



## Maintaining Excellence in Teaching Ministry: Biblical Reflections on Matthew 25:21 in Christian Religious Education at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the pedagogical and professional dimensions of teaching ministry excellence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo, South Nias, through a biblical-theological reflection on Matthew 25:21. Grounded in the concept of faithful stewardship, this research aims to examine how principles of faithfulness, responsibility, and excellence are reflected in contemporary Christian educational practice. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 93 Christian students and 20 Christian teachers through structured questionnaires measuring perceptions of instructional preparation, professional integrity, consistency, spiritual motivation, and overall teaching excellence. Descriptive and correlational analyses were employed to explore patterns in respondents' perceptions and to examine relationships between key indicators of teaching ministry excellence. The findings reveal that CRE teachers are perceived as demonstrating high levels of faithfulness, instructional preparedness, consistency, and ethical integrity. These dimensions are strongly aligned with the biblical portrayal of faithful stewardship in Matthew 25:21, where excellence in service is affirmed as a central virtue. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of supporting continuous professional development that integrates pedagogical skill enhancement with spiritual formation. This integrated approach is essential for sustaining excellence in Christian Religious Education, particularly in resource-limited and rural contexts such as South Nias. Overall, the study affirms that teaching ministry excellence is best understood as a holistic construct encompassing pedagogical competence, professional integrity, and faithful commitment to God's calling in education.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching Ministry, Christian Religious Education, Biblical Reflections*

### INTRODUCTION

Excellence in teaching ministry is increasingly recognized as a crucial dimension of professional competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE). In contemporary educational contexts, teachers are not only expected to demonstrate pedagogical and

professional skills but are also called to embody spiritual integrity, faithfulness, and commitment in their vocation. Within Christian education, teaching is understood not merely as a technical occupation but as a divine calling that integrates faith, character, and professional responsibility (Pazmino, 2001; Pazmiño, 2008). This theological and pedagogical perspective places Christian educators in a unique position, where excellence is defined not only by academic achievement but also by faithfulness to God's calling and stewardship of entrusted responsibilities. Matthew 25:21, which records the master's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant," has long been interpreted as a foundational biblical principle for understanding excellence, faithfulness, and stewardship in Christian life and ministry. The Parable of the Talents emphasizes accountability, responsibility, and faithful use of entrusted gifts as key indicators of commendable service (Hultgren, 2002; Jeremias, 1972). In biblical theology, this passage is frequently associated with the concept of stewardship, where individuals are called to manage God-given resources, abilities, and opportunities in ways that honor God and serve others (Wright, 2006). Applied to the context of Christian education, this parable provides a strong theological basis for understanding teaching as a form of stewardship that requires diligence, faithfulness, and a commitment to excellence. Christian education scholars consistently argue that teaching ministry involves more than instructional delivery; it entails spiritual leadership, moral modeling, and faithful representation of Christian values in daily practice (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). Teachers function as role models whose attitudes, work ethic, and integrity significantly shape students' character formation and spiritual development. In this sense, excellence in teaching ministry is inseparable from the teacher's spiritual life, vocational commitment, and sense of accountability before God (Palmer, 1998). The biblical vision of excellence, therefore, is not rooted in competition or mere performance metrics but in faithfulness, integrity, and responsible stewardship. The Parable of the Talents has been widely discussed in New Testament scholarship as a text that highlights responsible action in light of divine trust. Hultgren (2002) emphasizes that the parable calls believers to active and faithful engagement with what has been entrusted to them, while Wright (2006) interprets stewardship as participation in God's mission through responsible use of gifts and opportunities. These interpretations support the view that Christian educators are stewards of students' learning, spiritual growth, and moral formation. Consequently, maintaining excellence in teaching ministry becomes an expression of obedience, faithfulness, and service to God. In the context of Indonesian education, particularly in public schools where Christian Religious Education is taught to minority Christian students, the role of CRE teachers becomes even more significant. They are tasked not only with delivering curriculum content but also with nurturing Christian identity, faith commitment, and ethical character within a pluralistic environment (Suhadi & Halim, 2018). This contextual challenge requires CRE teachers to demonstrate high levels of professional competence, spiritual maturity, and dedication to their calling. Excellence in teaching ministry, therefore, is both a theological mandate and a practical necessity for sustaining meaningful Christian education in diverse educational settings. SMK Negeri 1 Aramo, South Nias, provides a relevant context for examining how excellence in teaching ministry is understood and practiced. With 93 Christian students and 20 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers, the school represents a setting where Christian educators play a vital role in shaping students' academic and spiritual development.

Investigating teaching excellence through the lens of Matthew 25:21 allows this study to integrate biblical theology with educational practice, offering a faith-based framework for understanding professional commitment, responsibility, and faithfulness in teaching. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how the biblical principle of faithfulness and excellence in Matthew 25:21 is reflected in the teaching ministry of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo. By grounding the analysis in established theological and educational scholarship, this research aims to contribute to the growing discourse on Christian teacher professionalism, stewardship, and excellence in ministry-oriented education. In doing so, it affirms that excellence in Christian teaching is not merely a matter of technical competence but a holistic expression of faith, vocation, and responsible service before God.

## METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design with a descriptive-correlational approach to examine how biblical principles of excellence and faithfulness derived from Matthew 25:21 are reflected in the teaching ministry of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo, South Nias. Quantitative methods were selected to enable systematic measurement of perceptions, attitudes, and practices related to teaching excellence and professional stewardship, allowing for objective analysis and statistical description of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A descriptive design was appropriate for capturing the current condition of teaching ministry practices, while the correlational element supported exploration of relationships among key variables related to teaching excellence, faithfulness, and professional commitment (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo, South Nias, a public vocational high school where Christian Religious Education is provided for Christian students. The population of this study consisted of 93 Christian students and 20 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers. For the purpose of this study, students served as the primary respondents, as they directly experience and evaluate the teaching practices of CRE teachers in classroom contexts. Teachers were included as supplementary respondents to provide additional perspectives on teaching ministry practices and professional commitment. A census sampling technique was applied to include all available Christian students as respondents, given the relatively manageable population size (Sugiyono, 2019). This approach ensured comprehensive representation and reduced sampling bias. For the teacher group, total sampling was also applied, involving all Christian teachers who consented to participate. The use of total population sampling is consistent with quantitative research practices in small populations to enhance external validity within the institutional context (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The primary independent variable in this study was teaching ministry excellence, conceptualized as the degree to which CRE teachers demonstrate faithfulness, responsibility, professionalism, and commitment in their teaching roles, grounded in the theological principles of Matthew 25:21. This variable was operationalized through indicators such as instructional preparation, consistency in teaching, responsibility toward students, integrity, and commitment to continuous improvement (Pazmiño, 2008; Groome, 2011). The dependent variable was students' perceptions of teaching excellence and faithfulness, defined as students' evaluations of how CRE teachers embody professional stewardship,

responsibility, and excellence in classroom practice. These perceptions were measured through students' responses to structured questionnaire items assessing observable teaching behaviors and attitudes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher based on established theoretical and biblical frameworks related to teaching excellence, stewardship, and professional competence in Christian education (Pazmiño, 2008; Palmer, 1998). The instrument consisted of closed-ended items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire covered several dimensions, including: faithfulness and responsibility in teaching, commitment to instructional excellence, professional integrity, consistency and reliability, and spiritual motivation in teaching ministry. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire items were reviewed by experts in Christian education and educational research methodology. This expert judgment process is consistent with recommended practices for establishing content validity in quantitative educational research (Fraenkel et al., 2019). A pilot test was conducted with a small group of students outside the research site to assess item clarity and reliability. Construct validity was supported through alignment of questionnaire items with theoretical constructs derived from Christian education scholarship and biblical stewardship theology (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency of the instrument. A coefficient value of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  was considered acceptable, following standard guidelines in social science research (Taber, 2018). Items that did not meet acceptable reliability criteria were revised or removed prior to final data collection. Data collection was carried out after obtaining formal permission from the school administration and informed consent from participants. Questionnaires were administered in paper-based format during scheduled school hours to ensure high response rates. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and instructed that participation was voluntary. These procedures followed ethical standards for educational research involving human participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to summarize participants' responses, including calculation of means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. These analyses provided an overview of students' and teachers' perceptions regarding excellence and faithfulness in teaching ministry. Where appropriate, correlational analysis using Pearson's  $r$  was conducted to explore relationships between indicators of teaching excellence and perceived professional commitment. Statistical analysis was performed using standard statistical software to ensure accuracy and reproducibility (Field, 2018).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative data were collected from 93 Christian students and 20 Christian teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo, South Nias. The student respondents represented diverse vocational study programs, ensuring that perceptions of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teaching practices reflected a broad cross-section of classroom experiences. The inclusion of all Christian students strengthened the representativeness of the findings within the institutional context. Teacher respondents consisted of CRE teachers and other Christian teachers who were involved in faith-based formation and character development activities at the school. This composition of respondents provided a

comprehensive perspective on teaching ministry excellence as experienced and perceived in daily instructional practices. From a methodological standpoint, the use of total population sampling enhanced the internal validity of the findings for this specific school context, allowing the results to be interpreted as a close approximation of the actual conditions at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019).

Overall descriptive analysis indicated that students perceived a generally high level of teaching ministry excellence among CRE teachers. The mean scores across most questionnaire dimensions were in the high category, indicating positive evaluations of teachers' faithfulness, responsibility, instructional preparation, and professional integrity. These results suggest that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo are widely viewed as demonstrating behaviors consistent with the biblical principle of faithfulness articulated in Matthew 25:21, where commendation is given to servants who are described as "good and faithful" in carrying out their entrusted responsibilities. In the dimension of faithfulness and responsibility, students reported strong agreement with statements indicating that teachers consistently attend classes, fulfill teaching obligations, and demonstrate commitment to their instructional duties. High mean scores in this dimension reflect that students perceive their teachers as reliable and dependable. This finding aligns with educational leadership literature emphasizing that teacher reliability and consistency are central indicators of professional competence and instructional quality (Darling-Hammond, 2017). From a biblical-theological perspective, faithfulness in small and large responsibilities, as emphasized in Matthew 25:21, provides a strong moral and spiritual framework for understanding professional commitment in teaching ministry (Wright, 2004). In terms of commitment to instructional excellence, students reported positive perceptions of teachers' preparation, clarity of instruction, and effort to deliver high-quality lessons. High mean scores suggest that CRE teachers are perceived as investing significant effort in lesson planning and instructional delivery. This supports prior research indicating that teacher preparation and instructional clarity are strongly associated with student engagement and learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009). Theologically, this commitment reflects a stewardship-oriented understanding of teaching as a calling that requires diligence, intentionality, and excellence (Palmer, 1998). The professional integrity dimension also yielded high average scores, indicating that students perceive their teachers as modeling honesty, fairness, and ethical conduct. These perceptions are particularly significant in Christian education contexts, where teachers are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to embody moral and spiritual values (Groome, 2011). The alignment between ethical behavior and instructional practice strengthens the credibility of teachers as role models and reinforces the formative dimension of Christian Religious Education.

One of the strongest dimensions in the results was consistency and reliability in teaching practices. Students reported that teachers consistently apply classroom rules, maintain structured learning environments, and provide regular feedback. High levels of consistency are widely recognized as essential for effective classroom management and student trust (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). In the context of teaching ministry, consistency also reflects faithfulness in carrying out daily responsibilities, reinforcing the theological principle that faithfulness is demonstrated not only in major achievements but also in

routine, everyday practices (Wright, 2004). From a biblical reflection standpoint, Matthew 25:21 emphasizes that faithfulness in “a few things” leads to greater trust and responsibility. The high scores in consistency and reliability suggest that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo are perceived as faithful stewards of their teaching roles. This perception is significant because it indicates that students recognize and value the moral and spiritual dimensions of professional reliability, not merely technical teaching competence. The dimension of spiritual motivation in teaching ministry also received positive evaluations, though with slightly more variation compared to technical and professional indicators. Students generally agreed that teachers demonstrate spiritual commitment, integrate Christian values into lessons, and express motivation rooted in faith. However, some variability suggests that while spiritual motivation is evident, it may not always be equally visible or consistently integrated across all instructional contexts. This finding reflects a broader challenge in Christian education, where integrating faith and learning in a coherent and consistent manner requires intentional pedagogical strategies and ongoing spiritual formation (Pazmiño, 2008). The results suggest that while CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo are perceived as spiritually motivated, there may be opportunities to strengthen the explicit integration of biblical principles, including stewardship and excellence, into everyday teaching practices. Data from teacher respondents indicated strong self-perceptions of commitment, faithfulness, and professional responsibility. Teachers reported high levels of agreement with statements reflecting dedication to their teaching roles, willingness to improve instructional quality, and commitment to Christian values in professional practice. These self-perceptions align with students’ generally positive evaluations, suggesting a convergence between how teachers view their own practices and how students experience them. Slight differences were observed in areas related to continuous professional development and reflective practice. While teachers expressed commitment to improvement, some responses indicated practical constraints, such as limited access to professional training opportunities or time constraints. This finding is consistent with broader research on teacher professional development in rural or resource-limited contexts, where structural barriers can limit opportunities for sustained professional growth (Darling-Hammond, Hylar, & Gardner, 2017).

Correlational analysis revealed a positive and statistically meaningful relationship between indicators of teaching excellence and perceived professional commitment. Higher scores in instructional preparation, consistency, and integrity were associated with higher perceptions of overall teaching ministry excellence. This relationship supports the theoretical assumption that excellence in teaching ministry is multidimensional, involving both technical competence and moral-spiritual commitment (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). The positive correlations also support educational research demonstrating that teacher professionalism is strongly linked to instructional quality and student perceptions of effective teaching (Hattie, 2009). In a Christian education context, this relationship is further strengthened by theological understandings of vocation and stewardship, where professional competence is viewed as an expression of faithfulness to God’s calling (Palmer, 1998).

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the relevance of Matthew 25:21 as a theological and pedagogical framework for understanding teaching ministry excellence. The verse emphasizes faithfulness, responsibility, and commendation for diligent stewardship. The high levels of perceived faithfulness, consistency, and commitment among CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo suggest that biblical principles are meaningfully reflected in professional practice. This alignment between theology and pedagogy reinforces the idea that Christian educators are not merely transmitters of religious knowledge but stewards of a sacred trust that includes students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation (Wright, 2004). The results support Groome's (2011) assertion that Christian education is inherently formative and relational, requiring teachers to model the very values they seek to cultivate in students.

The findings have several important implications for Christian Religious Education practice and policy at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo and similar contexts. The generally high levels of perceived teaching excellence suggest that current practices provide a strong foundation for effective teaching ministry. School leaders and education authorities can build on these strengths by supporting ongoing professional development that integrates pedagogical skill enhancement with spiritual formation. The variability in perceptions of spiritual motivation highlights the need for intentional strategies to strengthen faith-learning integration. This may include reflective teaching practices, collaborative lesson planning, and structured opportunities for theological reflection on teaching roles. Such approaches are consistent with best practices in Christian teacher education, which emphasize reflective practice and spiritual growth alongside technical competence (Pazmiño, 2008). The positive correlation between professionalism and perceived excellence underscores the importance of supporting teachers in maintaining high standards of professional conduct and instructional quality. Policies that recognize and reward faithful service, encourage collaboration, and provide access to professional learning opportunities can further enhance teaching ministry excellence. The results of this study are consistent with prior research highlighting the central role of teacher competence, integrity, and commitment in shaping student perceptions of effective teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hattie, 2009). In Christian education contexts, similar studies have emphasized the importance of faithfulness, stewardship, and moral modeling as defining characteristics of effective Christian educators (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). The findings also resonate with biblical scholarship emphasizing stewardship as a holistic concept encompassing responsibility, accountability, and faithful use of entrusted resources (Wright, 2004). By empirically linking these theological concepts to students' perceptions of teaching excellence, this study contributes to a growing body of research that integrates biblical theology with educational practice. The rural and socio-cultural context of South Nias provides an important backdrop for interpreting the findings. In contexts where educational resources may be limited, teacher commitment and faithfulness often play an especially critical role in sustaining educational quality. The high levels of perceived excellence in this study suggest that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo are effectively compensating for potential structural challenges through personal dedication and professional responsibility. This finding supports research indicating that in resource-constrained settings, teacher motivation and commitment can significantly influence educational outcomes and school climate

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In Christian education, this dynamic is further shaped by theological motivations that frame teaching as a form of ministry and service.

While the results are generally positive, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies on self-report and perception-based data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Students and teachers may provide favorable responses due to cultural respect for teachers or perceived expectations. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationship between teaching practices and long-term student outcomes. Future research could incorporate classroom observations, qualitative interviews, and longitudinal designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how teaching ministry excellence develops over time and how it affects students' spiritual and academic growth. Such mixed-method approaches would further strengthen the empirical and theological integration of Christian education research. The results and discussion demonstrate that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo are perceived as embodying key dimensions of teaching ministry excellence consistent with Matthew 25:21. High levels of faithfulness, responsibility, consistency, and professional integrity reflect a strong alignment between biblical stewardship principles and educational practice. The positive correlations between professionalism and perceived excellence further support the central role of teacher competence and commitment in shaping effective Christian education. These findings affirm the theological and pedagogical significance of excellence and faithfulness as core values in Christian Religious Education. They also highlight the importance of ongoing professional and spiritual development to sustain and enhance teaching ministry excellence in diverse educational contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the pedagogical and professional dimensions of teaching ministry excellence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo, South Nias, through the theological lens of Matthew 25:21. By employing a quantitative approach and involving 93 Christian students and 20 Christian teachers, this research provides empirical evidence on how biblical principles of faithfulness and stewardship are reflected in contemporary educational practice. The findings demonstrate that teaching excellence in Christian Religious Education is not limited to technical instructional competence but is deeply intertwined with moral, spiritual, and vocational commitments. The results indicate that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo are perceived as demonstrating a high level of faithfulness, responsibility, consistency, and professional integrity. These dimensions align closely with the biblical portrayal of faithful stewardship in Matthew 25:21, where commendation is given to servants who are diligent and trustworthy in fulfilling their responsibilities. The strong positive perceptions from students suggest that teachers are widely recognized as reliable and committed educators who take their professional and spiritual calling seriously. The study also highlights the importance of instructional preparation and consistency as central components of teaching ministry excellence. Students' positive evaluations of lesson preparation, classroom management, and instructional clarity suggest that CRE teachers are making sustained efforts to provide high-quality learning experiences. These findings are

consistent with broader educational research emphasizing the critical role of teacher preparation and professionalism in shaping effective teaching and positive student perceptions. In the context of Christian education, these pedagogical competencies gain added theological significance, as they are understood as expressions of faithful stewardship before God. The results reveal that spiritual motivation and ethical integrity are perceived as integral to teaching excellence. While some variability was observed in the visibility of spiritual integration across instructional contexts, the overall findings indicate that teachers are generally seen as modeling Christian values in their professional conduct. This underscores the formative role of CRE teachers not only as instructors but also as moral and spiritual exemplars. Such a dual role strengthens the credibility of Christian Religious Education and reinforces its mission to support holistic student development, encompassing cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that integrates biblical theology with educational research. By empirically linking Matthew 25:21 with indicators of teaching excellence, the study affirms that biblical concepts of stewardship, faithfulness, and responsibility provide a meaningful framework for understanding professional competence in Christian education. This integration enriches both theological reflection and pedagogical practice, offering a contextually grounded model for conceptualizing teaching as a form of ministry. The findings have important implications for school leadership and teacher development at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo and similar educational settings. School leaders are encouraged to support ongoing professional development that integrates pedagogical skill enhancement with spiritual formation. Structured opportunities for reflective practice, theological reflection, and collaborative learning may further strengthen the integration of faith and teaching. Such initiatives can help sustain high levels of teaching excellence while deepening teachers' understanding of their roles as faithful stewards of God's calling in education. The reliance on perception-based data and a cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences or to fully capture the complexity of teaching ministry practices. Future research is encouraged to incorporate qualitative methods, classroom observations, and longitudinal designs to provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of how teaching ministry excellence develops over time and how it impacts students' long-term spiritual and academic growth. In conclusion, this study affirms that teaching excellence in Christian Religious Education at SMK Negeri 1 Aramo is strongly shaped by a combination of pedagogical competence, professional integrity, and theological commitment. Grounded in the biblical message of Matthew 25:21, the findings emphasize that faithfulness and stewardship are not abstract ideals but lived realities that can be observed and experienced in daily teaching practice. As such, this research underscores the enduring relevance of biblical principles in guiding and strengthening excellence in Christian education within contemporary school contexts.

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