



The Professionalism of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Faithfulness to God: A Reflection on Exodus 34:14 at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas

Martha Evalina Siagian

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: evamaret62@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Teacher professionalism is a critical factor in the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly in cultivating students' faithfulness to God. Grounded in the theological mandate of Exodus 34:14, which emphasizes exclusive devotion to the Lord, this study examines the professionalism of CRE teachers in teaching faithfulness to God at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas. The research employed a quantitative descriptive design involving Christian elementary students as respondents. From a population of 143 Christian students and 10 Christian teachers, student perceptions were collected through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire measuring four key dimensions: instructional preparation, biblical content mastery, pedagogical implementation, and teacher spiritual modeling. The instrument met acceptable reliability standards (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$) and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that the professionalism of CRE teachers is generally categorized as high. Students reported that teachers consistently demonstrate clarity in biblical teaching, responsible lesson planning, and visible personal faithfulness that reinforces classroom instruction. The strongest dimension identified was teacher modeling of faithfulness, indicating that students learn not only cognitively but also through observed spiritual example. Nevertheless, moderate scores in interactive pedagogy suggest the need for greater use of student-centered strategies to deepen internalization of faith values. The study concludes that professionally competent CRE teachers play a strategic role in mediating the theological message of Exodus 34:14 into meaningful student formation. Strengthening innovative pedagogy alongside sustained spiritual integrity is recommended to enhance the effectiveness of faithfulness education in Indonesian primary school contexts.

Keywords: Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Faithfulness

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professionalism has long been recognized as a critical determinant of educational quality and student character formation. In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), professionalism extends beyond pedagogical competence and subject mastery to include the teacher's spiritual integrity, theological understanding, and moral consistency. CRE teachers are not merely transmitters of biblical knowledge; they function as formative agents who shape students' faith orientation and spiritual worldview through both instruction and personal example. Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes that effective religious education requires an integration of professional competence and lived faith, particularly in environments where students closely observe teacher behavior as a model of Christian life (Palmer, 2007). The emphasis on character education and religious moderation has further elevated the strategic role of religious education teachers. National educational discourse highlights the importance of teachers as role models in cultivating values, ethics, and spiritual maturity among learners. Professionalism in this context is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing pedagogical skill, personal integrity, social sensitivity, and spiritual commitment. Studies in teacher effectiveness indicate that students are more likely to internalize moral and religious values when teachers demonstrate coherence between teaching content and personal conduct (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Thus, examining the professionalism of CRE teachers in relation to specific biblical values becomes both pedagogically and theologically significant. One biblical theme that remains central to Christian formation is faithfulness to God. Exodus 34:14 declares, *"For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."* This text emerges within the covenant renewal narrative following Israel's failure with the golden calf, emphasizing exclusive devotion and covenant loyalty. Old Testament scholarship notes that the term "jealous" (Hebrew: *qannā*) reflects God's covenantal demand for undivided allegiance rather than emotional insecurity (Stuart, 2006). The passage therefore establishes faithfulness as a foundational theological principle in the life of God's people. For CRE teachers, the theological weight of Exodus 34:14 carries important pedagogical implications. Teaching faithfulness to God is not limited to doctrinal explanation; it involves cultivating habits of worship, loyalty, and spiritual consistency in students' daily lives. Professional CRE teachers must therefore translate covenant theology into age-appropriate, contextually meaningful learning experiences. Research in religious pedagogy suggests that value internalization is most effective when teachers employ relational, reflective, and modeling-based approaches rather than purely cognitive instruction (Groome, 2011). Consequently, teacher professionalism becomes the bridge between biblical theology and classroom transformation. Empirical studies focusing specifically on how teachers operationalize the value of faithfulness to God in Indonesian primary school contexts remain relatively limited. Many existing studies emphasize curriculum content or general character education without closely examining the professional practices of CRE teachers as faith-forming agents. This gap is particularly relevant in schools where Christian students constitute a significant learning community and where the CRE teacher's influence extends beyond the classroom into the broader spiritual climate of the school.

UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas, provides a meaningful context for such investigation. The school serves 143 Christian students supported by 10 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. Within this environment, the CRE teacher holds a strategic position in shaping students' understanding of faithfulness to God during formative primary school years. Given the developmental sensitivity of this stage, the professionalism of the CRE teacher may significantly influence how students conceptualize worship, loyalty, and commitment to God. This study therefore aims to examine the professionalism of the Christian Religious Education teacher in teaching faithfulness to God through the theological framework of Exodus 34:14 at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas. By focusing on observable teaching practices, instructional strategies, and student perceptions, the research seeks to provide an empirical portrait of how covenant faithfulness is pedagogically mediated in a contemporary Indonesian school setting. The findings are expected to contribute to the strengthening of spiritually grounded teacher professionalism and to enrich the discourse on transformative Christian Religious Education in primary schools.

METHODS

A quantitative design was selected because it enables systematic measurement of students' perceptions and allows the researcher to identify patterns, tendencies, and levels of agreement across the respondent population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study specifically used a descriptive survey model to portray the current condition of teacher professionalism as experienced by students without manipulating variables. The research adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. This design is appropriate for capturing participants' perceptions at a single point in time and for providing an empirical overview of how teacher professionalism is manifested in classroom practice. The focus of the analysis was to quantify students' evaluations of the CRE teacher's professionalism in fostering faithfulness to God in line with the theological framework of Exodus 34:14. The population of the study consisted of all 143 Christian students enrolled at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas. Considering the manageable population size and the intention to obtain comprehensive data, the study applied a total sampling (census) technique, in which all members of the population were invited to participate. This approach minimizes sampling error and enhances representativeness (Sugiyono, 2019). All 143 students returned usable questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 100%. Contextual institutional data indicated that the school has 10 Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. However, the quantitative respondents in this study were limited to students because the research aimed to capture learner perceptions of teacher professionalism in instructional practice. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on theoretical constructs of teacher professionalism in Christian education and the theological emphasis of faithfulness in Exodus 34:14. The instrument employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire measured five key dimensions: professional mastery of biblical teaching on faithfulness, instructional clarity in conveying loyalty to God, consistency between teaching and personal example, encouragement of faithful worship practices, and relational and ethical professionalism in classroom interaction. Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent expert judgment involving specialists in

Christian education and educational measurement to ensure content validity and theological alignment. A pilot test was conducted with students outside the research site to evaluate item clarity and internal consistency. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha produced a coefficient exceeding 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability for educational research (Field, 2013). Items with low item-total correlation were revised before the final administration. Data collection was conducted during the second semester of the academic year. Questionnaires were administered in printed format during regular school hours under the supervision of the researcher and classroom teachers. Students were given standardized instructions and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest responses. Participation was voluntary, and completed questionnaires were collected immediately to maintain data integrity. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage distributions. The level of teacher professionalism was interpreted using a five-category scale: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high, based on predetermined mean intervals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved 143 Christian students at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas, who provided perceptions regarding the professionalism of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher in teaching faithfulness to God. All distributed questionnaires were returned and deemed valid for analysis, resulting in a 100% usable response rate. Prior reliability testing confirmed that the instrument met acceptable internal consistency standards ($\alpha > 0.70$), allowing the data to be interpreted with confidence. Descriptive statistical analysis indicates that the overall mean score of teacher professionalism in teaching faithfulness to God falls within the high category. This finding suggests that students generally perceive the CRE teacher as professionally competent in integrating the theological value of covenant faithfulness, as reflected in Exodus 34:14, into classroom practice. The relatively moderate standard deviation indicates that student perceptions are fairly consistent across grade levels, meaning the teacher's professionalism is broadly experienced rather than limited to specific student groups. This result is significant within the Indonesian primary school context, where the credibility of religious instruction is closely tied to the teacher's professional and spiritual integrity. The data demonstrate that professionalism in CRE is not merely a formal requirement but is observable in day-to-day instructional interactions. To obtain a more nuanced understanding, the analysis was conducted across five measured dimensions: professional mastery of biblical teaching on faithfulness, instructional clarity, consistency between teaching and personal example, encouragement of faithful worship practices, and relational and ethical professionalism. Professional mastery of biblical teaching received a high mean score, indicating that students perceive the CRE teacher as competent in explaining the biblical concept of faithfulness to God. Students generally agreed that the teacher demonstrates strong understanding of Scripture, provides relevant biblical examples, and connects Exodus 34:14 to students' daily lives. This finding is important because Exodus 34:14 emphasizes exclusive devotion within the covenant relationship. Old Testament scholarship underscores that God's "jealousy" in this passage reflects covenant loyalty rather than emotional volatility (Stuart, 2006). The high student

ratings suggest that the teacher is able to translate this complex theological idea into developmentally appropriate instruction for primary-level learners. Mastery of content enhances instructional credibility. Research in character education shows that students are more receptive to moral and spiritual teaching when teachers demonstrate clear subject competence (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). The data in this study support that pattern: students who perceive strong biblical mastery are more likely to view the lesson on faithfulness as meaningful and authoritative. Item-level analysis reveals slight variability in students' understanding of deeper theological explanations. Some respondents selected moderate agreement on items related to historical background of the text. This suggests that while overall mastery is strong, there remains room to further contextualize biblical narratives in age-appropriate ways.

The instructional clarity also fell within the high category. Students reported that the CRE teacher explains lessons clearly, uses understandable language, and provides concrete examples of what faithfulness to God looks like in everyday life. This finding aligns with effective teaching theory, which emphasizes clarity as a core component of professional instruction (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In religious education, clarity is especially crucial because abstract theological concepts must be translated into practical moral understanding. The data indicate that the teacher frequently employs illustrative stories, guided discussions, and reflective questions to help students grasp the meaning of exclusive worship. This pedagogical approach reflects what Groome (2011) describes as transformative religious pedagogy, where learning moves from information to personal appropriation. A small percentage of students reported only moderate agreement regarding opportunities to ask follow-up questions. This suggests that while explanations are generally clear, increasing interactive dialogue could further strengthen conceptual understanding. Consistency between teaching and personal example received one of the highest mean scores in the study. Students strongly agreed that the CRE teacher practices what is taught, demonstrates integrity, and models faithfulness in daily behavior. This finding is particularly significant. Educational research consistently shows that moral credibility depends heavily on congruence between teacher speech and behavior (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). In Christian education, this congruence functions as lived theology. When students observe alignment between message and lifestyle, religious instruction gains authenticity. In light of Exodus 34:14, which demands exclusive devotion to God, teacher consistency becomes a powerful form of implicit curriculum. Students reported observing behaviors such as: the teacher maintaining respectful conduct, demonstrating commitment in prayer activities, showing fairness and integrity in classroom management, avoiding contradictory behavior. These observations suggest that the CRE teacher functions as what Palmer (2007) calls a teacher whose identity and integrity shape the learning environment. A small subset of students indicated moderate agreement regarding the teacher's visibility of personal spiritual practices outside formal lessons. This may reflect limited student exposure rather than actual inconsistency, but it highlights an area where intentional modeling could be further amplified.

Encouragement of faithful worship also fell within the high category, though slightly lower than the previous dimension. Students generally agreed that the teacher encourages prayer, devotion, and loyalty to God in daily life. This dimension operationalizes Exodus

34:14 at the behavioral level. Rather than remaining at doctrinal explanation, the teacher appears to guide students toward concrete expressions of faithfulness, such as: participating in prayer, showing commitment in worship, avoiding behaviors inconsistent with Christian faith, demonstrating loyalty to God in decision-making. Research in religious formation indicates that behavioral reinforcement is essential for value internalization (Groome, 2011). The findings suggest that the CRE teacher successfully bridges theological instruction and practical spirituality. The slightly lower mean compared to other dimensions indicates potential for strengthening structured spiritual practices, such as guided reflection or follow-up activities that help students sustain faithful habits beyond the classroom. Relational and ethical professionalism, produced a high and tightly clustered mean score, indicating strong student agreement that the teacher demonstrates fairness, respect, and ethical conduct. Students overwhelmingly perceived the teacher as: respectful in communication, fair in treatment of students, patient in addressing mistakes, approachable and supportive. This relational climate is pedagogically significant. Owens and Hekman (2012) argue that humble and ethical teacher behavior fosters trust and psychological safety, which in turn enhances student engagement. The consistency of responses in this dimension suggests that professionalism at the research site is not merely technical but relationally embodied. In the Indonesian cultural context, where teacher authority can sometimes be hierarchical, the presence of relational professionalism signals a healthy shift toward student-centered Christian pedagogy.

When viewed holistically, the findings reveal a coherent pattern: the CRE teacher at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli demonstrates professionally grounded, theologically aligned instruction in teaching faithfulness to God. The high scores across all five dimensions indicate that Exodus 34:14 is not treated merely as doctrinal content but is pedagogically operationalized. Teacher professionalism and theological faithfulness are interconnected. The data reinforce the view that effective CRE depends on both content mastery and embodied integrity (Palmer, 2007). Students are perceptive evaluators of teacher authenticity. Consistent with Berkowitz and Bier (2005), students responded most strongly to dimensions involving lived example and relational conduct. Faithfulness to God can be meaningfully taught at the primary level. With appropriate professional strategies, covenant theology can be translated into age-appropriate moral formation. Professional CRE teaching functions as spiritual formation. The teacher at the research site serves not only as instructor but as spiritual mentor for 143 Christian students, a significant formative influence. The findings strongly indicate that the professionalism of the CRE teacher at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas is pedagogically effective and theologically faithful, though continued development in dialogical interaction and structured worship reinforcement could further enhance impact.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching faithfulness to God through the theological reflection of Exodus 34:14 at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas. Based on quantitative analysis of student responses, the findings demonstrate that the professionalism of CRE

teachers is generally in the high category. Students perceive that the teacher not only delivers doctrinal content but also models loyalty to God through consistent attitudes, responsible instructional planning, and spiritually grounded classroom interactions. This confirms that teacher professionalism in CRE is not merely technical competence but an integration of pedagogical skill, theological fidelity, and spiritual integrity. The data indicate that the strongest aspects of professionalism lie in lesson preparation, clarity of biblical teaching, and the teacher's personal example of faithfulness. These dimensions significantly contribute to students' understanding of the exclusive devotion demanded in Exodus 34:14. The teacher's ability to contextualize the biblical message into students' daily lives appears to strengthen internalization of the value of faithfulness. Furthermore, the relational approach adopted by the teacher fosters trust and openness, which are essential conditions for effective spiritual formation in elementary school settings. The study also identifies several areas requiring enhancement. Some students reported that interactive learning strategies and dialogical exploration of faith issues could be further strengthened. This suggests that while the teacher's professionalism is already strong in content mastery and moral modeling, future development should emphasize more student-centered pedagogical innovation, reflective discussion, and formative assessment practices that deepen personal appropriation of faithfulness values. The findings affirm that the command in Exodus 34:14, calling believers to exclusive loyalty to God, can be meaningfully mediated through professionally competent CRE teachers. When professionalism is rooted in Christian spirituality, classroom instruction becomes a transformative space where cognitive understanding and spiritual commitment develop simultaneously. Thus, teacher professionalism functions as a strategic bridge between biblical theology and lived student faith. The professionalism of CRE teachers at UPT SD Negeri 060939 Timbang Deli, Medan Amplas is demonstrably effective in cultivating students' understanding of faithfulness to God, although continued professional development in interactive pedagogy is recommended. Future research may expand the sample scope, incorporate longitudinal designs, and explore qualitative dimensions of student faith formation to enrich the growing body of scholarship on Christian teacher professionalism in Indonesian primary education.

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