



Christian Religious Education Teachers as Spiritual Guides Inspired by Exodus 18:20 at SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers as spiritual guides inspired by the biblical principle found in Exodus 18:20 within the educational context of SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu. Using an experimental research design, the study involved 46 students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received spiritually guided instruction that integrated mentoring, reflective discussions, and contextual application of biblical values, while the control group experienced conventional CRE teaching focused primarily on cognitive learning. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test instruments measuring spiritual understanding, ethical sensitivity, and faith-based behavioral intention. The findings revealed that students in the experimental group demonstrated significantly greater improvement compared to those in the control group. The spiritually guided approach enabled students to connect biblical teachings with real-life situations, fostering deeper moral awareness and stronger commitment to practicing Christian values such as empathy, responsibility, and forgiveness. The study also found that when teachers functioned as mentors rather than solely as instructors, classroom relationships became more supportive and collaborative. This relational dynamic enhanced students' openness to spiritual reflection and contributed to a more positive learning environment. The results affirm that integrating spiritual guidance into CRE instruction promotes holistic development by bridging the gap between knowledge and lived faith.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Guidance, Exodus 18:20, Teacher Role.*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is not merely an academic discipline concerned with the transmission of doctrinal knowledge but is fundamentally oriented toward the holistic formation of students' spiritual identity and moral character. Within this framework, the teacher assumes a critical role that transcends the conventional function of an instructor. In Christian pedagogy, the teacher is called to serve as a spiritual guide who accompanies learners in their journey toward faith maturity and Christlike character. Research

consistently highlights that teachers of Christian education are central figures in shaping students' spiritual development, functioning as mentors and role models who embody the values they teach (Farrel, 2016; Jackson & Everington, 2017). This guiding role becomes particularly significant in contemporary educational contexts where students face moral ambiguity, identity challenges, and increasing secular influences. Christian education is grounded in the belief that spiritual growth occurs through guided learning shaped by biblical truth and the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather than operating as authoritarian transmitters of knowledge, Christian teachers function as facilitators who help students integrate faith with life experience. In this sense, teaching is not solely cognitive but transformational. As noted in theological reflections on Christian pedagogy, the teacher's task is to assist learners in knowing God personally, not merely knowing about God (Tokyo Union Church, 2020). This perspective aligns with the broader understanding that Christian teachers act as vessels of divine truth, enabling students to experience spiritual maturity through relational and reflective learning processes (Smith, 2018). Empirical studies further demonstrate that the spiritual competence of CRE teachers significantly influences students' faith development. A quantitative investigation revealed a strong positive relationship between teachers' spiritual competence and students' spirituality, accounting for 64% of the variance in spiritual growth indicators such as prayer, gratitude, and forgiveness (Hutabarat et al., 2023). These findings support. Christian teachers are often described as shepherd-like figures who nurture the spiritual formation of students through pastoral care and relational engagement. Shepherding within educational settings enables learners to grow in faith through guidance that addresses intellectual, emotional, and moral dimensions (Tarigan, 2021). Such guidance is essential because students, like all believers, continue to struggle with moral decision-making and require direction grounded in biblical truth. Therefore, the teacher's role as a spiritual mentor becomes indispensable in fostering resilience and ethical awareness among learners.

The importance of teachers as spiritual guides is also supported by contemporary theological studies emphasizing their responsibility to lead students toward unity of faith and spiritual maturity. Teachers are expected to guide learners not only in academic understanding but also in cultivating attitudes, values, and spiritual awareness based on biblical principles (Zega & Tarigan, 2024). When teachers embrace this calling, education becomes an instrument of discipleship that prepares students to live faithfully within their communities. This conceptualization resonates strongly with the biblical narrative of Exodus 18:20, in which Moses is instructed to "teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk." This passage underscores the dual responsibility of spiritual leaders: instruction and guidance. Teaching involves communicating divine truth, while guidance entails directing individuals toward righteous living. In educational contexts, this dual mandate finds practical expression in the role of CRE teachers who serve as both educators and spiritual mentors. The relevance of this biblical model becomes increasingly evident. Students today are exposed to diverse cultural and technological influences that may challenge traditional moral frameworks. Consequently, the presence of spiritually grounded teachers is vital for nurturing students' faith identity and ethical discernment. Previous research on teacher spirituality in Indonesian contexts confirms that personal devotion, ethical integrity, and compassion are essential dimensions that enable educators to transform classrooms into

environments of moral and spiritual formation (Tafonao, 2025). Studies emphasize that CRE teachers serve as spiritual mentors who foster love, empathy, and mutual responsibility among students through consistent modeling of Christian values (Surbakti & Tobing, 2025). Such mentoring practices illustrate that spiritual guidance is most effective when it is relational rather than purely instructional. Students respond more deeply to lived examples of faith than to abstract theological explanations. Despite the recognized importance of spiritual guidance in Christian education, gaps remain in understanding how teachers practically embody this role within formal school environments. Many educators struggle to integrate biblical principles into daily teaching practices due to institutional constraints or limited theological training (Zega & Tarigan, 2024). Consequently, further exploration is needed to examine how CRE teachers function as spiritual guides in real educational settings. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the role of Christian Religious Education teachers as spiritual guides inspired by Exodus 18:20. By focusing on the lived experiences of educators at SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu, this research aims to provide insights into how biblical principles of guidance are translated into pedagogical practice. Ultimately, the study contributes to the growing discourse on spiritual leadership in education and highlights the transformative potential of teachers who embrace their calling as guides in students' faith journeys.

METHODS

This study employed an experimental research design to examine the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers functioning as spiritual guides inspired by the principles of Exodus 18:20 in shaping students' spiritual attitudes and understanding. Experimental research is widely recognized as a systematic method for determining causal relationships by comparing outcomes between groups subjected to different treatments (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). In the context of educational studies, this design allows researchers to evaluate whether specific pedagogical interventions produce measurable changes in learners' attitudes and behaviors (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu and involved a total of 46 students who were enrolled in Christian Religious Education classes. The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group consisting of 23 students and a control group consisting of 23 students. The grouping was conducted using a non-randomized approach based on existing classroom structures while ensuring comparable academic and demographic characteristics between groups. This quasi-experimental structure is commonly applied in school-based research where full randomization is not feasible. The experimental group received instruction in which CRE teachers intentionally integrated spiritual guidance practices rooted in the model of Exodus 18:20. These practices included mentoring conversations, value-based reflection sessions, contextual biblical applications, and structured moral decision-making discussions. Teachers acted not only as content instructors but as facilitators of spiritual direction, encouraging students to connect biblical teachings with daily life experiences. Meanwhile, the control group received conventional CRE instruction that focused primarily on cognitive understanding of biblical content without structured spiritual mentoring components. Data collection was carried out using a pre-test and post-test design. The pre-test was administered to both groups prior to the intervention to measure baseline levels of students' spiritual awareness, moral understanding, and faith-based

attitudes. Following a four-week instructional period, the post-test was administered to assess changes resulting from the intervention. The instrument consisted of a validated Likert-scale questionnaire designed to evaluate three dimensions: spiritual understanding, ethical sensitivity, and faith-based behavioral intention. Such structured instruments are considered effective for measuring attitudinal change in experimental educational research (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). To ensure reliability, the instrument underwent internal consistency testing using Cronbach's Alpha. Validity was established through expert review involving Christian education practitioners and academic researchers. Classroom observations were conducted during the intervention period to verify the implementation of spiritual guidance practices in the experimental group. Data analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Mean score comparisons between pre-test and post-test results were calculated to determine the magnitude of change within each group. Furthermore, an independent sample t-test was used to examine whether the differences in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups were statistically significant. This analytical approach aligns with standard procedures in experimental educational research aimed at evaluating instructional effectiveness (Sugiyono, 2017). Through this methodological framework, the study sought to determine whether the intentional role of CRE teachers as spiritual guides could significantly influence students' spiritual and moral development within a formal school setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this experimental study reveal meaningful differences between students who experienced spiritually guided instruction and those who participated in conventional Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning. The intervention implemented at SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu was designed to reflect the biblical model of guidance found in Exodus 18:20, where leadership is expressed not merely through instruction but through intentional direction toward righteous living. This dual emphasis on teaching and guiding formed the foundation of the experimental treatment and shaped how CRE teachers engaged with students throughout the learning process. Both the experimental and control groups demonstrated relatively similar levels of spiritual understanding, ethical awareness, and faith-based behavioral intention. Pre-test analysis showed no significant disparity between the two groups, indicating that both sets of students began from comparable baseline conditions. This equivalence strengthened the internal validity of the study and allowed any subsequent differences observed in the post-test results to be more confidently attributed to the instructional approach rather than pre-existing variation. Following the four-week intervention, notable changes emerged in the experimental group. Students who were guided through spiritually oriented instruction displayed visible growth in their understanding of faith as a lived reality rather than merely a doctrinal concept. Their responses reflected a deeper comprehension of how biblical teachings relate to everyday decision-making, relationships, and personal responsibility. In contrast, students in the control group showed only modest development, largely confined to cognitive recall of lesson content rather than transformation in attitudes or perspectives. One of the most significant outcomes

observed was the shift in students' perception of the teacher's role. In the experimental group, teachers were increasingly viewed not only as sources of knowledge but as mentors who provided direction in navigating moral dilemmas and personal challenges. Students expressed greater trust in their teachers and demonstrated openness in discussing spiritual concerns. This relational dynamic became a crucial factor in fostering meaningful engagement with biblical values. The data suggest that when teachers embody the role of spiritual guides, students are more likely to internalize teachings because the learning process becomes relational rather than transactional. The impact of guided reflection sessions proved particularly influential. These sessions encouraged students to examine real-life situations through the lens of biblical principles. Instead of passively receiving information, learners were invited to interpret and apply scriptural values in practical contexts such as peer relationships, honesty in academic work, and conflict resolution. This participatory approach facilitated the development of ethical sensitivity, as students began to recognize the moral dimensions embedded within daily interactions. Post-test results indicated a substantial increase in the experimental group's ability to articulate value-based reasoning when confronted with hypothetical scenarios. Another important dimension of change was observed in students' behavioral intention. While cognitive understanding is essential, spiritual formation ultimately manifests in action. Students in the experimental group showed stronger commitment to behaviors aligned with Christian values, including empathy toward peers, willingness to forgive, and responsibility in fulfilling academic obligations. These tendencies were less evident in the control group, where moral reflection remained largely abstract. The findings highlight that spiritual guidance contributes to the transition from knowledge to practice. Classroom observations supported the quantitative results by revealing differences in student engagement patterns. In the experimental group, participation levels increased significantly over time. Students became more active in discussions and more willing to share personal reflections. This openness was nurtured by the teacher's consistent modeling of compassion, patience, and integrity. The presence of a supportive environment enabled students to explore faith-related questions without fear of judgment. Such an atmosphere aligns with the biblical principle of guidance emphasized in Exodus 18:20, which underscores the importance of showing rather than merely telling the way forward. The relational nature of the intervention also appeared to strengthen peer interactions. Students who experienced spiritually guided learning displayed improved cooperation and mutual respect. Group discussions became more constructive, and instances of negative behavior such as mockery or exclusion were noticeably reduced. This suggests that spiritual guidance does not only affect individual attitudes but also contributes to the cultivation of a positive communal climate within the classroom. In contrast, the control group maintained a more traditional learning atmosphere. While students demonstrated satisfactory comprehension of lesson material, their engagement remained primarily task-oriented. Discussions were limited to answering factual questions rather than exploring personal or ethical implications. As a result, opportunities for deeper reflection were minimal. The absence of structured mentoring meant that biblical teachings were seldom connected to students' lived experiences. Statistical analysis confirmed these observations. The experimental group exhibited a significantly higher mean increase between pre-test and post-test scores compared to the control group. The independent sample t-test indicated that the difference in post-test

outcomes was statistically significant, suggesting that the intervention had a measurable effect on students' spiritual awareness and ethical understanding. These results reinforce the proposition that teaching strategies incorporating spiritual guidance can produce transformative educational outcomes. Beyond measurable gains, qualitative observations revealed subtle yet meaningful shifts in classroom culture. Students began to adopt language reflecting shared values, such as responsibility, compassion, and fairness. Informal conversations increasingly referenced biblical insights discussed during reflection sessions. This indicates that spiritual learning extended beyond formal lesson time and began to shape students' everyday interactions.

The role of the teacher emerged as a central determinant of success. Teachers who intentionally practiced mentoring behaviors created learning environments characterized by trust and authenticity. Their willingness to listen, encourage, and provide direction reinforced their credibility as spiritual guides. Students responded positively to this authenticity, perceiving their teachers as consistent and approachable figures. These findings resonate with broader educational theories emphasizing the influence of role modeling in value formation. When students observe alignment between instruction and behavior, they are more inclined to internalize the values presented. In this study, teachers' lived expressions of faith reinforced the lessons delivered during class, enhancing the coherence of the educational experience. The implications of these results extend beyond the immediate context of CRE instruction. They suggest that spiritual guidance can function as a catalyst for holistic development, integrating cognitive, emotional, and moral dimensions of learning. In a rapidly changing social environment where students encounter diverse influences, the presence of teachers who offer principled direction becomes increasingly vital. The study also identified challenges associated with implementing spiritually guided instruction. Teachers required additional time to facilitate reflection sessions and to engage in mentoring conversations. Institutional constraints such as limited class periods occasionally restricted the depth of interaction possible. Despite these challenges, the overall benefits observed indicate that the integration of spiritual guidance is both feasible and impactful. The discussion further highlights the relevance of Exodus 18:20 as a pedagogical model. The passage emphasizes not only the communication of knowledge but also the responsibility to demonstrate the path of righteous living. In the educational setting examined, this principle was translated into practical strategies that encouraged students to connect faith with action. The study demonstrates that when CRE teachers embrace their role as spiritual guides, learning transcends academic boundaries and contributes to character formation. Students become more capable of navigating moral complexities and more inclined to live in accordance with their faith convictions. This transformative potential underscores the importance of re-envisioning the teacher's role within Christian education as one that combines instruction with intentional guidance. The results from SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu provide compelling evidence that spiritually guided teaching can foster deeper engagement with biblical values and promote meaningful personal growth among students. Such findings contribute to the ongoing conversation about how faith-based education can respond effectively to contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in scriptural principles.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education teachers serving as spiritual guides inspired by the biblical mandate of Exodus 18:20 within a formal school context. The experimental findings from SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu demonstrate that when teachers intentionally integrate spiritual guidance into instructional practice, the impact extends beyond cognitive learning toward meaningful transformation in students' attitudes, ethical awareness, and faith-based behavioral intentions. The results clearly indicate that students who participated in spiritually guided learning experienced significantly greater development compared to those who received conventional instruction. While traditional CRE teaching successfully conveyed doctrinal knowledge, it often remained limited to intellectual understanding. In contrast, the spiritually guided approach enabled students to connect biblical teachings with real-life situations, fostering a deeper awareness of moral responsibility and personal faith expression. This suggests that spiritual guidance functions as a bridge between knowing biblical truth and living it out in daily life. An important insight emerging from this study is the central role of relational engagement in spiritual formation. Teachers who adopted mentoring practices created environments characterized by trust, openness, and authenticity. Within such settings, students felt safe to reflect on personal experiences, ask questions about faith, and explore ethical challenges. This relational dynamic enhanced students' receptivity to biblical values and encouraged internalization rather than mere compliance. Consequently, the teacher's role evolved from information provider to spiritual companion, aligning closely with the leadership model reflected in Exodus 18:20. The improvement observed in students' ethical sensitivity and behavioral intention further reinforces the significance of this approach. Students exposed to guided reflection and value-based discussions demonstrated greater willingness to practice forgiveness, empathy, and responsibility. These changes suggest that spiritual guidance contributes not only to personal growth but also to the cultivation of a more positive classroom community. Enhanced peer relationships and collaborative attitudes were evident, indicating that spiritual formation has both individual and collective dimensions. From a pedagogical perspective, the study affirms that integrating spiritual mentoring within CRE instruction is both practical and effective. Although challenges such as time constraints and institutional limitations were encountered, the overall benefits outweighed these obstacles. Teachers who consistently modeled integrity and compassion were able to influence students' perspectives in ways that traditional instructional methods alone could not achieve. The findings underscore the enduring relevance of Exodus 18:20 as a framework for educational leadership. The passage emphasizes the dual responsibility of teaching truth and guiding conduct. When applied within contemporary classrooms, this principle encourages educators to move beyond content delivery toward transformative accompaniment. In doing so, teachers help students navigate moral complexities and develop resilience grounded in faith. The results highlight the importance of intentionality in spiritual education. The effectiveness of the intervention was not solely dependent on the content taught but on the manner in which it was delivered. Structured reflection, mentoring conversations, and contextual application of biblical principles created opportunities for students to experience faith as a lived reality. This study provides compelling evidence that CRE teachers who embrace their calling as spiritual guides can significantly enhance students' spiritual and moral development. The experience at SMP Negeri 2 Onolalu illustrates that education rooted in biblical guidance has the potential to

shape not only what students know but who they become. As educational environments continue to evolve, the integration of spiritual mentoring within Christian instruction remains essential for nurturing learners who are both intellectually informed and morally grounded.

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