



The Teacher as a Spiritual Witness in Society (Matthew 5:14-16): A Study at SMKN 1 Mandau

Pon Rapi Antoni Sirait

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: pon.rapi8@guru.smk.belajar.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers as spiritual witnesses in society based on Matthew 5:14-16 at SMKN 1 Mandau, Bengkalis. The research is grounded in the theological conviction that teachers are called not only to transmit knowledge but also to embody visible Christian character that influences students' faith development. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, the study involved 175 Christian students as respondents within a school context that includes five Christian teachers, two of whom are CRE teachers. Data were collected through a validated Likert-scale questionnaire measuring indicators of teachers' spiritual witness and students' faith engagement. Descriptive statistics, normality testing, and simple regression analysis were employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that the perceived level of teachers' spiritual witness is high, particularly in dimensions of loving interaction, professional integrity, and consistency between teaching and conduct. Regression analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between teachers' spiritual witness and students' faith engagement. This suggests that students are more motivated to practice Christian values and demonstrate moral awareness when they observe authentic Christian character in their teachers. However, the coefficient of determination shows that student faith formation is influenced by multiple factors beyond teacher example. The study concludes that the visible embodiment of Christian values by teachers remains a critical component of effective CRE in public vocational schools. Strengthening reflective spirituality, professional consistency, and relational care among teachers is recommended to enhance their role as credible spiritual witnesses in pluralistic educational contexts.

Keywords: *Teacher, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Witness*

INTRODUCTION

The role of teachers extends beyond the transmission of academic knowledge; it encompasses moral formation, character development, and spiritual influence within the

educational community. In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), teachers are expected not only to teach doctrinal content but also to embody Christian values in daily practice. This expectation resonates strongly with the biblical mandate found in Matthew 5:14-16, where believers are called to be “the light of the world,” whose lives visibly reflect God’s transformative work. Within school environments, Christian teachers function as living testimonies whose personal integrity, professional conduct, and relational engagement shape students’ perceptions of faith in action. Educational scholarship consistently affirms that teachers serve as powerful role models whose behavior significantly influences students’ moral and social development (Bandura, 1986). Social learning theory explains that students internalize values not merely through instruction but through observation and imitation of credible figures in their environment. In faith-based or religiously informed education, this modeling function becomes even more critical because the credibility of religious teaching is often measured by the congruence between what teachers proclaim and how they live (Palmer, 1998). The concept of the teacher as a spiritual witness is both pedagogically and theologically significant. Particularly in public schools where religious diversity is present, Christian teachers must navigate their witness with wisdom, professionalism, and sensitivity. The mandate of Matthew 5:14-16 does not promote coercive religiosity but emphasizes visible good works that glorify God. This aligns with the broader educational goal of character education promoted in Indonesian schools, which highlights integrity, responsibility, and social harmony as core competencies (Kemendikbud, 2017). Consequently, the presence of Christian teachers in public institutions such as SMKN 1 Mandau, Bengkalis, provides an important case for examining how spiritual witness is expressed within pluralistic educational settings. Previous studies have highlighted that effective Christian educators integrate faith and practice through authentic relationships, ethical consistency, and servant leadership (Van Brummelen, 2009). However, empirical research focusing specifically on the lived witness of Christian teachers in Indonesian vocational public schools remains limited. Most existing literature emphasizes curriculum, pedagogy, or religious instruction outcomes rather than the observable spiritual influence of teachers within everyday school life. This gap is significant because vocational schools often prioritize technical competence, potentially marginalizing the formative spiritual dimension of education. SMKN 1 Mandau in Bengkalis Regency presents a meaningful locus for investigation. The school community includes 175 Christian students and five Christian teachers, including two Christian Religious Education teachers. This demographic configuration creates a minority-faith environment in which the visibility and credibility of Christian witness among teachers may have heightened importance. In such contexts, the teacher’s role as a spiritual witness is not primarily expressed through formal preaching but through professional excellence, ethical consistency, and compassionate engagement with students and colleagues. Matthew 5:14-16 frames witness in terms of visibility (“a city set on a hill”), intentionality (“let your light shine”), and purpose (“that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”). These elements suggest that spiritual witness in education involves observable character, consistent behavior, and socially beneficial action. When applied to the teaching profession, this passage implies that Christian teachers are called to demonstrate pedagogical responsibility, relational care, and moral integrity in ways that positively influence the school community. Questions remain regarding how effectively Christian

teachers embody this witness in contemporary public-school settings and how students perceive such witness. Empirical investigation is necessary to understand whether the biblical ideal translates into measurable educational and relational outcomes. This study aims to examine the extent to which Christian Religious Education teachers function as spiritual witnesses at SMKN 1 Mandau, Bengkalis, focusing on observable behaviors, student perceptions, and the integration of faith-based values into professional practice. By addressing this focus, the study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on faith-integrated pedagogy in pluralistic educational environments and to provide practical insights for strengthening the role of Christian teachers as credible spiritual witnesses in Indonesian public schools.

METHODS

The quantitative approach was selected because the research sought to measure students' perceptions systematically and to determine the statistical relationship between teachers' spiritual witness and students' faith-related responses. Quantitative methods are appropriate for studies that aim to generalize patterns of perception and behavior through numerical data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at SMKN 1 Mandau, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. The school context is significant because Christian students and teachers constitute a minority within a pluralistic public-school environment. The population of this study consisted of 175 Christian students enrolled at the school. Using total sampling for the Christian student population (given its manageable size and to maximize statistical power), all 175 students were invited to participate as respondents. In addition, contextual data were gathered from five Christian teachers, including two CRE teachers, to support interpretation of the findings, although the primary quantitative analysis focused on student responses. The unit of analysis was the students' perception of teachers' spiritual witness in school life. The study examined one primary independent construct: Teachers' Spiritual Witness, operationalized through the following indicators: visibility of Christian character in daily behavior, consistency between teaching and conduct, professional responsibility and integrity, loving and respectful interaction with students, positive social influence within the school community. The dependent construct was: Students' Faith Engagement, reflected in: motivation to practice Christian values, interest in CRE learning, willingness to imitate positive teacher behavior, growth in moral awareness. These indicators were developed based on Matthew 5:14-16 and supported by Christian education literature emphasizing modeling and observational learning. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument employed a five-point scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items, distributed proportionally across the defined indicators. Prior to full deployment, the instrument underwent content validation by two experts in Christian education and educational measurement to ensure theological and pedagogical alignment. Empirical validity was examined using Pearson product-moment correlation, with items considered valid if $r_{\text{count}} > r_{\text{table}}$ at $\alpha = 0.05$. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient ≥ 0.70 interpreted as acceptable internal consistency (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The pilot test indicated that all retained items met validity requirements, and the overall reliability coefficient fell within the high

reliability category, confirming that the instrument was suitable for data collection. Data collection was carried out during the academic term with permission from school leadership. Respondents completed the questionnaire in supervised classroom settings to ensure independence of responses. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality of student data. All statistical analyses were conducted at a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Through this quantitative framework, the study aims to provide empirically grounded insights into how Christian teachers at SMKN 1 Mandau embody the biblical call to be “the light of the world” within a contemporary vocational school context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis in this study was designed to examine how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMKN 1 Mandau, Bengkalis, function as spiritual witnesses in light of Matthew 5:14-16, and how this witness is perceived to influence students' faith engagement. Data were obtained from 175 Christian students, representing the full accessible population, thereby strengthening the descriptive power of the findings. The results are presented through descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and inferential analysis, followed by an integrative theological and pedagogical discussion. Based on descriptive analysis, the overall mean score for the variable teachers' spiritual witness fell within the high category. This indicates that, from the students' perspective, Christian teachers, particularly CRE teachers, generally demonstrate visible Christian character in their professional and relational conduct. Among the five measured indicators, the highest mean emerged in the dimension of loving and respectful interaction with students, followed closely by professional responsibility and integrity. Slightly lower but still strong scores were found in visibility of Christian character, consistency between teaching and conduct, and positive social influence within the school community. These findings suggest that relational expressions of faith, such as kindness, patience, and respectful communication, are the most immediately perceived forms of spiritual witness by students. This aligns with observational learning theory, which emphasizes that learners are particularly responsive to behaviors that directly affect their interpersonal experience. When teachers consistently demonstrate care and fairness, students interpret these behaviors as authentic expressions of the Christian values being taught. In the context of Matthew 5:16, such visible good works function precisely as the kind of “light” that can be seen by others. Further analysis of item-level responses revealed that students strongly agreed with statements indicating that CRE teachers treat students fairly, show concern for students' difficulties, and maintain ethical consistency in classroom management. This pattern reflects a healthy alignment between pedagogical professionalism and spiritual credibility. Several items, especially those related to the explicit verbal articulation of faith in everyday school interactions, showed comparatively moderate (though still positive) scores. This suggests that while teachers' behavioral witness is strong, the explicit integration of faith language into broader school life may be more restrained, possibly due to the pluralistic nature of the public-school environment. Normality testing using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov procedure indicated that the data were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), and linearity testing confirmed a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. These prerequisite tests justified

proceeding to inferential analysis. The simple regression analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant influence of teachers' spiritual witness on students' faith engagement ($p < 0.05$). The regression coefficient indicated that increases in perceived teacher witness were associated with measurable increases in students' motivation to practice Christian values, interest in CRE learning, and willingness to imitate positive behaviors. The coefficient of determination (R^2) showed that teachers' spiritual witness accounted for a meaningful proportion of the variance in students' faith engagement, although not the entirety, indicating the presence of additional influencing factors such as family environment, peer culture, and church involvement. This finding reinforces the central premise of Christian pedagogy: formation occurs through embodied example as much as through verbal instruction. Students at SMKN 1 Mandau appear to internalize Christian values more deeply when they observe congruence between what teachers teach and how they live. This empirical pattern supports Bandura's social learning framework, which posits that credible models significantly shape learner attitudes and behaviors. Within CRE specifically, the teacher's life functions as a pedagogical text that students continuously interpret. The findings resonate strongly with the structure of Matthew 5:14-16. The passage emphasizes three key dimensions of witness: visibility ("a city set on a hill"), intentional shining ("let your light shine"), and observable good works ("that they may see your good works"). The high ratings on relational care and professional integrity indicate that teachers at SMKN 1 Mandau are effectively embodying the visibility dimension of the text. Students are not merely hearing about Christian virtues; they are witnessing them in practice. The slightly lower scores in explicit faith expression suggest a nuanced contextual dynamic. In a public vocational school characterized by religious diversity, teachers may intentionally express their faith primarily through ethical conduct rather than overt verbal proclamation. This adaptive strategy can be interpreted not as a weakness but as a contextually wise embodiment of witness, one that aligns with the non-coercive spirit of Matthew 5:16, where the goal is that others "see your good works" rather than hear religious slogans. The data therefore reflect a form of incarnational witness, where professional excellence and relational integrity become the primary vehicles of spiritual influence. Another important finding concerns the strong student agreement with items related to consistency between teaching and behavior. Educational research has long warned that perceived hypocrisy significantly undermines moral education. In this study, the relatively high scores in consistency suggest that CRE teachers at SMKN 1 Mandau have largely succeeded in maintaining credibility. This credibility is pedagogically crucial because vocational high school students, who are developmentally more critical and socially aware, tend to evaluate teachers not only by instructional competence but by authenticity of character.

The discussion must also consider the institutional context. With 175 Christian students and only five Christian teachers (including two CRE teachers), the visibility of Christian witness among teachers carries amplified significance. In minority-faith settings, students often rely heavily on teachers as accessible adult models of lived faith within the school environment. The data suggest that the teachers in this context are meeting this expectation at a commendable level. The regression results also remind us that teacher witness, while influential, is not the sole determinant of student faith engagement. The R^2 value indicates that a substantial portion of variance remains explained by other

factors. This invites a more holistic understanding of Christian formation in schools. Family spirituality, church participation, peer networks, and digital culture likely interact with teacher influence in complex ways. Future studies would benefit from multivariate models that incorporate these additional variables. The strong performance in relational care should be intentionally maintained and institutionalized through mentoring and reflective practice among CRE teachers. Targeted training could help teachers integrate faith language more naturally and contextually appropriately within pluralistic classrooms, without compromising professionalism or inclusivity. School leadership should recognize that spiritual witness is not an abstract theological concept but an observable professional competency that can be nurtured through supportive policy and collegial culture. The results of this study provide robust empirical support for the proposition that Christian teachers at SMKN 1 Mandau are functioning as meaningful spiritual witnesses within their educational context. Students clearly perceive and respond to the teachers' Christlike character, particularly in relational and ethical domains. While opportunities remain to deepen explicit faith integration, the overall pattern reflects a healthy embodiment of Matthew 5:14-16 in a contemporary Indonesian public vocational school.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the extent to which Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMKN 1 Mandau, Bengkalis, function as spiritual witnesses in society in light of Matthew 5:14-16. Using a quantitative approach involving 175 Christian students, the research demonstrates that the personality and professional conduct of Christian teachers, particularly CRE teachers, are perceived positively and significantly influence students' faith engagement. Overall, the level of teachers' spiritual witness was categorized as high, indicating that students clearly observe and value the embodiment of Christian character within the school environment. The findings confirm that spiritual witness in educational settings is most powerfully communicated through relational and ethical behavior rather than through verbal instruction alone. Indicators such as loving interaction, fairness, integrity, and professional responsibility received the strongest student responses. This pattern reinforces the biblical emphasis that the "light" of believers is made visible through good works that others can see. In the context of SMKN 1 Mandau, the teachers' daily conduct functions as a lived testimony that shapes students' motivation to practice Christian values, increases their interest in CRE learning, and encourages positive behavioral imitation. Inferential analysis further revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between teachers' spiritual witness and students' faith engagement. Although the magnitude of influence was meaningful, the coefficient of determination indicates that student faith formation is multidimensional and also shaped by family, church, peer, and broader cultural factors. Thus, while teachers play a strategic and irreplaceable role, effective Christian formation in public schools requires collaborative support from multiple formative environments. The minority position of Christian teachers within a pluralistic vocational school heightens the importance of credible, non-coercive witness. The data suggest that teachers at SMKN 1 Mandau have generally succeeded in embodying an incarnational model of witness—one expressed through professional excellence, ethical consistency, and compassionate

relationships. This approach is particularly appropriate in public-school contexts where religious sensitivity and inclusivity must be maintained. CRE teachers should continue to cultivate reflective spiritual disciplines that sustain authenticity between teaching and living. Professional development programs should intentionally strengthen teachers' capacity to integrate faith meaningfully yet wisely within diverse classrooms. School leaders should recognize spiritual witness as a measurable dimension of teacher competence and provide institutional support that nurtures character-based professionalism. Finally, future research is encouraged to incorporate broader ecological variables and mixed-method designs to deepen understanding of faith formation dynamics in Indonesian public schools. In conclusion, the study affirms that when Christian teachers faithfully embody the values they teach, they become effective "lights" within the educational community. Their visible good works not only reinforce classroom instruction but also contribute significantly to the spiritual and moral development of students in contemporary vocational education settings.

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