



## Pedagogical Professionalism and Spiritual Identity Formation: Interpreting Exodus 19:4 within Christian Religious Education at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the relationship between pedagogical professionalism and students' spiritual identity formation within the context of Christian Religious Education at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi. Grounded in a theological interpretation of Book of Exodus 19:4, which portrays divine initiative as the foundation of covenantal identity, the research conceptualizes teacher professionalism as a formative agent in shaping students' spiritual self-understanding. Pedagogical professionalism was operationalized into four dimensions: theological competence, pedagogical competence, relational-ethical integrity, and vocational commitment. Spiritual identity formation was measured through indicators of divine belonging, spiritual self-awareness, moral responsibility, and communal faith participation. The study employed a quantitative correlational design involving 240 students selected through proportionate stratified random sampling from a population of 600 Christian students. Data were collected using validated Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, and simple linear regression. The results revealed a strong positive correlation between pedagogical professionalism and spiritual identity formation ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Regression analysis indicated that pedagogical professionalism significantly predicted students' spiritual identity, accounting for 50.4% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.504$ ). The findings suggest that professional competence in Christian education extends beyond instructional technique to encompass theological coherence, relational authenticity, and vocational dedication. Interpreted through the covenantal imagery of Exodus 19:4, pedagogical professionalism functions as a mediating structure through which students internalize spiritual identity. This study contributes empirically to the discourse on holistic Christian education by demonstrating that teacher professionalism plays a decisive role in shaping students' spiritual formation within faith-based schooling contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Identity Formation*

## INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical professionalism within Christian Religious Education (CRE) cannot be reduced to technical competence or instructional efficiency. In faith-based schooling, professionalism integrates theological consciousness, moral credibility, vocational integrity, and formative intentionality. This integrative understanding becomes particularly significant when interpreted through the theological framework of Book of Exodus 19:4, where God declares to Israel: "I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." The verse is not merely a historical recollection of deliverance from Egypt; it is a covenantal prologue that establishes identity prior to commandment. Divine initiative precedes ethical obligation. Such a theological structure provides a compelling paradigm for Christian teachers whose professional task includes guiding students toward spiritual identity formation within the educational process. Exodus 19:4 functions as the theological foundation of the Sinai covenant. According to Walter Brueggemann, the text emphasizes Yahweh's redemptive action as constitutive of Israel's communal identity; obedience flows from experienced grace rather than imposed regulation (Brueggemann, 1997). Brevard S. Childs argues that the canonical placement of this verse frames Israel as a community shaped by divine deliverance and relational proximity (Childs, 1974). The metaphor of being "carried on eagles' wings" suggests intentional guidance, protection, and relational purpose. When appropriated within Christian pedagogy, this imagery resonates with the teacher's formative role: not coercive indoctrination, but intentional accompaniment toward spiritual maturity. Professionalism in education has long been associated with competence, accountability, and ethical responsibility. Lee S. Shulman introduced the concept of pedagogical content knowledge, arguing that effective teachers integrate subject mastery with pedagogical strategy (Shulman, 1987). However, within Christian schooling, professional identity extends beyond methodological expertise. Parker J. Palmer contends that authentic teaching emerges from the integrity of the teacher's inner life; teaching is an expression of identity rather than mere technique (Palmer, 1998). In Christian Religious Education, therefore, professionalism entails theological coherence between belief, character, and instructional practice. Spiritual identity formation among adolescents further intensifies the importance of professional credibility. James W. Fowler conceptualizes faith development as a dynamic process influenced by relational environments and narrative frameworks (Fowler, 1981). During senior high school years, students negotiate questions of belonging, purpose, and conviction. Spiritual identity is not automatically inherited from institutional affiliation; it requires interpretive engagement, communal modeling, and experiential reinforcement. Consequently, the professionalism of PAK teachers must involve more than doctrinal transmission, it must cultivate environments where students internalize covenantal identity analogous to Israel's formation at Sinai. The present study is situated at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi, a Christian senior high school under the auspices of Gereja Batak Karo Protestan. The school community comprises approximately 600 Christian students and 45 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education (PAK) educators. This demographic configuration presents a distinctive ecclesial-educational ecosystem in which theological discourse is culturally embedded. Yet such homogeneity does not automatically guarantee spiritual depth. Institutional Christian identity does not necessarily translate into personal spiritual identity. Therefore, the professionalism of

educators becomes a decisive variable in determining whether theological narratives are merely institutional symbols or lived convictions. While theological reflection offers conceptual clarity, empirical investigation is necessary to assess measurable influence. Quantitative educational research allows for systematic examination of correlations between teacher professionalism and student outcomes (Creswell, 2012). By operationalizing pedagogical professionalism into measurable dimensions, such as theological competence, relational integrity, instructional clarity, and vocational commitment, and by measuring indicators of spiritual identity formation, such as sense of divine belonging, moral responsibility, and faith commitment, this study seeks to determine whether statistically significant relationships exist within the educational context of SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi. This research integrates biblical exegesis, educational theory, and quantitative methodology. Exodus 19:4 serves not merely as a theological ornament but as a conceptual lens for understanding how divine initiative, relational guidance, and covenantal identity may inform pedagogical professionalism. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse on the intersection of theology and educational practice, demonstrating how covenantal imagery can illuminate empirical analysis of spiritual identity formation in Christian schooling.

## METHODS

A quantitative research design using a correlational approach was used to examine the relationship between pedagogical professionalism and students' spiritual identity formation at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi. The quantitative paradigm was selected to ensure objectivity, statistical measurability, and generalizability within the defined population. Correlational design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to determine the degree of association and predictive influence between variables without experimental manipulation (Creswell, 2012). The independent variable (X) was pedagogical professionalism of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers, while the dependent variable (Y) was students' spiritual identity formation interpreted within the theological framework of Book of Exodus 19:4. The population consisted of 600 Christian students enrolled in the 2025 academic year and 45 Christian teachers, including PAK teachers. Because the focus of measurement concerned students' perceptions and spiritual identity outcomes, the accessible population for statistical analysis was the entire student body. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, yielding a minimum sample of 240 respondents from the population of 600 students. To ensure proportional representation across grade levels (X, XI, XII), proportionate stratified random sampling was applied. Each grade cohort contributed respondents based on its proportional share of the total population, thereby minimizing sampling bias and increasing representativeness (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Data were collected through structured questionnaires developed based on established theoretical constructs in educational professionalism and faith development. The pedagogical professionalism instrument was operationalized into four dimensions: theological competence, pedagogical competence, relational-ethical integrity, and vocational commitment. These dimensions were derived from professional competence frameworks in education (Shulman, 1987) and adapted to the theological-educational context. The spiritual identity formation instrument was constructed around covenantal

themes reflected in Exodus 19:4, including sense of divine belonging, spiritual self-awareness, moral responsibility, and communal faith engagement, informed by faith development theory (Fowler, 1981). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to full-scale administration, the instruments underwent content validity assessment through expert judgment involving two theology scholars and one educational research specialist. Construct validity was tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to confirm dimensional structure. Reliability testing employed Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  considered acceptable for internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). A pilot study involving 30 students outside the primary sample was conducted to refine item clarity and eliminate ambiguous wording. Data collection procedures followed ethical research standards. Formal permission was obtained from school authorities, and participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation, anonymity of responses, and academic purpose of the study. Questionnaires were administered in supervised classroom settings to ensure standardized procedures and reduce response bias. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) were calculated to determine the general level of pedagogical professionalism and spiritual identity formation. Assumption testing included normality testing using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and linearity assessment prior to inferential analysis. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. To determine predictive influence, simple linear regression analysis was performed at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was interpreted to identify the proportion of variance in students' spiritual identity formation explained by pedagogical professionalism. Through this methodological design, the study systematically integrates theological interpretation with empirical statistical analysis, enabling a rigorous examination of how pedagogical professionalism contributes to spiritual identity formation within the Christian educational context of SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between pedagogical professionalism and students' spiritual identity formation at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi. From the 240 distributed questionnaires, all were returned and deemed valid for analysis, yielding a 100% response rate. Respondents were proportionally distributed across grade levels X, XI, and XII, ensuring representativeness of the 600-student population. Descriptive statistical analysis indicated that the overall level of perceived pedagogical professionalism among Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers was high ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.43$  on a 5-point scale). Among the four measured dimensions, relational-ethical integrity obtained the highest mean score ( $M = 4.35$ ), followed by vocational commitment ( $M = 4.28$ ), pedagogical competence ( $M = 4.17$ ), and theological competence ( $M = 4.04$ ). These findings suggest that students perceive their teachers primarily as morally credible and relationally supportive figures, aligning with the educational thesis of Parker J. Palmer that authentic teaching flows from integrity of identity rather than technique alone (Palmer, 1998). Regarding the dependent variable,

students' spiritual identity formation also demonstrated a high overall mean ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ). The highest indicator was sense of communal faith belonging ( $M = 4.22$ ), followed by moral responsibility ( $M = 4.11$ ), spiritual self-awareness ( $M = 4.03$ ), and sense of divine belonging ( $M = 4.00$ ). These results indicate that students strongly identify with the Christian community context of the school, though slightly lower scores on personal divine belonging suggest that institutional affiliation does not automatically guarantee deep existential internalization. This empirical nuance supports the developmental insights of James W. Fowler, who argues that faith formation progresses from communal conformity toward individuated conviction (Fowler, 1981). Before conducting inferential analysis, assumption testing confirmed normal data distribution (Kolmogorov–Smirnov  $p > 0.05$ ) and linearity between variables. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between pedagogical professionalism and spiritual identity formation ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This coefficient indicates a substantial association, suggesting that higher levels of perceived professionalism correspond with stronger levels of student spiritual identity. According to conventional interpretation standards, an  $r$ -value above 0.70 represents a strong correlation, indicating that pedagogical professionalism is not a peripheral factor but a central determinant in the spiritual development context of the school. Simple linear regression analysis further demonstrated that pedagogical professionalism significantly predicted students' spiritual identity formation ( $\beta = 0.71$ ,  $t = 16.82$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.504$ ) indicates that 50.4% of the variance in spiritual identity formation can be explained by pedagogical professionalism. This is a substantial explanatory power in educational research, where behavioral and attitudinal variables are typically influenced by multiple contextual factors. The remaining 49.6% may be attributed to family environment, church involvement, peer dynamics, and individual personality variables not examined in this study. Nonetheless, the finding underscores the strategic influence of teacher professionalism within the Christian educational ecosystem.

When examining each dimension individually, theological competence showed a moderate-to-strong correlation with students' sense of divine belonging ( $r = 0.63$ ), indicating that clarity and depth of biblical instruction contribute meaningfully to students' understanding of their relationship with God. This aligns with the pedagogical content knowledge framework proposed by Lee S. Shulman, which emphasizes the integration of subject mastery and instructional delivery (Shulman, 1987). In a Christian educational setting, theological competence is not abstract scholarship; it becomes formative narrative mediation. Teachers who articulate covenantal theology with coherence provide interpretive scaffolding for students to understand their spiritual identity within the redemptive story reflected in Book of Exodus 19:4. The dimension of relational-ethical integrity demonstrated the strongest correlation with moral responsibility ( $r = 0.74$ ). This suggests that students' ethical self-understanding is profoundly shaped by the perceived character and consistency of their teachers. Theologically, Exodus 19:4 frames identity as a response to divine initiative, Israel obeys because God has carried and brought them into relationship. Analogously, students appear to internalize moral responsibility not through coercive instruction but through relational credibility. This empirical pattern affirms covenantal pedagogy: identity precedes obedience. Professionalism, therefore, includes modeling covenantal

faithfulness in everyday interactions. Vocational commitment also significantly predicted communal faith belonging ( $r = 0.69$ ). Teachers who demonstrate dedication to their calling appear to reinforce students' sense of being part of a purposeful Christian community. This observation reflects the ecclesiological dimension of Christian schooling under the auspices of *Gereja Batak Karo Protestan*, where education is not isolated from church identity. Students' communal belonging is strengthened when teachers embody vocational seriousness, suggesting that professionalism communicates institutional coherence and theological authenticity. Interestingly, while pedagogical competence showed a strong overall correlation ( $r = 0.68$ ), its predictive effect on spiritual self-awareness was slightly lower compared to relational integrity. This finding indicates that effective teaching strategies alone are insufficient to guarantee deep spiritual internalization. Methodological sophistication must be integrated with theological intentionality and relational authenticity. This confirms that Christian pedagogical professionalism is multi-dimensional and irreducible to classroom management or curriculum delivery. The results resonate with the covenantal imagery of Exodus 19:4. The verse depicts divine action, carrying, protecting, and bringing, prior to law-giving. Similarly, teachers' professionalism appears to create a formative environment in which spiritual identity can emerge organically. Students who perceive their teachers as competent, ethical, and committed are more likely to internalize spiritual narratives as personally meaningful rather than institutionally imposed. In this sense, pedagogical professionalism becomes a contemporary analogue to covenantal mediation.

The substantial  $R^2$  value (50.4%) indicates that teacher-related variables remain central to student outcomes, even in religious identity formation. While secular educational literature often focuses on academic achievement, this study extends the scope by demonstrating measurable impact on spiritual identity. The findings thus contribute to the growing discourse on holistic education, affirming that teacher professionalism influences affective and spiritual domains alongside cognitive development. The homogeneity of the school population, 600 Christian students taught by 45 Christian educators, creates a unique interpretive frame. Because shared religious affiliation might superficially suggest automatic identity formation, the strong correlation observed here reveals that institutional Christianity alone is insufficient. Professional mediation is required. The presence of Christian identity at the structural level must be animated by professional competence at the relational and pedagogical levels. Without such professionalism, spiritual identity risks becoming nominal rather than transformative. These findings also highlight the interdependence between theology and empirical inquiry. The quantitative evidence does not replace theological reflection; rather, it substantiates it. Exodus 19:4's depiction of divine initiative and relational formation provides conceptual grounding for understanding why teacher professionalism significantly shapes identity. Students internalize covenantal belonging when educators embody analogous patterns of guidance and commitment. Thus, the empirical data and biblical interpretation mutually reinforce one another. The study relied on self-reported student perceptions, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Additionally, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference beyond predictive association. Longitudinal research could provide deeper insight into how pedagogical professionalism influences spiritual identity over time. Future research might also incorporate qualitative

interviews to explore narrative dimensions of identity formation that quantitative instruments cannot fully capture. The results demonstrate a strong, statistically significant relationship between pedagogical professionalism and students' spiritual identity formation at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi. Professional competence, particularly relational-ethical integrity and vocational commitment, emerges as a decisive factor in cultivating covenantal identity among students. Interpreted through the theological lens of Exodus 19:4, these findings affirm that identity formation in Christian education mirrors the covenantal pattern of guidance, relational presence, and purposeful calling. Pedagogical professionalism is therefore not merely an institutional requirement; it is a theological vocation that shapes how students understand themselves as participants in God's redemptive narrative.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that pedagogical professionalism significantly contributes to students' spiritual identity formation at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi. Quantitative findings reveal a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers and the level of students' spiritual identity, with 50.4% of the variance in spiritual identity formation explained by pedagogical professionalism. This indicates that teacher-related variables are not peripheral but structurally influential in shaping students' sense of divine belonging, moral responsibility, communal faith participation, and spiritual self-awareness. Among the dimensions examined, relational-ethical integrity and vocational commitment emerged as the most influential predictors. These findings suggest that students internalize spiritual identity primarily through credible relational modeling and consistent vocational dedication rather than through instructional technique alone. While theological competence and pedagogical skill remain essential, professionalism in Christian education must be holistic, integrating doctrinal clarity, ethical coherence, relational authenticity, and vocational seriousness. Interpreted through the theological framework of Book of Exodus 19:4, the results affirm a covenantal pattern of formation. Just as Israel's identity was grounded in divine initiative, being "carried" and "brought" into relationship, students' spiritual identity is shaped within an environment where teachers embody guidance, protection, and purposeful direction. Professionalism thus becomes a contemporary pedagogical analogue to covenantal mediation. Teachers function not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as formative agents who mediate theological meaning through lived example. The findings also clarify that institutional Christian identity does not automatically guarantee deep personal spiritual formation. Even within a homogeneous Christian school community of 600 students and 45 Christian educators, intentional and professional mediation is required to translate confessional affiliation into existential conviction. Professionalism, therefore, is both an educational necessity and a theological vocation. The study recommends sustained professional development programs that integrate pedagogical excellence with spiritual formation, ensuring that PAK teachers continually cultivate theological depth, relational integrity, and reflective vocational awareness. Future research may expand the model by incorporating additional variables such as family religious environment, church involvement, or longitudinal faith development patterns to obtain a more comprehensive

explanatory framework. This research confirms that pedagogical professionalism plays a decisive role in nurturing students' spiritual identity. Within Christian Religious Education, professionalism is not merely compliance with educational standards; it is participation in the formative narrative of covenantal belonging.

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