



The Role of Worship in Strengthening Spiritual Competence: A Reflection on Matthew 28:17 at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of worship in strengthening students' spiritual competence in light of Matthew 28:17 within the context of Christian Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut, Central Tapanuli. Worship is widely recognized in Christian pedagogy as a formative practice that integrates cognitive understanding, affective response, and behavioral expression of faith. However, empirical studies examining its measurable contribution to students' spiritual competence in Indonesian public schools remain limited. This research therefore aims to analyze the extent to which structured school worship contributes to students' spiritual development. The study employed a quantitative descriptive–correlational design with students as respondents. The population consisted of 122 Christian students, all of whom were included using total sampling. Data were collected through a validated Likert-scale questionnaire measuring two variables: quality of worship implementation and students' spiritual competence. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. The findings indicate that both worship implementation and students' spiritual competence are in the high category. Inferential analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between the two variables, demonstrating that meaningful and well-facilitated worship contributes substantially to strengthening students' spiritual competence. The results support the theological insight of Matthew 28:17 that authentic worship nurtures deeper faith response and spiritual maturity. The study concludes that structured worship is an effective pedagogical strategy in Christian Religious Education, even in contexts with limited human resources. Strengthening the quality, intentionality, and student engagement in worship practices is therefore recommended to sustain holistic spiritual formation in schools.

Keywords: *Worship, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Worship occupies a central place in Christian spirituality because it forms the primary context in which believers encounter God, express faith, and cultivate obedience. Within

the educational setting, particularly in Christian Religious Education (CRE), worship is not merely a liturgical activity but also a formative pedagogical medium that shapes students' spiritual competence. Spiritual competence in this study refers to the capacity of learners to demonstrate faith awareness, reverence toward God, and consistency in living out Christian values in daily life. In many Indonesian public schools, including SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut in Central Tapanuli, the integration of meaningful worship practices into CRE remains an important yet often underexplored dimension of holistic education. The biblical foundation for this study is drawn from Matthew 28:17, which records that when the disciples saw the risen Christ, they worshiped Him, though some doubted. This brief but profound text reveals two critical theological insights. First, worship emerges as a natural response to the revelation of Christ's authority and presence. Second, worship occurs within the real tension of human faith, where reverence and doubt may coexist. Scholars note that this passage highlights worship as both an act of devotion and a process of spiritual formation that moves believers toward deeper trust and obedience (France, 2007). Thus, worship in educational contexts should be understood not only as ritual performance but as a transformative encounter that strengthens students' spiritual maturity. The formation of spiritual competence has been widely recognized as a core objective. Pazmiño (2008) emphasizes that Christian teaching must aim beyond cognitive mastery toward the nurturing of faith, character, and lived discipleship. Similarly, Van Brummelen (2009) argues that authentic Christian learning environments intentionally create spaces where students can experience God's presence through prayer, worship, and reflective practices. These perspectives suggest that structured worship within schools can function as a powerful catalyst for internalizing Christian values when implemented pedagogically and contextually. The practical implementation of worship in public-school CRE settings often faces limitations. Time constraints, formalistic routines, and limited teacher facilitation skills can reduce worship to a ceremonial obligation rather than a formative experience. Research in Indonesian contexts has shown that when worship lacks meaningful engagement, students may participate outwardly without significant spiritual impact (Sidjabat, 2011). This challenge becomes particularly significant in schools with limited Christian educators, such as SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut, where one CRE teacher serves a relatively large population of 122 Christian students. Under such conditions, the quality, intentionality, and pedagogical design of worship become crucial factors in determining its formative effectiveness. The teacher plays a decisive role in mediating worship experiences. Effective CRE teachers function not only as instructors but also as spiritual facilitators who guide students into reflective and participatory encounters with God. Hattie (2009) underscores that teacher influence remains one of the strongest school-based factors affecting student development. When applied to faith formation, this suggests that the teacher's ability to design, lead, and contextualize worship significantly affects students' spiritual growth. Therefore, examining the role of worship in strengthening spiritual competence must also consider the instructional and spiritual leadership exercised by the CRE teacher. Empirical attention to worship as a pedagogical strategy in Indonesian public junior high schools remains limited. Many studies focus on curriculum, cognitive outcomes, or character education broadly, while fewer investigate how worship practices concretely shape students' spiritual competence in everyday school contexts. This gap underscores the need for context-specific research that bridges biblical theology, Christian pedagogy, and

lived educational practice. This study aims to analyze the role of worship in strengthening the spiritual competence of students at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut, Central Tapanuli. With a population of 122 Christian students guided by one CRE teacher, the school provides a meaningful micro-context for examining how worship functions within real instructional constraints. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more intentional, theologically grounded, and pedagogically effective worship practices in Christian Religious Education within Indonesian public schools.

METHODS

A quantitative research approach using a descriptive-correlational design was implemented to examine the role of worship in strengthening students' spiritual competence. The quantitative method was selected because it allows for systematic measurement of students' perceptions and behaviors and enables statistical analysis of the relationship between worship practices and spiritual competence. Such an approach is widely recommended in educational research when the objective is to identify measurable patterns and relationships within a defined population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research utilized a cross-sectional survey design, in which data were collected at one point in time from Christian students at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut, Central Tapanuli. The independent variable (X) in this study was the quality of worship implementation, while the dependent variable (Y) was students' spiritual competence. The design aimed to determine the extent to which participation in and experience of school-based worship contribute to the development of students' spiritual awareness, reverence, and faith expression. The population of this study consisted of 122 Christian students enrolled at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut. Because the population size was relatively manageable, the study applied a total sampling technique, meaning all Christian students were included as respondents. Total sampling increases statistical power and minimizes sampling bias when the population is small and accessible (Sugiyono, 2019). The final sample comprised 122 student respondents, representing the full population of Christian learners at the research site. The presence of one Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher provided contextual background but the teacher did not serve as a respondent, since the study focused on students' measured spiritual competence. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on biblical-theological and Christian education frameworks. The instrument consisted of two main scales: Worship Implementation Scale (Variable X), indicators included: student participation in worship, understanding of worship meaning, reverence during worship, teacher facilitation of worship, perceived spiritual atmosphere; Spiritual Competence Scale (Variable Y), indicators included: awareness of God's presence, consistency in prayer and devotion, willingness to obey God's word, expression of gratitude and faith, application of Christian values in daily life. All items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire underwent content validation through expert judgment in Christian education. Empirical validity was tested using Pearson product-moment correlation, with items considered valid when $r_{\text{count}} > r_{\text{table}}$ at $\alpha = 0.05$. Instrument reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient ≥ 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency (Field, 2018). Data collection was conducted during the second semester of the academic year. After obtaining school

permission, questionnaires were administered directly to students in classroom settings under the supervision of the researcher and the CRE teacher. Students were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. All statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of 0.05. Through this quantitative framework, the study sought to produce empirical evidence regarding how structured worship within Christian Religious Education contributes to strengthening students' spiritual competence at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis conducted among 122 Christian students at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut provides important empirical insights into the role of worship in strengthening students' spiritual competence. The data reveal not only the general condition of worship practices within the school context but also the measurable relationship between the quality of worship experiences and the development of students' spiritual maturity. The findings are discussed in an integrated manner to illuminate both statistical tendencies and their theological-pedagogical implications. Descriptive statistics indicate that the implementation of worship at the research site falls within the high category. The mean score for the worship variable (X) shows that most students perceive school worship activities as meaningful, orderly, and spiritually engaging. A large proportion of respondents reported active participation during worship sessions, attentiveness during prayer and Scripture reading, and a positive perception of the spiritual atmosphere created in the classroom or school setting. This suggests that although the school has only one Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher, the worship program has been implemented with reasonable effectiveness. The result aligns with the principle that well-structured worship, even in limited-resource contexts, can significantly shape students' spiritual awareness when carried out intentionally and consistently. Further descriptive analysis shows that students' spiritual competence (Y) also falls within the high category. Students generally demonstrated awareness of God's presence, willingness to pray, appreciation for biblical teaching, and efforts to apply Christian values in daily behavior. However, closer examination of item-level responses reveals moderate variation among indicators. The strongest indicator appears in awareness of God's presence, while relatively lower (though still positive) scores appear in consistent personal devotion outside school. This pattern is pedagogically significant because it suggests that school-based worship effectively nurtures cognitive and affective spirituality but may need reinforcement to influence students' independent spiritual disciplines at home. The normality test using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov procedure shows that both variables are normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), thereby fulfilling the assumptions for parametric analysis. This allowed the study to proceed with Pearson correlation and regression testing. The Pearson correlation analysis reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship between worship implementation and students' spiritual competence. The correlation coefficient falls within the moderate-to-strong range, indicating that better-quality worship experiences are associated with higher levels of student spiritual competence. This finding empirically confirms a long-standing assumption within Christian education that worship is not merely ritualistic but formative in nature. This statistical relationship strongly resonates with the teaching of Matthew

28:17, where worship precedes obedience and mission. Worship in the biblical tradition is not passive admiration but an encounter that transforms the believer's orientation toward God and life. The present findings suggest that when students are meaningfully engaged in worship, through prayer, Scripture, and reverent participation, their internal spiritual disposition is measurably strengthened. In other words, the data support the view that worship functions as a spiritual formation mechanism, not simply a ceremonial activity. Regression analysis further clarifies the predictive power of worship. The simple linear regression test shows that worship implementation significantly predicts students' spiritual competence at the 0.05 significance level. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that a meaningful proportion of the variance in spiritual competence is explained by the worship variable. While this percentage does not account for all influencing factors, since family environment, church involvement, and personal faith journey also play roles, it nevertheless demonstrates that school worship contributes substantially to students' spiritual development. This finding is particularly important given the study context, where only one CRE teacher serves 122 Christian students. The positive outcomes suggest that the effectiveness of worship is not solely dependent on the number of teachers but on the quality, intentionality, and consistency of worship facilitation. This has significant implications for schools in rural or resource-limited settings across Indonesia. It suggests that strengthening worship design and teacher pedagogical sensitivity may yield meaningful spiritual outcomes even when staffing is minimal. Another noteworthy pattern emerges when examining student engagement indicators. Students reported the highest agreement with items related to corporate worship participation, such as singing, listening to Scripture, and following guided prayer. However, slightly lower scores appear in items measuring personal spiritual discipline, such as praying independently or reflecting on Scripture outside school hours. This gap highlights a classic challenge in Christian education: the transition from guided spirituality to self-regulated spirituality. Worship at school successfully creates spiritual awareness, but additional pedagogical strategies may be needed to cultivate sustained personal devotion. This suggests the need for a more integrative worship-learning model. Worship should not stand alone as a weekly ritual but should be pedagogically connected to classroom reflection, small-group discussion, and practical faith applications. When worship is cognitively processed and behaviorally reinforced, the likelihood of long-term spiritual formation increases. The current data imply that while SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut has achieved commendable progress, there remains room for strengthening the transfer of worship experience into daily Christian living. The findings also reveal important insights regarding the teacher's role as a spiritual facilitator. Student responses indicate strong agreement with statements describing the CRE teacher as reverent, organized, and spiritually encouraging during worship. This supports the broader literature in Christian education which emphasizes that teacher modeling significantly influences students' spiritual receptivity. In contexts where teacher authenticity is visible, students are more likely to internalize the values being taught. Thus, the effectiveness of worship in this study cannot be separated from the teacher's embodied spirituality.

Some students indicated that worship sessions sometimes feel routine or time-limited. This feedback is valuable because it signals the risk of ritual fatigue, a phenomenon widely discussed in liturgical and educational studies. When worship becomes overly repetitive

without pedagogical variation, student engagement may plateau. Future program development should consider incorporating varied worship elements such as reflective silence, student-led prayer, contextual testimonies, and creative liturgical expressions appropriate to the junior secondary level. Another significant dimension of the findings relates to the social context of the school. SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut operates in a setting where Christian students form a clear religious group within the broader Indonesian educational landscape. In such contexts, worship serves not only a devotional function but also an identity-forming function. The high scores on spiritual awareness and gratitude suggest that school worship helps students articulate their Christian identity with greater confidence. This is particularly important in pluralistic environments where faith expression must be both rooted and respectful. The statistical strength of the relationship between worship and spiritual competence also reinforces contemporary discussions on holistic education. Modern educational theory increasingly recognizes that cognitive achievement alone is insufficient for character formation. The present study contributes empirical support to the argument that structured spiritual practices within formal education can measurably influence affective and behavioral dimensions of student development. Thus, worship should be viewed as an integral component of holistic Christian pedagogy rather than an optional supplement. It is important to interpret the findings with appropriate caution. The cross-sectional design captures correlation rather than definitive causation. While worship significantly predicts spiritual competence, the relationship is likely reciprocal and influenced by external variables such as family religiosity, church participation, peer influence, and personal faith maturity. Future research using longitudinal or mixed-method designs would provide deeper insight into the developmental trajectory of students' spirituality over time. The overall pattern of results strongly supports the central thesis of this study: meaningful worship implementation is positively associated with stronger student spiritual competence. In practical terms, the data suggest that schools seeking to strengthen students' faith formation should prioritize not only curriculum content but also the quality of communal worship experiences. The case of SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut demonstrates that even with limited personnel, intentional worship design can produce measurable spiritual outcomes. The findings affirm that worship, when pedagogically facilitated and spiritually authentic, functions as a powerful formative medium in Christian Religious Education. The significant statistical relationship, the high descriptive scores, and the consistent student perceptions collectively indicate that worship at the research site has contributed meaningfully to students' spiritual growth. At the same time, the identified gaps, particularly in fostering independent spiritual discipline, provide constructive direction for future pedagogical refinement. Strengthening reflective integration, diversifying worship methods, and reinforcing home-school faith continuity will likely enhance the long-term impact of worship-based spiritual formation in similar educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the role of worship in strengthening students' spiritual competence at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut, Central Tapanuli, in light of the theological insight of Matthew 28:17. Based on quantitative data collected from 122 Christian students, the findings consistently demonstrate that school-based worship plays a

significant and positive role in shaping students' spiritual development. The statistical results confirm that the quality of worship implementation is positively correlated with students' levels of spiritual competence, indicating that worship is not merely ceremonial but formational in nature. Both the worship variable and the spiritual competence variable were found to be in the high category. Students generally perceive worship activities at school as meaningful, reverent, and spiritually supportive. They show strong awareness of God's presence, willingness to participate in prayer and Scripture engagement, and positive attitudes toward Christian values. These outcomes suggest that the worship practices facilitated by the CRE teacher, despite the limitation of having only one teacher serving a relatively large number of students, have been implemented effectively and with intentionality. Inferential analysis further strengthens this conclusion. The significant positive correlation and regression results indicate that improvements in the quality of worship are associated with measurable increases in students' spiritual competence. This finding supports the theological premise of Matthew 28:17 that authentic worship precedes deeper faith response and discipleship readiness. In the context of Christian Religious Education, worship functions as a pedagogical bridge that connects cognitive biblical knowledge with affective and behavioral faith formation. The study also identifies important areas for development. While students demonstrate strong engagement in corporate worship settings, indicators related to independent spiritual discipline outside school show comparatively lower scores. This suggests that current worship practices are effective in guided, communal contexts but need further reinforcement to cultivate sustained personal spirituality. Future CRE strategies should emphasize integrative approaches that connect school worship with personal devotional habits, reflective learning activities, and home-church collaboration. The findings carry several practical implications. First, schools should continue to prioritize well-structured and theologically grounded worship as a core component of CRE. Second, CRE teachers should be supported through professional and spiritual development to maintain authenticity as worship facilitators. Third, program innovation-such as student-led worship elements and contextual liturgical variation, may help prevent routine fatigue and deepen student engagement. The study affirms that meaningful and well-facilitated worship significantly contributes to the strengthening of students' spiritual competence. In resource-limited settings such as SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut, intentional worship design remains a highly strategic and effective pathway for holistic Christian formation.

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