



Professionalism of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Light of Paul's Servanthood Ethos in Philippians 1:27: A Study at SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in light of Paul's servanthood ethos in Philippians 1:27 at SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran. The research is grounded in the conviction that CRE teachers are called not only to deliver instructional content but also to embody the ethical and spiritual values they teach. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study involved Christian teachers and students within a school context that includes 37 Christian students and 15 Christian teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings indicate that CRE teachers generally demonstrate strong professionalism marked by instructional preparedness, ethical consistency, and responsible classroom management. More importantly, their professionalism is perceived by students as credible because it is supported by visible Christian character, particularly in areas of integrity, relational care, and servant-oriented attitudes. The embodiment of Pauline servanthood values contributes positively to students' moral awareness and faith-related engagement. Nevertheless, the study also identifies areas for development, including the need for deeper integration of vocational ethics into CRE instruction and more systematic peer collaboration among Christian teachers. The study concludes that the effectiveness of CRE in vocational public schools is closely linked to the visible integration of professional competence and spiritual authenticity. Strengthening reflective formation and collaborative support systems is recommended to sustain teachers' roles as credible witnesses of the gospel in pluralistic educational contexts.

Keywords: Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Servanthood Ethos

INTRODUCTION

The demand for teacher professionalism in contemporary education continues to intensify as schools are expected not only to deliver academic excellence but also to

cultivate character, integrity, and social responsibility among students. In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), professionalism carries an even deeper theological dimension because teachers are understood as both educators and spiritual mentors. Their competence is measured not merely by pedagogical mastery but also by their ability to embody Christian values in ways that are credible, consistent, and transformative for learners. Within Indonesian public schools, where religious diversity and institutional accountability intersect, the professionalism of CRE teachers becomes especially significant for sustaining meaningful faith-based formation without compromising educational inclusivity. Scholarly discourse has long affirmed that teacher professionalism encompasses mastery of subject matter, pedagogical skill, ethical commitment, and reflective practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In Christian education literature, however, professionalism is further enriched by the concept of vocation, teaching as a calling that integrates faith, character, and service (Pazmiño, 2008). This integration is particularly relevant in vocational secondary schools such as SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran, where students are being prepared not only for employment but also for responsible participation in society. CRE teachers in such contexts must navigate the dual responsibility of maintaining instructional quality while modeling Christ-centered attitudes that can be observed in daily school life. A compelling biblical framework for understanding professional Christian conduct is found in Philippians 1:27, where the Apostle Paul exhorts believers to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” This text emphasizes ethical consistency, communal responsibility, and steadfast commitment to the gospel mission. Pauline scholarship notes that the phrase *politeuesthe* (“conduct yourselves”) carries civic and communal overtones, suggesting that Christian identity must be visibly expressed in public life (Fee, 1995). For educators, this exhortation resonates strongly with the expectation that professional behavior should reflect the values being taught. Thus, Philippians 1:27 provides a rich theological lens for examining the professionalism of CRE teachers as servant-leaders within educational institutions. Previous research in teacher effectiveness consistently highlights the influence of teacher professionalism on student motivation, moral development, and learning engagement (Hattie, 2009). Within Christian education specifically, studies have shown that students are particularly responsive to teachers whose lives demonstrate coherence between belief and practice (Van Brummelen, 2009). Empirical investigations that explicitly connect Pauline servanthood ethics with measurable dimensions of CRE teacher professionalism in Indonesian vocational schools remain limited. This gap is noteworthy given the growing emphasis on character education and the strategic role of CRE in public education policy. The context of SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran provides a meaningful site for such investigation. The school serves a diverse student body, including 37 Christian students, supported by 15 Christian teachers, among whom are CRE educators responsible for formal religious instruction. In a setting where Christian students represent a minority within the broader school ecosystem, the professional and spiritual credibility of CRE teachers becomes particularly consequential. Their conduct may function as a primary lived reference for students seeking to integrate faith with academic and vocational aspirations. This study aims to analyze the professionalism of Christian Religious Education teachers in light of Paul’s servanthood ethos in Philippians 1:27 within the context of SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran. Specifically, the research seeks to measure students’ perceptions of CRE teacher professionalism, examine the extent to which Pauline service values are reflected in

teachers' professional practice, and explore the relationship between perceived teacher professionalism and students' faith-related engagement. By integrating quantitative educational analysis with biblical-theological reflection, this study intends to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on faith-informed teacher professionalism in Indonesian public secondary education. Understanding how CRE teachers embody Pauline servanthood in their professional roles is essential for strengthening the credibility, effectiveness, and transformative potential of Christian education in pluralistic school environments.

METHODS

A descriptive qualitative approach was used to explore the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in light of Paul's servanthood ethos in Philippians 1:27 at SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran. The qualitative design was selected because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of lived professional practices, spiritual attitudes, and contextual dynamics rather than to test statistical relationships. Descriptive qualitative research enables the researcher to capture participants' perspectives, meanings, and experiences in their natural educational setting. The study was conducted at SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran, a public vocational secondary school characterized by religious diversity. The focus was on the Christian educational environment within the school, particularly CRE instructional practices and teacher professional behavior. The design followed a naturalistic inquiry framework, emphasizing real classroom conditions and authentic teacher-student interactions. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research focus. The primary informants included: CRE teachers (as key informants), Christian teachers (supporting informants), and Christian students (as confirmatory informants). The school context includes 37 Christian students and 15 Christian teachers (including CRE teachers). From this population, participants were chosen based on the following criteria: actively involved in the CRE learning process, willing to participate voluntarily, and able to provide reflective information regarding teacher professionalism and spiritual modeling. This sampling strategy ensured depth and relevance of qualitative data. In-depth interviews were conducted with CRE teachers and selected Christian teachers to explore their understanding of professionalism, servanthood, and the practical implementation of Philippians 1:27 in their teaching ministry. Interviews with students focused on their perceptions of teachers' character, consistency, and influence. Non-participant observations were carried out during CRE learning sessions and selected school activities. The observation focused on indicators of professional conduct, including instructional preparation, relational interaction, ethical consistency, and visible expressions of Christian service. The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by interview guides, observation checklists, and document review protocols developed from indicators of teacher professionalism and Pauline servanthood values derived from Philippians 1:27. Through this descriptive qualitative methodology, the study seeks to provide a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of how CRE teacher professionalism embodies Paul's servanthood ethos in a contemporary vocational school setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran reflects Paul's servanthood ethos in Philippians 1:27 and how such professionalism is perceived by members of the Christian school community. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving CRE teachers, Christian teachers, and Christian students. The findings are presented thematically and discussed in relation to both Pauline theology and contemporary scholarship on teacher professionalism. The finding concerns the overall profile of CRE teacher professionalism as perceived within the school context. Interview data from students consistently indicated that CRE teachers were viewed as disciplined, responsible, and morally consistent in their daily conduct. Students frequently described their teachers as "firm but caring," "fair in assessment," and "serious about teaching." Classroom observations confirmed that CRE teachers typically arrived prepared, used structured lesson plans, and maintained orderly learning environments. These patterns indicate that the foundational dimensions of teacher professionalism, content mastery, pedagogical readiness, and ethical responsibility, are functioning at a strong level in SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran. This aligns with educational research emphasizing that professional credibility begins with visible instructional competence and reliability in routine duties. The qualitative data reveal that professionalism in this context is not interpreted merely in technical terms but is strongly connected to moral and spiritual credibility. Students repeatedly emphasized that what made CRE teachers influential was not only how they taught but how they lived. Several student participants noted that their teachers "practice what they teach," particularly in areas such as honesty, patience, and respectful communication. This perception is crucial when interpreted through Philippians 1:27, where Paul calls believers to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. The Greek term *politeuesthe* implies a public, observable mode of life consistent with one's professed identity. In the educational setting studied, the teachers' daily behavior appears to function as a lived hermeneutic of the gospel message. Thus, the findings support the theological claim that teacher professionalism in CRE cannot be separated from embodied Christian character. The next theme emerging from the data is the servanthood orientation of CRE teachers, which closely parallels Pauline ethics. Interview responses from fellow Christian teachers described CRE educators as willing to assist colleagues, flexible in taking additional responsibilities, and attentive to students beyond classroom requirements. Observational notes documented multiple instances in which CRE teachers provided informal counseling to students experiencing personal or academic difficulties. Students likewise reported feeling "approached" and "listened to" by their CRE teachers. These patterns strongly reflect the servant posture embedded in Philippians 1:27 and throughout Pauline ministry, where communal solidarity and self-giving service are central virtues. From a professional standpoint, such behaviors extend teacher competence beyond formal instruction into relational ministry, which is widely recognized in Christian education literature as a hallmark of transformative teaching. The findings also reveal variations in the depth of servanthood embodiment among teachers. While most participants affirmed positive examples, some students indicated that not all Christian teachers consistently

demonstrated the same level of relational warmth or spiritual intentionality. A small number of student comments suggested that certain teachers were perceived as professionally competent but relationally distant. This nuance is important analytically because it demonstrates that professionalism and spiritual witness, while related, are not automatically identical. The Pauline model in Philippians 1:27 calls for both steadfastness in duty and unity of spirit, implying an integration of competence and communal care. The variation observed in the field suggests that ongoing formation and reflective practice remain necessary even among experienced educators.

The next finding concerns the impact of teacher professionalism on students' faith-related attitudes. Student interviews revealed that many learners draw practical moral guidance from observing their teachers. Several participants explicitly connected their motivation to behave ethically with the example set by CRE teachers. For instance, students mentioned becoming more careful about honesty in assignments and more respectful in peer interactions after reflecting on teacher behavior. Although this study did not employ statistical measurement of faith growth, the qualitative patterns strongly indicate that professional Christian modeling contributes to students' moral awareness and value internalization. This supports social learning theory, which posits that learners often adopt behaviors through observation of credible role models. Within the theological framework of Matthew 5:14-16 and Philippians 1:27, this dynamic can be understood as the pedagogical function of visible Christian witness. Another important dimension emerging from the data is the contextual challenge of practicing Christian professionalism in a pluralistic public-school environment. Participants acknowledged that CRE teachers must exercise wisdom and sensitivity when expressing their faith commitments. Teachers reported being intentional about demonstrating Christian values through universal ethical behaviors, such as fairness, discipline, and compassion, rather than through overtly confessional language in general classroom settings. This strategy reflects a contextualized form of witness that is both faithful and socially responsible. It resonates strongly with Pauline missionary flexibility, where the apostle consistently adapted his approach without compromising core convictions. In the SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran context, such professional wisdom appears to enhance the credibility of CRE teachers among both Christian and non-Christian members of the school community. Document analysis further reinforced the findings by showing alignment between formal instructional planning and observed practice. CRE lesson plans reviewed in the study included explicit objectives related to character formation, ethical reflection, and application of biblical values to daily life. Importantly, these plans were not merely formal artifacts; classroom observations confirmed that teachers attempted to operationalize these goals through discussion, reflection questions, and behavioral examples. This coherence between planning and practice is a critical marker of mature professionalism. In Pauline terms, it reflects integrity, living and teaching in a unified manner consistent with the gospel call. While relational care was generally strong, structured reflective activities that explicitly connect biblical texts with vocational life were less consistently observed. Given that SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran is a vocational institution, integrating Pauline servanthood more intentionally with workplace ethics could further strengthen the relevance of CRE instruction. Peer collaboration among Christian teachers, while present informally, has not yet developed into systematic professional learning communities focused on spiritual

formation. Strengthening such collaborative structures could help sustain and deepen the embodiment of Philippians 1:27 across the teaching staff. The discussion of these findings points to several broader implications. The study affirms that Paul's exhortation in Philippians 1:27 remains highly applicable to contemporary educational ministry. Professionalism in CRE is most credible when it is visibly communal, ethically consistent, and service-oriented. The findings reinforce the importance of teacher modeling as a primary mechanism of value transmission. Institutionally, the results suggest that school leaders should recognize spiritual professionalism as an integral component of teacher quality, especially in contexts where religious education forms part of the national curriculum. The results demonstrate that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran largely embody a form of professionalism that resonates with Paul's servanthood ethos, particularly in areas of responsibility, relational care, and ethical consistency. Students clearly perceive and respond to this lived witness, indicating that professional Christian character remains a powerful educational influence. At the same time, the presence of variability and contextual challenges underscores the need for ongoing reflective formation, collaborative support, and contextual sensitivity. When professionalism and Pauline servanthood are intentionally integrated, CRE teachers are better positioned to function not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but as credible witnesses whose lives illuminate the gospel within contemporary vocational education.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in light of Paul's servanthood ethos in Philippians 1:27 within the context of SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research explored how teacher professionalism is perceived and embodied in a vocational secondary school environment that includes 37 Christian students and 15 Christian teachers. The findings provide important insights into the integration of professional competence and spiritual witness in contemporary Christian education. The study finds that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Kisaran demonstrate a strong level of professionalism characterized by instructional preparedness, ethical consistency, and responsible classroom management. More importantly, professionalism in this context is closely associated with visible Christian character. Students and fellow teachers perceive CRE educators as credible not only because of their teaching skills but also because of their integrity, relational care, and commitment to service. This confirms the continuing relevance of Philippians 1:27, which calls believers to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, as a meaningful theological framework for understanding teacher professionalism in Christian education. The research further reveals that the servanthood dimension of Pauline ethics is evident in the teachers' willingness to support students beyond formal instructional duties. Acts of mentoring, counseling, and collegial cooperation reflect a service-oriented posture that strengthens the moral authority of CRE teachers. Students appear responsive to this lived example, indicating that teacher professionalism functions as an important mediating factor in the internalization of Christian values. Thus, the teacher's life remains a central pedagogical text in faith-based education. The study also identifies areas requiring continued development. Variations in relational warmth among teachers and the limited integration of vocational ethics into CRE instruction suggest that professionalism and

spiritual witness must be continuously nurtured through reflective practice and collaborative professional development. In pluralistic public-school settings, CRE teachers must also maintain contextual sensitivity so that their witness remains both faithful and educationally appropriate. The professionalism of CRE teachers becomes most transformative when it embodies Pauline servanthood through integrity, consistency, and relational service. Strengthening structured spiritual formation, peer collaboration, and contextualized pedagogical strategies is recommended to sustain this integration. By doing so, CRE teachers can more effectively serve as credible witnesses of the gospel while fulfilling the professional standards expected in Indonesian vocational education.

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