined through item-total correlations and exploratory factor analysis to ensure that items loaded appropriately on their intended dimensions. Items with low factor loadings or poor correlations were revised or removed prior to final data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions) were used to summarize students' perceptions of pedagogical spirituality across the measured dimensions. Inferential analyses, including correlation and simple regression analysis, were conducted to examine relationships between pedagogical spirituality indicators and students' reported engagement and perceived spiritual climate in the classroom. All statistical analyses were performed using standard statistical software. The level of significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . The results of these analyses provided the empirical basis for interpreting how pedagogical spirituality, as informed by Matthew 6:21, is manifested and perceived in the CRE context at UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that pedagogical spirituality, as perceived by students, is a significant and visible dimension of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teaching at UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil. Descriptive analysis shows that students generally reported positive perceptions across all measured dimensions of pedagogical spirituality, including spiritual orientation of teaching, relational spirituality, modeling of Christian character, and integration of faith and learning. These findings suggest that students experience their teachers not merely as transmitters of religious knowledge, but as educators whose teaching practices are shaped by spiritual values and inner commitments. This supports the theoretical claim that spirituality is not an abstract or private domain but is embodied in pedagogical relationships and daily classroom practices (Groome, 2011; Palmer, 1998). Across the dimension of spiritual orientation of teaching, students consistently perceived that their teachers emphasized spiritual priorities in the learning process. This includes the regular use of biblical references, encouragement of prayerful attitudes, and explicit connection between learning activities and Christian values. These perceptions indicate that teachers' "treasure," in the sense of Matthew 6:21, is oriented toward spiritual and moral formation rather than purely academic achievement. The prominence of this dimension confirms that pedagogical spirituality is understood by students as a central feature of CRE teaching, reflecting the biblical principle that inner priorities shape outward practices (France, 2007; Wright, 2010). In pedagogical terms, this suggests that spiritual intentionality is not peripheral but integrated into lesson delivery and classroom ethos. Relational spirituality emerged as another strongly perceived dimension. Students reported that teachers demonstrated care, respect, and empathy in their interactions, creating a classroom environment characterized by trust and emotional safety. This finding aligns with Christian education scholarship that emphasizes relationality as a core component of faith-based pedagogy (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). The results suggest that pedagogical spirituality is operationalized through relational practices, such as listening to students, addressing personal concerns, and responding to mistakes with guidance rather than punitive reactions. From a theological perspective, this reflects the understanding that Christian teaching is inherently relational and grounded in love and

pastoral care, rather than solely in cognitive transmission. The dimension of modeling Christian character also received strong positive responses. Students perceived that teachers' behavior was generally consistent with the values they taught, including honesty, patience, fairness, and humility. This consistency between teaching and personal example is a critical aspect of pedagogical spirituality, as it reflects what Palmer (1998) describes as teaching that flows from the integrity of the teacher. The results suggest that students are sensitive to congruence between words and actions and that such congruence strengthens the credibility of CRE instruction. In theological terms, this supports the biblical emphasis on embodiment of faith, where character and conduct serve as living testimonies of spiritual commitments (Wright, 2010).

Integration of faith and learning was also positively perceived, indicating that students experienced CRE not as a disconnected subject but as one that informs and is informed by other aspects of school life. Teachers were perceived to make connections between biblical values and daily learning activities, moral decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. This finding reinforces Groome's (2011) emphasis on holistic faith formation, where learning involves the integration of belief, practice, and reflection. In the context of Matthew 6:21, this integration can be interpreted as evidence that teachers' spiritual priorities shape how they frame the purpose and meaning of learning itself, positioning education as a spiritual and moral endeavor. Inferential analysis further suggests meaningful relationships between pedagogical spirituality dimensions and students' reported engagement and perceived spiritual climate in the classroom. Students who reported higher levels of perceived pedagogical spirituality also tended to report higher levels of engagement, attentiveness, and sense of belonging. This pattern supports the argument that spirituality-oriented pedagogy contributes not only to moral and spiritual outcomes but also to affective and motivational aspects of learning. This aligns with broader educational research indicating that relational and values-based teaching environments enhance student engagement and learning motivation (Lickona, 1991; Palmer, 1998). In CRE contexts, this implies that pedagogical spirituality has both theological and pedagogical significance. From a biblical-theological perspective, these findings can be interpreted through the lens of Matthew 6:21, which emphasizes the inseparable relationship between the heart and one's priorities. The results suggest that when teachers' hearts are oriented toward spiritual formation and Christian values, this orientation becomes visible in their teaching practices, relational behaviors, and classroom culture. Students, as daily observers of these practices, perceive and internalize these spiritual priorities. This supports the theological claim that spiritual orientation is not hidden but is expressed through concrete pedagogical actions, thereby shaping the moral and spiritual atmosphere of the classroom (France, 2007; Wright, 2010). The findings also highlight the role of pedagogical spirituality in character formation. Students' positive perceptions of teacher modeling and relational care suggest that teachers function as moral and spiritual exemplars. This is consistent with character education theory, which emphasizes the importance of role modeling in shaping students' values and behaviors (Lickona, 1991). In Christian education, this modeling carries additional theological weight, as teachers are understood not only as educators but also as witnesses to the faith. The results therefore reinforce the view that pedagogical spirituality is a key mechanism through which biblical values are translated into lived experiences for

students. Another important discussion point concerns the institutional and cultural context of the school. With 99 Christian students and 13 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers, the school environment provides a context in which shared religious identity may facilitate the expression of pedagogical spirituality. The relatively homogeneous religious context likely supports the integration of spiritual practices and values into daily school life. However, this also raises important considerations for broader applicability. While the findings demonstrate the effectiveness of pedagogical spirituality in this context, future research should examine whether similar patterns emerge in more religiously diverse settings, where expressions of spirituality may require different pedagogical strategies. The results further suggest that pedagogical spirituality contributes to a positive spiritual climate within the school. Students' perceptions indicate that classrooms are experienced not merely as academic spaces but as environments where spiritual and moral values are lived and reinforced. This finding aligns with the concept of school culture as a formative context, where shared values and relational norms shape students' experiences and identity development. From a Christian education perspective, this supports the argument that spiritual formation is a communal and cultural process, not only an individual one (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008).

The findings underscore the importance of intentional spiritual formation in teacher development. The strong relationship between perceived pedagogical spirituality and student engagement suggests that teachers' spiritual orientation and relational practices have tangible educational effects. This supports calls for professional development programs that integrate spiritual formation, theological reflection, and pedagogical skill development. Such programs would help teachers to align their inner commitments with their teaching practices, in line with Palmer's (1998) emphasis on identity and integrity in teaching. At the same time, the results caution against reducing pedagogical spirituality to surface-level religious activities. While prayer, biblical references, and explicit spiritual language are important, the findings indicate that students place significant value on relational care, consistency of character, and integration of faith into everyday learning. This suggests that pedagogical spirituality is most effective when it is embodied and relational, rather than merely symbolic or ritualistic. This interpretation resonates with biblical theology, which emphasizes that faith is demonstrated through love, integrity, and daily conduct, not only through verbal confession (Wright, 2010). The findings also contribute to the broader discourse on spirituality in education by providing empirical support for the claim that spirituality enhances the quality of teaching and learning. While much of the existing literature on pedagogical spirituality is conceptual or reflective, this study adds a quantitative dimension by demonstrating how students perceive and respond to spiritually grounded pedagogy. This strengthens the argument that spirituality is not only a theological or philosophical concept but also an empirically observable dimension of educational practice. The results highlight the significance of Matthew 6:21 as a meaningful biblical framework for understanding pedagogical spirituality. By connecting inner spiritual priorities with observable pedagogical practices, the study demonstrates how this biblical text can be operationalized in contemporary educational contexts. The findings suggest that when teachers' "treasure" is oriented toward spiritual formation, relational integrity, and Christian character, their pedagogical "heart" is expressed through practices that students recognize as spiritually meaningful and

educationally supportive. This reinforces the relevance of biblical theology for informing and evaluating pedagogical practice in Christian Religious Education. The results and discussion indicate that pedagogical spirituality is a central and effective dimension of CRE teaching at UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil. The integration of spiritual orientation, relational care, character modeling, and faith-learning integration contributes to a positive spiritual climate, enhanced student engagement, and meaningful character formation. These findings support the theoretical and theological claim that spirituality is the heart of Christian pedagogy and that, in line with Matthew 6:21, the priorities of the heart are inevitably reflected in the practices of teaching.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pedagogical spirituality constitutes a central and influential dimension of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teaching at UPT SD Negeri 037156 Laumil. The quantitative findings demonstrate that students perceive their teachers' spiritual orientation, relational care, character modeling, and integration of faith and learning as significant elements of the teaching process. These perceptions indicate that spirituality is not merely an abstract theological concept, but a lived pedagogical reality that shapes classroom climate, student engagement, and moral-spiritual formation. Interpreted through the lens of Matthew 6:21, the results suggest that teachers' inner spiritual priorities are clearly reflected in their pedagogical practices. When teachers' "treasure" is oriented toward spiritual formation and Christian values, their pedagogical "heart" becomes visible through consistent relational behavior, ethical modeling, and spiritually intentional teaching. This confirms the biblical and theoretical assertion that teaching is inseparable from the teacher's inner orientation and sense of calling. The study further affirms that pedagogical spirituality contributes positively to students' engagement and their perception of a supportive spiritual climate. These outcomes highlight the pedagogical value of integrating spirituality with professional teaching competence. Rather than competing with academic goals, pedagogical spirituality appears to strengthen the relational and motivational foundations of effective learning. This research contributes to Christian education scholarship by providing empirical support for the integration of biblical spirituality and pedagogical practice. It underscores the importance of teacher development programs that intentionally cultivate spiritual formation alongside pedagogical and relational competencies. Future research is recommended to extend this investigation to more diverse school contexts and to incorporate additional outcome variables, such as students' spiritual growth and moral decision-making, in order to further enrich understanding of pedagogical spirituality in Christian Religious Education.

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