



Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Promoting the Spirit of Giving: Evidence from SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in promoting the spirit of giving at SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau, with theological reflection on Exodus 35:5. In Christian education, teacher professionalism is not limited to instructional expertise but also encompasses moral integrity, spiritual vocation, and relational commitment that together shape the transmission and internalization of biblical values. The spirit of giving, as emphasized in Exodus 35:5, represents a central Christian virtue that reflects voluntary, joyful, and faith-based generosity. This study aims to explore how CRE teachers' professional competence is enacted in practice and how it contributes to fostering generosity among students in a public junior high school context. A qualitative research design with a descriptive-interpretive approach was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with CRE teachers and selected Christian teachers, classroom and school observations, and document analysis of lesson plans and school programs. The findings reveal that CRE teachers conceptualize professionalism as a holistic integration of pedagogical skill, moral integrity, and spiritual calling. Teachers employed a range of instructional strategies, including biblical storytelling, contextual application, and school-based social activities, to connect Exodus 35:5 with students' daily experiences. The results also indicate the importance of institutional support and culturally responsive approaches in sustaining the cultivation of generosity within a public school setting. This study contributes to the literature on Christian Religious Education and teacher professionalism by providing qualitative evidence from the Indonesian context. The findings underscore the need to conceptualize professionalism holistically and highlight practical implications for teacher professional development and school-based strategies to strengthen the formation of generosity and social responsibility among students.

Keywords: Professional Competence, Christian Religious Education, Spirit of Giving

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professionalism is widely recognized as a central pillar in improving the quality of education and shaping students' academic, moral, and social development. In contemporary educational discourse, professional competence is not limited to mastery of subject matter and instructional techniques, but also encompasses ethical integrity, commitment to students' holistic growth, and the ability to model values that are essential for character formation (Darling-Hammond, 2017; OECD, 2019). In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), teacher professionalism takes on an even deeper significance, as teachers are not only responsible for transmitting biblical knowledge but also for embodying and cultivating Christian virtues that can be internalized and practiced by students in their daily lives (Pazmiño, 2008; Van Brummelen, 2009). One of the core Christian values emphasized in Scripture and Christian tradition is the spirit of giving, which reflects generosity, stewardship, and obedience to God's will. Exodus 35:5 explicitly calls God's people to bring offerings willingly, highlighting that giving is not merely a ritual obligation but a heartfelt response rooted in gratitude and commitment to God's purposes. Theologically, this passage underscores the voluntary and joyful nature of giving, which is grounded in a relational understanding of obedience and trust in God (Wenham, 2003; Walton, Matthews, & Chavalas, 2012). In Christian education, this biblical principle provides a foundational framework for teaching students about generosity, responsibility, and social concern. The challenge of integrating biblical values such as generosity and giving requires a high level of teacher professionalism. Teachers must navigate curricular standards, institutional policies, and diverse student backgrounds while remaining faithful to the distinctive goals of Christian Religious Education. Research has consistently shown that teachers who demonstrate strong professional competence, through ethical conduct, reflective practice, continuous professional development, and effective instructional strategies, are more likely to influence students' character development and value formation in meaningful ways (Day, 2017; Hattie, 2009). This suggests that professionalism is not only a technical or administrative requirement, but also a moral and relational practice that directly shapes students' dispositions and behaviors. Within the field of Christian education, several scholars emphasize that the teacher's role as a moral and spiritual model is central to effective faith-based learning. Pazmiño (2008) argues that Christian educators function as interpreters of both Scripture and life, helping students connect biblical teachings with real-world contexts. Similarly, Van Brummelen (2009) highlights that Christian teachers are called to integrate faith, learning, and living, so that students encounter Christian values not only through lessons but also through the teacher's professional identity and daily practices. In this sense, professionalism becomes a lived testimony that reinforces the credibility and relevance of Christian values, including generosity and the spirit of giving. The spirit of giving also has significant social and educational implications. Studies in moral and character education indicate that generosity, prosocial behavior, and altruism are associated with positive social relationships, empathy, and civic responsibility (Lickona, 2012; Noddings, 2013). From an educational psychology perspective, students are more likely to develop these dispositions when they observe consistent modeling by significant adults, especially teachers, who demonstrate care, fairness, and ethical commitment (Bandura, 1986). Therefore, CRE teachers' professional competence plays a

strategic role in shaping students' attitudes toward giving, sharing, and social responsibility. In the Indonesian context, where religious education is an integral part of the national curriculum, Christian Religious Education teachers in public schools face unique challenges and opportunities. They are expected to uphold professional standards in line with national education policies while also nurturing faith-based values that contribute to students' character development and social harmony (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2016). This dual responsibility requires teachers to exercise professionalism not only in pedagogical and administrative domains but also in moral and spiritual leadership. At SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau, where there are approximately 65 Christian students and 8 Christian teachers (including CRE teachers), the cultivation of the spirit of giving represents an important aspect of Christian character education. In this setting, teacher professionalism becomes a key factor in how biblical teachings, such as the call to give willingly in Exodus 35:5, are translated into concrete learning experiences and student practices. However, empirical research that specifically examines the relationship between CRE teachers' professional competence and the promotion of the spirit of giving in Indonesian public schools remains limited. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in promoting the spirit of giving at SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau. By focusing on students' and institutional contexts, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence on how teacher professionalism contributes to the internalization of generosity as a Christian value. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader literature on Christian education, teacher professionalism, and character formation, as well as to offer practical insights for improving the quality and impact of Christian Religious Education in public school settings.

METHODS

A qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' professional practices, beliefs, and lived experiences in integrating biblical values into classroom instruction and school life. This design is particularly appropriate for capturing the complex, contextual, and meaning-making dimensions of professionalism and value education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study focused on how CRE teachers interpret the biblical call to give willingly and how this interpretation is translated into pedagogical practices, professional attitudes, and interactions with students. Through qualitative inquiry, the research sought to uncover patterns, themes, and insights that cannot be adequately captured through purely quantitative measurement. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau, a public junior high school with approximately 65 Christian students and 8 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education teachers. The participants of this study consisted of: Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, who were the primary participants, given their direct responsibility for teaching biblical values and modeling Christian character, and selected Christian teachers from other subject areas, to provide additional perspectives on professional practices and school culture related to the spirit of giving, a purposive sample of Christian students, to capture students' perceptions and experiences of how teachers promote generosity and giving in both instructional and relational contexts. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those

included had direct experience and relevance to the research focus. This strategy is consistent with qualitative research principles that prioritize information-rich cases over statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with CRE teachers and selected Christian teachers. Interview guides were developed to explore participants' understanding of teacher professionalism, their interpretation of Exodus 35:5, and their strategies for cultivating the spirit of giving among students. Semi-structured interviews allowed for both consistency across participants and flexibility to pursue emerging themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Non-participant observations were carried out during CRE classes and relevant school activities to document how teachers model professionalism and promote generosity in practice. Observation protocols focused on instructional strategies, teacher-student interactions, and instances where values related to giving, sharing, and stewardship were explicitly or implicitly addressed. Observations provided contextual and behavioral data that complemented interview findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns and meaningful units related to teacher professionalism and the promotion of the spirit of giving. This iterative and inductive process is consistent with qualitative analytic practices aimed at generating rich, contextualized understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in promoting the spirit of giving at SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau, with theological reflection on Exodus 35:5. Through interviews, classroom and school observations, and document analysis, several major themes emerged that illustrate how teacher professionalism is enacted in daily educational practice and how it contributes to students' understanding and internalization of generosity as a Christian virtue. The findings reveal that professionalism is expressed not only through technical teaching skills but also through moral integrity, relational commitment, and spiritual modeling, all of which play a significant role in shaping a school culture that supports the spirit of giving. Participants consistently described teacher professionalism as a multidimensional construct encompassing pedagogical competence, ethical responsibility, and spiritual maturity. These dimensions were found to interact dynamically in the promotion of generosity, suggesting that effective character education in Christian Religious Education depends on the integration of professional, moral, and theological commitments. This section presents and discusses the findings under several interconnected themes: professional identity and spiritual vocation, pedagogical strategies for cultivating the spirit of giving, modeling and relational influence, integration of Exodus 35:5 into instructional practice, institutional and cultural context, and perceived impact on students. One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the data was the understanding of professionalism as a form of spiritual vocation. CRE teachers frequently articulated their professional identity not merely in terms of job responsibilities or formal qualifications, but as a calling to serve God and students through education. This perspective aligns with Christian educational scholarship that emphasizes teaching as a form of ministry and vocation (Pazmiño, 2008; Van Brummelen, 2009). Teachers described professionalism as

involving faithfulness, integrity, and commitment to personal spiritual growth, which they believed directly influenced their effectiveness in promoting Christian values such as generosity. This finding resonates with broader discussions of teacher professionalism that highlight moral purpose and ethical commitment as central components of professional identity (Day, 2017; Sockett, 2012). In the context of SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau, teachers' narratives suggested that professionalism is inseparable from their understanding of Christian discipleship. This integration of professional and spiritual identity provided a strong motivational foundation for teaching about the spirit of giving, as teachers perceived generosity not only as a curricular topic but as a lived expression of faith. The data also indicate that this sense of vocation contributed to teachers' resilience and commitment, even in the face of resource constraints and institutional challenges. Teachers expressed that their motivation to model generosity and encourage students to give was rooted in their personal faith commitments, which helped sustain professional dedication. This supports previous research suggesting that intrinsic motivation and moral purpose are key factors in sustaining teacher professionalism and commitment (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Another finding concerned the pedagogical strategies employed by CRE teachers to cultivate the spirit of giving among students. Teachers reported using a range of instructional approaches, including biblical storytelling, class discussions, reflective questioning, and project-based activities related to charity and social service. These strategies were designed to help students connect biblical teachings to real-life situations, thereby facilitating deeper understanding and personal relevance. Observational data confirmed that teachers frequently emphasized practical applications of biblical texts, encouraging students to consider how generosity could be expressed in everyday contexts, such as sharing with peers, helping family members, and participating in school or community-based charitable activities. This approach reflects constructivist and experiential learning principles, which suggest that students are more likely to internalize values when they actively engage with meaningful, contextually relevant experiences (Kolb, 2015; Slavin, 2018). The findings also reveal variation in the extent to which student-centered pedagogies were systematically implemented. While some teachers regularly incorporated reflective and participatory methods, others relied more heavily on teacher-centered instruction, such as lectures and direct explanation of biblical principles. Although these approaches can effectively transmit knowledge, the data suggest that they may be less effective in fostering deep affective and behavioral internalization of generosity. This aligns with character education literature, which emphasizes the importance of participatory and reflective pedagogies for value formation (Lickona, 2012; Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014). Modeling emerged as a particularly powerful mechanism through which teachers promoted the spirit of giving. Students and teachers alike emphasized that teachers' personal examples of generosity, fairness, and care had a significant impact on students' attitudes and behaviors. Teachers described intentional efforts to demonstrate generosity through everyday actions, such as supporting students in need, contributing to school-based charitable initiatives, and showing empathy and kindness in interactions with students and colleagues. This finding is consistent with social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn values and behaviors through observation and imitation of significant role models (Bandura, 1986).

In the context of Christian Religious Education, teachers function as highly salient moral and spiritual models. The data suggest that when teachers' professional conduct is characterized by generosity and care, students are more likely to perceive the spirit of giving as authentic and attainable, rather than as an abstract moral ideal. Relational influence also played a key role. Teachers highlighted the importance of building trusting and respectful relationships with students as a foundation for effective value education. Observations indicated that teachers who demonstrated relational sensitivity, such as listening to students, acknowledging their struggles, and affirming their efforts, were more successful in engaging students in discussions about generosity and social responsibility. This supports relational theories of moral and character education, which emphasize the centrality of caring relationships in fostering ethical development (Noddings, 2013). A central focus of this study was how Exodus 35:5 was interpreted and integrated into instructional practice. Teachers consistently emphasized the voluntary and heartfelt nature of giving highlighted in this passage. Rather than framing giving as a compulsory obligation, teachers stressed that biblical giving is a joyful response to God's grace and an expression of gratitude and trust. This theological interpretation shaped how the spirit of giving was presented to students, with an emphasis on willingness, sincerity, and personal conviction. Document analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials revealed that Exodus 35:5 was commonly used as a foundational text for lessons on generosity, stewardship, and communal responsibility. Teachers often linked this passage to contemporary examples, such as school fundraising activities, support for peers in need, and participation in church or community service programs. This approach reflects contextualized biblical pedagogy, which seeks to connect ancient texts with contemporary life contexts (Walton et al., 2012; Wright, 2006). This integration demonstrates how biblical texts can function as normative and formative resources in Christian education. The findings suggest that when teachers possess both theological understanding and pedagogical skill, they are better equipped to translate scriptural principles into concrete educational practices. This supports the argument that effective Christian education requires a synthesis of biblical-theological literacy and pedagogical competence (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008).

The institutional and cultural context of SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau also significantly shaped the promotion of the spirit of giving. As a public school with a Christian minority population, CRE teachers navigated both opportunities and constraints in implementing faith-based value education. Teachers reported that while the school generally supported religious education activities, they also needed to align their practices with broader institutional policies and multicultural considerations. Teachers described collaborating with other Christian teachers and school administrators to organize activities that embodied the spirit of giving in practical ways. This institutional collaboration enhanced the visibility and impact of generosity as a shared value. Participants noted that local community norms and socio-economic conditions influenced how students and families understood and practiced giving. Teachers emphasized the importance of contextual sensitivity, recognizing that students' capacities to give materially varied, and therefore stressed non-material forms of generosity, such as time, service, and emotional support. This culturally responsive approach aligns with inclusive and context-aware models of character education, which emphasize the need to adapt value education to students'

lived realities (Gay, 2018). Participants reported that the promotion of the spirit of giving had observable impacts on students' attitudes and behaviors. Teachers noted increased willingness among students to participate in charitable activities, greater sensitivity to peers' needs, and improved cooperation and sharing in classroom contexts. Students described learning to view giving not only as donating money or goods, but also as helping others, offering time, and showing care and empathy. While these perceived impacts are based on qualitative perceptions rather than quantitative measurement, they provide important insights into how teacher professionalism may contribute to character development outcomes. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that sustained exposure to value-oriented instruction and modeling can support the development of prosocial behaviors and moral dispositions (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Knafo-Noam, 2015; Lickona, 2012). Teachers also acknowledged challenges, including varying levels of student motivation and differences in family support for value education. These challenges highlight the need for ongoing collaboration between school, family, and community in fostering generosity as a sustained character trait. The findings thus reinforce ecological perspectives on moral development, which emphasize the interconnected roles of multiple social contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that the professional competence of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau plays a significant role in promoting the spirit of giving as a Christian value. Professionalism is expressed through an integrated combination of pedagogical skill, moral integrity, spiritual vocation, and relational commitment. This integrated professionalism enables teachers to translate the biblical call of Exodus 35:5 into meaningful educational practices that resonate with students' lived experiences. The results support and extend existing literature on teacher professionalism and Christian education by providing empirical, context-specific evidence from an Indonesian public school setting. They underscore the importance of viewing professionalism not merely as technical competence but as a holistic construct that includes moral and spiritual dimensions. Furthermore, the findings highlight the central role of modeling, relational pedagogy, and contextualized biblical instruction in fostering character formation. At the same time, the study identifies areas for further development, including the need for more systematic use of student-centered pedagogies, enhanced institutional support, and stronger collaboration with families and communities. Addressing these areas may further strengthen the impact of CRE teachers' professionalism on students' internalization of generosity and the spirit of giving. This study demonstrates that professional competence in Christian Religious Education is a key enabling factor in cultivating the spirit of giving among students. By embodying and enacting the principles of Exodus 35:5 through professional practice, CRE teachers contribute not only to students' religious knowledge but also to their moral and social development, thereby supporting the broader goals of holistic Christian education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in promoting the spirit of giving at SMP Negeri 2 Lamandau, using Exodus 35:5 as a theological and pedagogical framework. Through a qualitative approach involving

interviews, observations, and document analysis, the findings demonstrate that teacher professionalism plays a central and multifaceted role in shaping how biblical values of generosity are interpreted, taught, and internalized by students. Professional competence in this context extends beyond technical instructional skills to include moral integrity, spiritual vocation, and relational commitment, all of which together form a holistic model of Christian teacher professionalism. The results indicate that CRE teachers understand their professional role as both an educational and spiritual calling. This vocational perspective strengthens their motivation to model generosity and to integrate the spirit of giving consistently into their teaching and interactions with students. Such integration reinforces the idea that Christian values are most effectively transmitted when they are embodied by teachers in daily professional practice. This finding supports theoretical perspectives in Christian education that emphasize the unity of faith, teaching, and living, where the teacher's personal and professional identity becomes a key medium for value formation. The study highlights that while CRE teachers employ a variety of instructional strategies, such as biblical storytelling, discussion, and contextual application, there is room for further development in the systematic use of student-centered and reflective learning approaches. These methods are particularly important for fostering deeper internalization of generosity as a personal conviction rather than merely a cognitive concept. The findings suggest that enhancing teachers' capacity to design experiential and reflective learning activities may further strengthen students' understanding and practice of giving as an expression of Christian faith. Relational and modeling dimensions of professionalism emerged as especially influential. Teachers' everyday actions of care, fairness, and generosity functioned as powerful forms of implicit instruction, shaping students' attitudes toward giving through observation and relational engagement. This underscores the importance of professional conduct and ethical consistency in Christian education, where what teachers do often speaks as strongly as what they teach. The study thus reinforces social learning and relational theories that position teachers as central moral agents in students' character development. The findings point to the importance of supportive school structures and collaborative practices in sustaining the promotion of generosity. Even within the constraints of a public school context and limited resources, institutional collaboration and culturally responsive approaches enabled teachers to create meaningful opportunities for students to practice the spirit of giving. This suggests that teacher professionalism is most effective when supported by school leadership, collegial cooperation, and sensitivity to students' socio-cultural realities. This study contributes to the literature on Christian Religious Education and teacher professionalism by providing qualitative evidence from the Indonesian context on how professional competence supports the cultivation of generosity as a Christian value. The findings highlight the need to conceptualize professionalism holistically, integrating pedagogical, moral, and spiritual dimensions. The study suggests that targeted professional development, reflective practice, and institutional support can further enhance CRE teachers' capacity to foster the spirit of giving. Future research is recommended to extend this work through multi-site studies and mixed-methods approaches to deepen understanding of how teacher professionalism shapes character formation across diverse educational settings.

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