



Building Meaningful Obedience: An Analysis of Teacher Pedagogical Competence from the Perspective of Matthew 23:12 at SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how teacher pedagogical competence contributes to the formation of meaningful student obedience through the interpretive lens of Matthew 23:12 at SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh. The research was motivated by the growing need to move beyond compliance-based discipline toward value-based character formation in contemporary education. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving teachers, students, and school leadership. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns in the enactment of pedagogical authority and student responses. The findings reveal that while teachers generally demonstrate adequate procedural pedagogical competence, the depth of student obedience varies significantly depending on how authority is relationally embodied. Classrooms characterized by directive and control-oriented approaches tend to produce situational compliance, whereas servant-oriented pedagogy, marked by humility, relational care, and moral explanation, fosters more voluntary and internalized obedience. The exegetical reflection on Matthew 23:12 reinforces the educational importance of authority grounded in humility rather than dominance. The study concludes that pedagogical competence becomes transformative when integrated with servant leadership principles and authentic teacher modeling. It recommends strengthening professional development in relational pedagogy, reflective teacher identity, and value-based classroom assessment. These findings contribute to the discourse on Christian-informed character education and offer practical insights for improving teacher professionalism in pluralistic public-school contexts.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Obedience*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education in the twenty-first century is increasingly recognized as a transformative enterprise that extends beyond cognitive achievement toward holistic character formation. Educational systems worldwide are shifting from content-centered instruction to value-oriented learning that integrates intellectual growth with moral and relational development. Within this broader movement, the concept of obedience remains contested. Traditionally, obedience in schooling contexts has been associated with rule compliance, discipline enforcement, and behavioral control. However, such reductionist understandings fail to capture the deeper pedagogical and ethical dimensions of obedience as a voluntary response grounded in respect, understanding, and internalized values (Lickona, 1991). Teacher competence is formally regulated under national standards, particularly through the Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 16 of 2007, which defines pedagogical competence as teachers' ability to understand learners, design and implement instruction, evaluate learning outcomes, and develop students' potential holistically. Pedagogical competence is thus positioned not merely as technical proficiency but as the core of professional teaching identity (Mulyasa, 2013). Yet, while national frameworks emphasize procedural mastery, they often underarticulate the ethical-spiritual orientation that animates authentic educational authority. Scholarly discourse on pedagogical competence has been deeply shaped by Shulman's (1987) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge, which argues that effective teaching requires the integration of subject matter knowledge with pedagogical strategies tailored to learners' needs. Teachers are not mere transmitters of information; they are interpreters who translate knowledge into accessible forms. However, competence alone does not automatically produce meaningful obedience. Psychological research on motivation suggests that compliance can emerge either from external pressure or internalized commitment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The latter is more sustainable and morally formative, as it stems from autonomy, relatedness, and competence satisfaction rather than fear or reward dependency.

Social psychology has long demonstrated the power of authority structures in eliciting obedience, most notably in Milgram's (1963) behavioral studies. Yet educational contexts differ fundamentally from laboratory conditions. Schools aim not to test submission but to cultivate responsible agency. Wentzel (2002) found that students are more likely to internalize behavioral norms when teachers display warmth, fairness, and relational support. These findings suggest that obedience in educational settings is relationally mediated rather than mechanically enforced. Matthew 23:12 provides a profound counter-narrative to authoritarian models of leadership: *"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted"* (Holy Bible, NIV, 2011). Situated within Jesus' critique of the scribes and Pharisees, this verse articulates a paradoxical ethic of authority grounded in humility and service rather than dominance. Greenleaf (1977) conceptualized this ethos in his theory of servant leadership, proposing that true leaders prioritize the growth and well-being of those they lead. In educational settings, servant leadership reframes authority as relational stewardship rather than hierarchical control (Crippen, 2010). SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh provides a compelling context for examining these intersections. As a public senior high school within Indonesia's pluralistic

educational landscape, it operates under national competency standards while navigating diverse student backgrounds. Preliminary observations indicate variations in how teachers enact pedagogical competence and how students interpret obedience. Some classrooms reflect compliance driven by disciplinary structures, whereas others demonstrate relational obedience rooted in trust and respect. This variability raises critical questions regarding the nature of pedagogical competence and its ethical orientation. This study therefore investigates the relationship between teacher pedagogical competence and the formation of meaningful student obedience through the interpretive lens of Matthew 23:12. Specifically, it seeks to examine how pedagogical practices embody, or fail to embody, the servant principle articulated by Jesus, and how such embodiment influences students' internalization of obedience. By integrating educational theory, motivational psychology, and servant theology, this research aims to construct a conceptual model in which pedagogical competence functions as professional service, transforming obedience from imposed compliance into value-based commitment. In doing so, the study contributes to character education discourse by proposing that meaningful obedience arises not from authoritarian enforcement but from credible, humble, and relationally grounded pedagogical authority. Within Indonesia's plural educational context, such an integrative framework offers both theoretical enrichment and practical guidance for reimagining teacher professionalism as ethically and spiritually informed practice.

METHODS

A qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to understand processes, meanings, and relational dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study strategy is appropriate when the researcher intends to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). In this study, pedagogical competence and student obedience are socially and relationally constructed within the classroom environment of SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh. The research site was SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh, a public senior high school operating under Indonesia's national education standards. The selection of this site was based on purposive considerations: the school implements character education programs aligned with national policy, it represents a pluralistic public-school context, and preliminary observations indicated variation in classroom authority patterns and student responsiveness. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). The primary participants consisted of Christian Religious Education teachers and selected students who had experienced classroom instruction emphasizing obedience and character formation. School leaders were included as supporting informants to provide institutional perspectives on pedagogical practice. Sampling continued until data saturation was reached, meaning no substantially new themes emerged from additional data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data were collected through three main techniques to ensure triangulation and depth of understanding. Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to document real-time pedagogical interactions, teacher authority patterns, instructional strategies, and student behavioral responses. Observations focused

particularly on moments where obedience, discipline, or character guidance was enacted. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers, students, and administrators. The interview protocol explored perceptions of pedagogical competence, meanings of obedience, experiences of classroom authority, and reflections related to the humility principle of Matthew 23:12. Semi-structured interviewing allowed the researcher to maintain focus while also enabling participants to articulate their lived experiences in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Document analysis was undertaken on lesson plans, school policies, and character education guidelines to examine the formal articulation of pedagogical and disciplinary frameworks. Data analysis followed the thematic analysis procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes, initial open coding to identify meaningful units, axial coding to group related categories, theme development to construct interpretive patterns, and interpretive synthesis linking empirical findings with the servant pedagogy framework derived from Matthew 23:12. To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility was strengthened through triangulation and member checking; transferability through thick description of context; dependability through an audit trail of analytic decisions; and confirmability through reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Formal permission was obtained from the school administration. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings, and all data were stored securely. By employing a rigorous qualitative case study design, this research aims to produce a nuanced and trustworthy account of how pedagogical competence, when infused with servant-oriented humility, shapes meaningful student obedience in the Indonesian public-school context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative case study reveal that pedagogical competence at SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh operates not merely as a technical instructional capacity but as a relational and moral force that significantly shapes the quality of student obedience. Through classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis, a complex pattern emerged in which obedience among students was mediated by how teachers enacted authority, structured learning, and embodied the humility principle reflected in Matthew 23:12. The analysis indicates that meaningful obedience, defined in this study as voluntary, reflective, and value-based student responsiveness, was most strongly associated with pedagogical practices characterized by relational warmth, instructional clarity, and servant-oriented teacher identity. Conversely, classrooms that relied predominantly on procedural control and directive authority tended to produce compliance that was situational and externally motivated rather than deeply internalized. At the structural level, teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh generally demonstrated adequate mastery of formal pedagogical competencies. Lesson planning documents reviewed in this study showed alignment with national curriculum requirements, including clearly stated learning objectives, structured activity sequences, and assessment components. Teachers displayed familiarity with student developmental characteristics and employed commonly recommended instructional strategies such as

guided discussion, questioning techniques, and reflective exercises. These findings are consistent with the Indonesian national competency framework, which positions pedagogical competence as the teacher's capacity to design, implement, and evaluate effective learning processes (Mulyasa, 2013). The qualitative evidence suggests that procedural adequacy alone does not automatically translate into transformative classroom influence. What distinguished more effective classrooms was not simply the presence of pedagogical structure but the manner in which teachers relationally enacted their professional authority.

Classroom observations revealed two broad pedagogical authority patterns. The pattern may be described as compliance-oriented pedagogy. In these classrooms, teachers maintained strong procedural control, emphasized rule adherence, and frequently used directive language such as commands, warnings, and corrective reminders. Students in these environments generally followed instructions and maintained order during observed lessons. However, interview data indicated that their obedience was largely situational. Many students reported that they complied primarily to avoid sanctions or to meet teacher expectations rather than because they personally embraced the underlying values. This finding resonates with self-determination theory, which distinguishes between controlled motivation and autonomous internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2000). From a character education perspective, such externally regulated obedience is considered less stable and less likely to transfer beyond supervised contexts. The next pattern, which appeared in several classrooms, reflected what this study conceptualizes as servant-oriented pedagogy. Teachers in this category still maintained classroom structure and expectations but enacted authority through relational engagement rather than dominance. Observational field notes documented frequent use of invitational language, empathetic listening, and dialogical interaction. Rather than merely instructing students to obey, these teachers explained the moral reasoning behind expectations and connected classroom norms to broader character goals. Students in these environments demonstrated not only behavioral compliance but also verbalized understanding of why obedience matters. Interview responses repeatedly highlighted feelings of being respected, guided, and personally known by the teacher. This relational climate aligns closely with research showing that students are more likely to internalize norms when teachers display care and fairness (Wentzel, 2002). The theological lens of Matthew 23:12 provided an interpretive framework that illuminated why these differences matter pedagogically. The verse's emphasis on humility as the basis of true authority was reflected in the practices of teachers whose classrooms produced more meaningful forms of obedience. These teachers did not relinquish authority; rather, they reframed it through service, modeling what Greenleaf (1977) describes as servant leadership. Interview data from teachers in this group revealed a conscious commitment to viewing teaching as ministry rather than mere instruction. They described their role using language such as "guiding," "accompanying," and "forming character," indicating an internalized professional identity that integrates competence with humility. This identity orientation appears to function as a mediating mechanism through which pedagogical competence becomes morally persuasive rather than merely administratively effective. Student voice provided particularly important insight into the dynamics of obedience formation. Across interviews, students consistently distinguished between teachers who

were perceived as “strict” and those perceived as “firm but caring.” Interestingly, strictness alone did not predict respect. Several students reported that highly controlling teachers generated short-term compliance but also emotional distance. In contrast, teachers who combined clear expectations with relational warmth were more likely to be described using terms such as “respected,” “trusted,” and “worth listening to.” This pattern supports the growing body of literature suggesting that authority legitimacy in classrooms is relationally constructed rather than structurally imposed. It also reinforces the central argument of this study that pedagogical competence must be ethically and relationally grounded to produce meaningful character outcomes.

The role of instructional mediation emerged as another critical theme. Teachers who effectively connected biblical and moral content to students’ lived realities tended to foster deeper internalization of obedience values. In several observed lessons, teachers explicitly linked classroom discipline to broader life skills such as responsibility, reliability, and faithfulness. Students in these classrooms were able to articulate obedience not merely as rule-following but as a character trait relevant to family life, peer relationships, and future vocational responsibilities. This finding aligns with Groome’s (2011) assertion that faith-informed education becomes transformative when learners actively appropriate meaning within their life contexts. Where such contextualization was absent, student understanding remained largely conceptual and detached from behavior. The study also identified areas of pedagogical tension. One recurring challenge involved balancing authority and approachability. Some teachers expressed concern during interviews that excessive relational softness might reduce classroom discipline. This perceived trade-off occasionally led teachers to revert to more directive control strategies, especially when facing time pressure or classroom management difficulties. The data suggest that professional development in this context should not simply encourage greater warmth but should help teachers develop what might be termed “structured humility,” the capacity to maintain clear expectations while embodying servant-oriented authority. This nuanced competence appears essential for sustaining both order and internalized obedience. Institutional context also played a moderating role. Document analysis showed that the school formally emphasizes character education, yet implementation across classrooms was uneven. Some teachers integrated character goals explicitly into lesson planning, while others treated discipline primarily as behavioral management. This variability indicates that organizational messaging alone is insufficient; teacher belief systems and professional identity significantly shape classroom enactment. The presence of supportive school leadership and collaborative professional culture appeared to strengthen servant-oriented practices, suggesting the importance of whole-school alignment in character education initiatives. Another important finding concerns the developmental readiness of senior high school students. Adolescents at SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh demonstrated increasing capacity for moral reasoning and critical reflection, but they also showed sensitivity to perceived fairness and authenticity. Students were quick to detect inconsistency between teacher expectations and teacher behavior. In classrooms where teachers modeled punctuality, preparedness, and respectful communication, student responsiveness was noticeably higher. This observation reinforces the long-standing educational principle that modeling is a powerful component of character formation. Within the framework of Matthew 23:12,

teacher humility was most credible when embodied behaviorally rather than merely articulated verbally.

The minority and pluralistic dimensions of the school context further enriched interpretation. Although the study focused on pedagogical competence broadly, the findings suggest that servant-oriented authority may be particularly valuable in diverse public-school environments where moral persuasion must operate without coercive religious homogeneity. Teachers who relied primarily on positional authority risked student disengagement, whereas those who built relational credibility were more successful in fostering voluntary cooperation. This insight has broader implications for character education in multicultural settings across Indonesia. The results of this study support a reframing of pedagogical competence. Rather than viewing competence solely as instructional skill, the evidence suggests a triadic model consisting of technical proficiency, relational intelligence, and ethical-spiritual orientation. When these dimensions operate in integration, teacher authority becomes both academically effective and morally formative. The exegetical reflection on Matthew 23:12 provides theological coherence to this model by grounding educational authority in humility and service. The findings suggest several strategic directions. Professional development programs should move beyond procedural training to include formation in relational pedagogy and reflective professional identity. Classroom practice should intentionally incorporate explanatory moral dialogue rather than relying exclusively on rule enforcement. Schools should cultivate collaborative cultures that support consistent character messaging across subjects. Finally, future research would benefit from longitudinal designs that track whether servant-oriented pedagogy produces sustained behavioral outcomes over time. The results and discussion demonstrate that pedagogical competence at SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh significantly influences the nature and depth of student obedience. The decisive factor is not competence in isolation but competence enacted through humility, relational care, and meaningful instructional mediation. When teachers embody the paradox of authority articulated in Matthew 23:12, obedience in the classroom shifts from externally imposed compliance toward internally owned character formation. This transformation represents the central educational promise of servant-informed pedagogy in contemporary Indonesian schooling.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how teacher pedagogical competence contributes to the formation of meaningful student obedience at SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh through the interpretive lens of Matthew 23:12. The findings clearly demonstrate that pedagogical competence functions most effectively when it is enacted not merely as technical instructional skill but as relational and ethically grounded professional practice. While teachers at the research site generally exhibited adequate mastery of formal pedagogical requirements, such as lesson planning, classroom management, and instructional delivery, the depth and quality of student obedience varied significantly depending on how teacher authority was relationally embodied in the classroom. The study confirms that obedience among students emerges in at least two qualitatively different forms. Compliance-oriented classrooms tended to produce externally regulated obedience

driven by rule enforcement and supervisory control. Although such approaches maintained short-term classroom order, they did not consistently foster deep internalization of values. In contrast, classrooms characterized by servant-oriented pedagogy, marked by relational warmth, respectful communication, and moral explanation, were more successful in cultivating voluntary, reflective, and value-based obedience. Students in these environments demonstrated clearer understanding of the ethical meaning behind behavioral expectations and showed stronger personal ownership of disciplined conduct. The exegetical reflection on Matthew 23:12 provides a compelling theological framework for interpreting these findings. The biblical principle that true authority is grounded in humility and service offers a corrective to authoritarian educational models. Teachers who embodied humility through attentive listening, fairness, and personal example were perceived by students as more credible and trustworthy. This relational credibility emerged as a key mediating factor linking pedagogical competence to meaningful character formation. Thus, the study extends the concept of pedagogical competence beyond procedural proficiency toward what may be described as ethically infused professional authority. The contextual setting of SMA Negeri 1 Kutabuluh as a public and pluralistic school further underscores the importance of this integrated model. In such environments, durable student obedience cannot rely solely on institutional power or disciplinary structures; it must be cultivated through persuasive, relationally grounded teaching practices. The findings therefore have broader implications for character education in Indonesian public schools, suggesting that the effectiveness of moral instruction depends heavily on the teacher's ability to harmonize instructional clarity, relational sensitivity, and authentic personal modeling. The study also identifies ongoing challenges. Variability in classroom practice indicates that not all teachers have fully integrated servant-oriented pedagogy into their professional identity. Tensions between maintaining discipline and expressing relational warmth remain evident, and institutional character education policies have not yet produced uniformly transformative classroom cultures. These gaps point to the need for more intentional professional development that addresses not only pedagogical techniques but also reflective formation of teacher identity and authority orientation. In light of these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Teacher development programs should incorporate training in relational pedagogy, moral dialogue, and reflective practice grounded in servant leadership principles. Schools should strengthen collaborative cultures that align disciplinary policies with character formation goals. Classroom assessment should move beyond behavioral compliance toward indicators of value internalization. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to examine the sustainability of servant-oriented pedagogical impacts across diverse educational contexts. This study affirms that pedagogical competence is a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful student obedience. Its transformative power emerges when competence is animated by humility, relational care, and ethically grounded authority consistent with the vision of Matthew 23:12. When teachers teach from this posture, obedience in the classroom is no longer merely imposed, it becomes personally embraced, morally understood, and educationally formative.

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