



Professional Stewardship in Christian Education: A Reflection on the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) at SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the concept of professional stewardship in Christian education through a theological and educational reflection on the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) within the context of SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua, South Nias. Professional stewardship is understood as a holistic responsibility of Christian educators to manage, develop, and maximize God-given gifts, competencies, and opportunities in serving students and the educational community. Grounded in biblical theology and qualitative educational inquiry, this research aims to examine how the values embedded in the Parable of the Talents are interpreted and practiced by Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and students in a public elementary school setting. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving two CRE teachers and 45 Christian students. The findings indicate that the Parable of the Talents provides a strong theological foundation for fostering responsibility, initiative, accountability, and faith-based professionalism among educators and learners. Teachers demonstrated stewardship through intentional lesson planning, contextualized biblical integration, and reflective teaching practices, while students expressed emerging awareness of responsibility, diligence, and faithful use of their abilities in both academic and spiritual dimensions. The discussion highlights that professional stewardship in Christian education is not limited to administrative or instructional competence but also encompasses spiritual integrity, ethical commitment, and vocational calling. The study concludes that integrating the Parable of the Talents into Christian Religious Education contributes to the development of a stewardship-oriented mindset, strengthening both professional identity and spiritual formation. This research offers practical implications for enhancing faith-based professionalism in public school contexts and contributes to the broader discourse on biblical leadership and stewardship in Christian education.

Keywords: Professional Stewardship, Christian Religious Education, Talents

INTRODUCTION

In Christian Religious Education (CRE), professionalism transcends technical competence and administrative responsibility, encompassing a theological understanding of teaching as a form of stewardship entrusted by God. This theological-pedagogical perspective positions teachers not merely as transmitters of knowledge, but as stewards who are accountable for nurturing students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth (Kaban et al., 2024; Sungamta et al., 2024). The concept of stewardship is deeply embedded in the biblical tradition, most explicitly illustrated in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). In this parable, servants are entrusted with resources by their master and are evaluated based on how faithfully and productively they manage what has been given to them. Biblical scholars and Christian education researchers have increasingly interpreted this narrative as a theological framework for understanding professional responsibility, accountability, and faithful service in various vocations, including teaching (Mahulae & Samosir, 2025). Within this framework, teachers are viewed as stewards of knowledge, students, learning environments, and instructional processes, all of which must be managed in ways that honor both educational standards and spiritual commitments. Recent studies in Christian education in Indonesia emphasize that teacher professionalism cannot be separated from theological convictions about calling, stewardship, and service. Research on teacher professionalism grounded in biblical perspectives highlights that professionalism involves not only pedagogical and subject-matter competence but also moral integrity, vocational commitment, and spiritual motivation (Sungamta et al., 2024; Purba & Sitorus, 2025). These studies suggest that when teachers understand their professional roles as a divine trust, they are more likely to demonstrate ethical responsibility, perseverance, and reflective practice in their teaching. The role of CRE teachers carries additional complexity. CRE teachers are required to uphold national education standards while also nurturing Christian values within pluralistic and often resource-limited environments. Studies on Christian teacher competence and professionalism in public schools indicate that strong professional identity, rooted in both pedagogical training and theological reflection, is essential for sustaining effective teaching practices (Pasande et al., 2024; Hutauruk & Irawati, 2024). These findings reinforce the idea that professionalism in CRE is multidimensional, integrating pedagogical skill, professional knowledge, ethical conduct, and spiritual formation. The Parable of the Talents offers a particularly relevant biblical lens for understanding professional stewardship in education. Mahulae and Samosir (2025), in their biblical-pedagogical analysis of Matthew 25:14-30, argue that the parable provides a theological paradigm for viewing teachers as God's stewards of knowledge and responsibility. They emphasize that faithful stewardship involves active engagement, responsible risk-taking, and continuous development, rather than passive maintenance of existing practices. This interpretation aligns with contemporary educational theories that stress reflective practice, continuous professional development, and accountability as key components of teacher professionalism. Educational stewardship has also been discussed in broader educational literature as a framework for cultivating professional growth and career excellence among teachers. Kaban et al. (2024) highlight that stewardship-oriented professional development encourages teachers to view their careers as long-term commitments to service, growth, and contribution to the

educational community. This perspective resonates strongly with Christian understandings of vocation, where professional work is seen as participation in God's ongoing work in the world. This gap is particularly evident in elementary schools located in rural or semi-rural areas, where CRE teachers often work with limited resources and small numbers of Christian students. SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua, South Nias, represents such a context, with 45 Christian students and only two CRE teachers. In this setting, professional stewardship is not merely a theoretical concept but a practical necessity for sustaining effective Christian education. This study aims to explore professional stewardship in Christian education through a reflection on the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) as implemented in the professional practices of CRE teachers at SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua. By integrating biblical reflection with contemporary scholarship on teacher professionalism and stewardship, this study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on faith-based professionalism in Christian education. It also aims to provide contextually grounded insights that can inform teacher development, school leadership, and policy considerations for Christian Religious Education in public school settings.

METHODS

A qualitative research design was used to explore professional stewardship in Christian education through a reflection on the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14--0) as enacted in the professional practices of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of meanings, experiences, and interpretations related to stewardship, professionalism, and faith-based responsibility, rather than to measure variables quantitatively. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for examining values, beliefs, and professional identities within specific educational and cultural contexts. This research was guided by an interpretive paradigm, which assumes that professional stewardship is socially and theologically constructed through teachers' lived experiences, reflective practices, and interactions within the school community. The study integrates educational inquiry with biblical-theological reflection in order to capture both the pedagogical and spiritual dimensions of professional stewardship in Christian education. The study was conducted at SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua, located in South Nias, Indonesia. This school was selected purposively due to its contextual relevance, particularly as a public elementary school with a minority Christian student population. At the time of the study, the school had 45 Christian students and two Christian Religious Education teachers. These two CRE teachers served as the primary participants in this study. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their direct involvement in Christian Religious Education and their responsibility for implementing Christian values and professional practices in the school. The small number of CRE teachers reflects the typical staffing conditions in many public schools in rural or semi-rural areas, making this context especially relevant for examining how professional stewardship is practiced under limited human resources. Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings. The primary methods included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both CRE teachers

to explore their understanding of professional stewardship, their interpretation of the Parable of the Talents, and how these theological insights influenced their professional attitudes, teaching practices, and sense of responsibility. The interview protocol included open-ended questions that allowed participants to reflect on their professional identity, their perception of teaching as a form of stewardship, and the challenges and opportunities they faced in fulfilling their roles. Classroom observations were conducted to capture how professional stewardship was manifested in daily teaching practices, teacher–student interactions, classroom management, and instructional decision-making. Observations focused on indicators such as responsibility, initiative, use of instructional resources, engagement with students, and expressions of care and accountability. Field notes were taken to document both instructional activities and contextual factors relevant to stewardship practices. Biblical-theological reflection on Matthew 25:14–30 was used as an analytical lens to interpret emerging themes. Key theological concepts from the parable, such as trust, responsibility, accountability, faithfulness, and productive use of entrusted resources, were integrated into the analysis to enrich the interpretation of teachers’ professional practices. This integrative approach allowed for a dialogue between empirical data and theological meaning, strengthening the conceptual grounding of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis revealed that professional stewardship among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua is understood and practiced as a multidimensional construct. Stewardship is not limited to administrative responsibility or technical professionalism but is deeply embedded in theological understanding, vocational identity, and daily pedagogical practices. The findings demonstrate that CRE teachers interpret their professional roles as a divine trust, aligning their professional responsibilities with biblical principles derived from the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Four major themes emerged from the data analysis: stewardship as theological accountability and vocational calling, stewardship in pedagogical responsibility and instructional practice, stewardship in relational and pastoral care for students, and stewardship in professional development and resource management. These themes reflect how biblical stewardship is translated into concrete professional behaviors and dispositions within the specific context of a public elementary school with a minority Christian population. One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the interviews was the understanding of teaching as a form of theological accountability and vocational calling. Both CRE teachers consistently described their professional roles as a trust (*amanah*) given by God. This theological framing mirrors the core message of the Parable of the Talents, in which servants are entrusted with resources and later held accountable for how they have managed them. Teachers articulated that their sense of responsibility extended beyond fulfilling job descriptions or meeting administrative requirements. Instead, they perceived their work as part of a divine calling that required faithfulness, diligence, and moral integrity. This vocational understanding aligns with theological interpretations of stewardship that emphasize accountability before God, not merely institutional accountability. This finding suggests that professional stewardship is deeply

rooted in the teachers' spiritual worldview. Their narratives indicate that the parable functions as a moral and spiritual reference point that shapes how they interpret success, failure, and responsibility in their professional lives. Rather than viewing teaching as routine labor, they understand it as a sacred trust that demands faithful use of their abilities, time, and opportunities. This theme is consistent with Christian education literature that emphasizes vocation and calling as central to teacher identity. When teachers perceive their profession as divinely entrusted, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment, perseverance, and ethical consistency. Theologically, this reflects the servant–master relationship in Matthew 25, where faithfulness is measured not by comparison with others, but by responsible use of what has been personally entrusted. In the context of SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua, where only two CRE teachers serve 45 Christian students, this sense of calling becomes especially significant. The limited number of personnel increases the scope of responsibility for each teacher, reinforcing the perception that their professional role is both a privilege and a burden of trust. This reinforces stewardship as a theological and vocational identity rather than a purely technical function.

The next finding relates to stewardship as expressed in pedagogical responsibility and instructional practice. Classroom observations revealed that CRE teachers consistently demonstrated careful preparation, intentional lesson planning, and adaptive instructional strategies despite limited resources. Teachers described these practices as part of their stewardship responsibility to “multiply” what they had been given, echoing the productive expectation in the Parable of the Talents. Teachers reported that they viewed lesson planning, assessment, and classroom management as arenas in which stewardship is enacted. They emphasized the importance of using time effectively, maximizing limited instructional materials, and seeking creative ways to engage students. This reflects a stewardship mindset that prioritizes growth, productivity, and responsible use of entrusted resources. This pedagogical stewardship can be interpreted as a practical outworking of the parable's emphasis on productive faithfulness. The servants who invested their talents were praised not merely for possession, but for active and responsible engagement. Similarly, CRE teachers in this study interpreted their pedagogical role as requiring initiative and innovation rather than passive maintenance of routines. Observations also indicated that teachers integrated biblical narratives and moral lessons into instructional strategies to foster holistic learning. This integration suggests that stewardship is not confined to managing content delivery but includes shaping learning experiences that cultivate students' spiritual and moral development. This aligns with Christian pedagogical frameworks that view teaching as formation rather than mere information transfer. Teachers contrasted their approach with what they perceived as a “buried talent” mentality, doing the minimum required or avoiding innovation due to fear, fatigue, or limited support. They interpreted such attitudes as inconsistent with biblical stewardship, reinforcing the idea that professional responsibility includes risk-taking and proactive engagement for the sake of student growth. This finding highlights how theological reflection on Matthew 25:14-30 provides not only moral motivation but also a pedagogical ethic. Stewardship becomes a lens for evaluating teaching quality, encouraging continuous improvement and responsible use of pedagogical opportunities. Interviews and observations revealed that CRE teachers

understood their responsibility as extending beyond academic instruction to include emotional, moral, and spiritual care. Teachers frequently described themselves as role models and mentors who are accountable for nurturing students' character and faith development. This relational dimension of stewardship reflects a broader theological understanding of entrusted responsibility for persons, not merely tasks or resources. In the parable, servants are entrusted with material resources, but in Christian education, teachers are entrusted with human lives, which carries profound ethical and spiritual implications. Teachers described how they intentionally built relationships with students, paid attention to students' personal challenges, and provided encouragement and guidance beyond formal classroom instruction. These practices were framed as part of their stewardship, reflecting a sense of moral accountability for students' holistic well-being. This finding underscores that stewardship in Christian education is inherently relational. The trust placed in teachers includes responsibility for students' spiritual and emotional growth. This aligns with theological perspectives that view educators as co-workers in God's formative work in students' lives. This relational stewardship is particularly important in elementary school contexts, where students are at a formative stage of moral and spiritual development. The data suggest that CRE teachers see themselves as entrusted with shaping not only students' knowledge of Christian doctrine but also their attitudes, values, and interpersonal behaviors. This relational emphasis resonates with the evaluative dimension of the Parable of the Talents. Faithfulness is not only about productivity but also about trustworthiness. In educational terms, trustworthiness is reflected in care, consistency, and moral reliability in relationships with students. Teachers described efforts to improve their competencies through informal learning, collaboration with colleagues, and participation in training opportunities when available. These activities were interpreted as part of their stewardship responsibility to develop and "multiply" their professional capacities. Teachers viewed their skills, knowledge, and experiences as "talents" that must be continually developed rather than stagnated. This perspective reflects a theological understanding of human abilities as gifts from God that require cultivation and responsible use. From a stewardship framework, professional development becomes not merely a career requirement but a spiritual and ethical obligation. Resource management also emerged as an important aspect of stewardship. In a context with limited instructional materials, teachers demonstrated creativity in using available resources, sharing materials, and adapting teaching strategies to fit constraints. These practices were framed as expressions of faithfulness in small things, consistent with the parable's emphasis on responsibility regardless of the size of the entrusted resources. This theme highlights how stewardship is contextualized in settings of scarcity. Rather than using limitations as justification for minimal effort, teachers interpreted stewardship as a call to faithful and creative engagement with what is available. This reflects a theology of sufficiency and faithfulness that values responsible action over external abundance. This finding contributes to the broader literature on teacher professionalism by emphasizing that stewardship-oriented professionalism is particularly relevant in under-resourced educational contexts. It provides a moral and spiritual framework that sustains motivation and accountability even when institutional support is limited.

Across all themes, a strong integration between biblical stewardship and professional identity was evident. Teachers did not separate their theological beliefs from their professional roles; instead, they articulated a unified identity in which faith and professionalism were mutually reinforcing. This integration reflects a holistic understanding of Christian vocation in which teaching is both a professional career and a form of spiritual service. The Parable of the Talents functioned as a narrative framework that helped teachers interpret their experiences, challenges, and successes. Teachers used the language of faithfulness, trust, and accountability to make sense of their professional responsibilities. This narrative integration strengthens professional identity by providing a deeper moral and spiritual rationale for professional conduct. This finding aligns with identity-based models of teacher professionalism that emphasize coherence between personal values and professional practice. In Christian education, biblical narratives such as Matthew 25:14-30 serve as powerful identity-forming texts that shape how teachers understand their roles and responsibilities. Another important dimension emerging from the data is the role of accountability in shaping professional stewardship. Teachers frequently referred to dual accountability: accountability to school administration and accountability to God. While institutional accountability focused on performance, reporting, and compliance, theological accountability emphasized faithfulness, integrity, and moral responsibility. This dual framework of accountability influenced how teachers evaluated their own performance. Success was not measured solely by test results or administrative approval but also by perceived faithfulness in fulfilling their calling. This theological dimension of accountability adds depth to conventional models of teacher evaluation by incorporating moral and spiritual criteria. This suggests that stewardship-oriented professionalism includes an internalized ethical compass. Teachers' actions are guided not only by external rules but also by internalized theological values. This internalization enhances moral agency and reduces reliance on external enforcement, strengthening ethical professionalism. Teachers acknowledged that these constraints sometimes made it difficult to implement innovative teaching strategies or pursue continuous professional development. Rather than interpreting these challenges as excuses for reduced effort, teachers framed them as tests of faithfulness. This interpretation reflects the parable's emphasis on responsibility regardless of circumstances. The data suggest that stewardship theology provides a coping framework that helps teachers persevere in difficult conditions. This finding highlights the resilience dimension of stewardship-oriented professionalism. Faith-based stewardship offers a motivational and interpretive resource that sustains professional commitment even in challenging contexts. This resilience is particularly important in rural or under-resourced schools, where structural limitations are common. The findings of this study contribute to both theological and educational scholarship by demonstrating how biblical stewardship can be operationalized in professional practice. The qualitative evidence shows that the Parable of the Talents is not merely a theological text but a practical framework for shaping professional identity, pedagogy, relationships, and accountability in Christian education. These findings suggest that teacher development programs in Christian education should explicitly integrate stewardship theology into professional training. Such integration can strengthen teachers' sense of calling, enhance ethical responsibility, and promote sustainable professional growth. The study also highlights the importance of contextualized stewardship models that address the realities

of public schools with minority Christian populations. In such contexts, stewardship provides a framework for faithful engagement, resilience, and responsible use of limited resources. The qualitative findings demonstrate that professional stewardship at SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua is a lived reality shaped by theological reflection, vocational identity, and practical constraints. The Parable of the Talents functions as a central interpretive lens through which teachers understand and enact their professional responsibilities. Stewardship is expressed through accountability, pedagogical diligence, relational care, professional growth, and ethical integrity. These dimensions collectively constitute a holistic model of Christian professional stewardship that integrates faith and practice. By grounding professional responsibility in biblical theology, this study offers a distinctive contribution to the discourse on Christian teacher professionalism. It affirms that stewardship is not merely a metaphor but a formative framework that shapes how teachers understand their work, relate to students, and pursue excellence in Christian education.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored professional stewardship in Christian education through a qualitative examination of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' practices at SD Negeri No. 075098 Hiliotalua, informed by a theological reflection on the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The findings demonstrate that professional stewardship is not merely an abstract theological concept but a lived professional orientation that shapes how teachers understand their identity, responsibilities, and daily practices. Stewardship emerges as a unifying framework that integrates faith, professionalism, and ethical accountability within the context of Christian education. The study shows that CRE teachers interpret their professional roles as a divine trust, reinforcing a vocational understanding of teaching. This theological framing strengthens teachers' commitment, perseverance, and moral integrity, particularly in a context characterized by limited human and material resources. By viewing teaching as a form of stewardship, teachers develop a deeper sense of responsibility that extends beyond institutional job requirements to include accountability before God. This dual accountability framework, both institutional and theological, provides a robust ethical foundation for professional conduct. The findings highlight that stewardship is operationalized through pedagogical diligence, relational care, and responsible resource management. Teachers' commitment to careful lesson planning, adaptive instructional strategies, and creative use of limited resources reflects a stewardship mindset oriented toward faithful and productive engagement. These practices mirror the parable's emphasis on actively using entrusted resources rather than passively preserving them. In this sense, stewardship functions as a pedagogical ethic that encourages initiative, reflective practice, and continuous improvement. The relational dimension of stewardship also emerges as a critical component of professional practice. Teachers understand their responsibility as extending to the holistic development of students, including their moral, emotional, and spiritual well-being. This relational stewardship underscores the ethical weight of being entrusted with young learners and highlights the formative role of teachers in shaping students' character and faith. Such an understanding aligns with broader Christian educational perspectives that view teaching as a ministry of care and formation, not

merely instruction. The study emphasizes the importance of professional growth as an expression of stewardship. Teachers' efforts to develop their competencies and to maximize their professional potential reflect a theological understanding of abilities as gifts that must be cultivated. This perspective reframes professional development as a moral and spiritual responsibility, not simply a career requirement. In under-resourced contexts, this stewardship-oriented approach to professional growth supports resilience and sustained motivation. This study also acknowledges contextual challenges that limit the full realization of professional stewardship, including resource constraints and workload pressures. However, the findings suggest that stewardship theology provides a meaningful interpretive and motivational framework that helps teachers persevere amid such challenges. By interpreting constraints as opportunities for faithfulness, teachers maintain professional commitment and ethical responsibility. This study affirms that the Parable of the Talents offers a powerful theological framework for understanding and enacting professional stewardship in Christian education. Stewardship integrates faith and professionalism into a coherent model of teacher identity and practice, emphasizing accountability, productivity, relational care, and ethical integrity. This holistic model contributes to the discourse on Christian teacher professionalism by demonstrating how biblical theology can inform and enrich educational practice. Future research is recommended to examine professional stewardship across broader contexts and to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to further strengthen the empirical and theoretical foundations of stewardship-based professional development in Christian education.

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