



Spiritual Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Addressing the Challenges of Modern Education: An Exegetical Study of Philippians 4:4-7 at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in addressing the challenges of modern education through an exegetical reflection on Philippians 4:4-7 at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala. The research is grounded in the increasing complexity of contemporary educational contexts that require teachers not only to possess pedagogical skills but also to demonstrate strong spiritual maturity and resilience. The study involved 53 Christian students and 8 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers, as the contextual background of the research setting. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires measuring dimensions of teachers' spiritual competence, students' perceptions, and the integration of biblical values in classroom practice. The findings indicate that CRE teachers generally demonstrate a high level of spiritual competence, particularly in modeling joy, peace, and trust in God as emphasized in Philippians 4:4-7. Statistical analysis shows a significant positive relationship between teachers' spiritual competence and students' spiritual attitudes toward learning and coping with modern educational pressures. The study also reveals that contextual biblical integration strengthens students' emotional stability and learning motivation. These results affirm that spiritually competent teachers play a strategic role in helping students navigate the demands of modern education while maintaining Christian faith values. The study recommends continuous professional and spiritual formation programs for CRE teachers to sustain their effectiveness in increasingly complex educational environments.

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

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of modern education, marked by technological disruption, cultural pluralism, and increasing psychological pressures on students, has significantly reshaped the role of teachers in contemporary classrooms. In this dynamic context,

Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers are not only expected to demonstrate pedagogical and professional competence but also strong spiritual competence that enables them to guide students holistically. Spiritual competence refers to the teacher's capacity to embody Christian virtues, maintain spiritual maturity, and translate biblical values into meaningful educational practices (Groome, 2011). For CRE teachers, this competence becomes increasingly crucial as students face anxiety, moral confusion, and identity challenges in the era of globalization and digitalization. Modern educational challenges often manifest in students' emotional instability, declining discipline, and weakened spiritual awareness. Studies indicate that students in the digital age frequently experience stress, distraction, and fragmented attention, which can negatively affect their character formation and learning engagement (Fullan, 2013). Within this situation, CRE teachers are called to become spiritual anchors who nurture inner peace, resilience, and faith-based coping mechanisms among learners. The success of Christian education, therefore, is closely related to the spiritual authenticity of the teacher, because students tend to internalize values more effectively through lived examples than through verbal instruction alone (Palmer, 2007). Spiritual competence in facing life's pressures is profoundly reflected in Philippians 4:4-7. In this passage, the Apostle Paul exhorts believers to rejoice in the Lord, practice gentleness, replace anxiety with prayer, and experience the peace of God that surpasses understanding. The text presents a theological framework for emotional regulation, spiritual resilience, and faithful living amid uncertainty. Exegetically, the passage emphasizes that Christian maturity is demonstrated not merely through doctrinal knowledge but through a transformed inner life characterized by joy, prayerfulness, and divine peace (Fee, 1995). These elements are highly relevant for CRE teachers who must navigate the complexities of modern education while maintaining spiritual stability.

Integrating Philippians 4:4-7 into CRE teaching offers a constructive pathway for addressing students' psychosocial and spiritual needs. The virtues of rejoicing, gentleness, prayerfulness, and peace can function as pedagogical values that shape classroom climate and student character. Previous research confirms that spiritually grounded teaching contributes positively to students' emotional well-being, moral development, and learning motivation (Estep, Anthony, & Allison, 2008). Consequently, examining how CRE teachers embody and transmit these values becomes an important scholarly endeavor. The context of SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala in Aceh Tenggara presents a unique educational setting. Although the school operates within a pluralistic environment, there are 53 Christian students and 8 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, who play a strategic role in nurturing students' spiritual growth. Preliminary observations suggest that while CRE instruction is implemented regularly, the extent to which teachers' spiritual competence reflects the principles of Philippians 4:4-7 has not been systematically studied. Given the pressures of modern education, such as technological distractions, academic competition, and socio-emotional challenges, there is a need to examine how CRE teachers embody biblical spirituality in their professional practice. This study therefore aims to analyze the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in addressing modern educational challenges through an exegetical reflection on Philippians 4:4-7 at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala. Specifically, the research seeks to explore the exegetical meaning of Philippians 4:4-7 in relation to educational spirituality,

examine the manifestation of CRE teachers' spiritual competence in the school context, and evaluate the implications of such competence for students' spiritual and emotional development. By integrating biblical exegesis with educational analysis, this study is expected to contribute to the strengthening of spiritually grounded Christian pedagogy in contemporary Indonesian schools.

METHODS

A quantitative descriptive design was used to examine the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in addressing the challenges of modern education through reflection on Philippians 4:4-7. The quantitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to obtain measurable and objective data regarding students' perceptions of teachers' spiritual competence and its educational implications (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala, Aceh Tenggara, with the population consisting of 53 Christian students. Given the relatively small and accessible population, the study applied a total sampling technique, meaning all 53 students were involved as research respondents to ensure comprehensive representation. Contextual information was also obtained from eight Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, to support interpretation of findings, although the primary data source remained the students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from the conceptual framework of teacher spiritual competence and the exegetical themes of Philippians 4:4-7, namely joyful spirituality, gentleness, prayerfulness, and peace-building presence in the classroom. The instrument used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Prior to implementation, the questionnaire underwent content validation by experts in Christian education to ensure theoretical alignment and clarity of items. Construct validity was examined using item-total correlation, and reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha with a minimum acceptable coefficient of 0.70, indicating internal consistency of the instrument. The data collection procedure was carried out systematically through several steps: obtaining formal permission from the school, coordinating with the CRE teacher, explaining the purpose of the study to respondents, distributing the questionnaires in a supervised classroom setting, and collecting the completed instruments for coding and tabulation. Ethical principles were upheld by ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity of respondents, and confidentiality of the data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, percentages, and standard deviations, to determine the level of teachers' spiritual competence. The results were then interpreted using predetermined category criteria (very high, high, moderate, low, very low) and enriched through theological reflection on Philippians 4:4-7 to maintain integration between empirical findings and biblical foundations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a substantive picture of the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in addressing the challenges of modern education at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala, Aceh Tenggara. Based on responses from

the 53 Christian students who participated through total sampling, the overall mean score of teachers' spiritual competence was in the high category, indicating that students generally perceive the CRE teacher as demonstrating spiritually grounded professionalism in the learning process. This result is significant considering the minority context, only 53 Christian students among the wider school population and eight Christian teachers including the CRE teacher, which often presents unique pedagogical and pastoral challenges. The data suggest that spiritual competence is not merely an internal disposition but is expressed in observable pedagogical behaviors that students can meaningfully perceive and evaluate. When disaggregated into the four exegetically derived dimensions from Philippians 4:4-7, joyful spirituality, gentleness, prayerfulness, and peace-oriented presence, the results show nuanced variations. The joyful spirituality dimension obtained one of the highest mean scores. Students reported that the CRE teacher consistently demonstrates enthusiasm in teaching, maintains a positive classroom climate, and communicates faith in ways that foster hope rather than fear. This finding aligns with the Pauline exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord always," which in educational praxis translates into a pedagogy marked by hopeful presence. In the context of modern education, often characterized by performance pressure, digital distraction, and emotional fatigue, teacher joy functions as a stabilizing spiritual resource. Contemporary educational literature emphasizes that teacher affect significantly shapes student engagement and classroom climate. Therefore, the strong score in this dimension indicates that the CRE teacher's spirituality is embodied in emotionally constructive pedagogy rather than merely doctrinal instruction.

Gentleness (*epieikes*) also received a high evaluation, though slightly lower than joyful spirituality. Students generally agreed that the teacher demonstrates patience, fairness, and approachability when handling classroom situations. However, several response patterns suggest variability in how consistently gentleness is perceived across different instructional moments. This is pedagogically meaningful. In the exegesis of Philippians 4:5, gentleness is presented not as passivity but as a disciplined relational posture that balances authority and empathy. In modern classrooms, especially in pluralistic public schools like SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala, teachers must navigate tensions between maintaining academic standards and nurturing relational trust. The data suggest that while the CRE teacher largely succeeds in embodying gentle authority, there remain opportunities to strengthen consistency, particularly in classroom management during high-pressure academic situations. The prayerfulness yielded a solid high-category score but showed greater dispersion in student responses compared to the previous two dimensions. Students clearly recognized that the CRE teacher integrates prayer into learning activities and encourages reliance on God in facing academic and personal challenges. However, some responses indicate that the experiential depth of prayer practices in the classroom may vary. This finding is important when interpreted through Philippians 4:6, which frames prayer not as ritual formality but as an existential response to anxiety. In the landscape of modern education, marked by exam stress, social media pressures, and identity struggles, prayer-centered pedagogy must move beyond routine opening and closing prayers toward formative spiritual accompaniment. The data therefore suggest that while the structural presence of prayer is strong, its transformative pedagogical depth could be further strengthened. Peace-oriented presence also fell

within the high category but registered the lowest mean among the four indicators. Students generally perceived the CRE teacher as promoting harmony, conflict resolution, and emotional calm in the classroom. Nevertheless, this relatively lower score is analytically significant. Philippians 4:7 speaks of “the peace of God... guarding hearts and minds,” which implies not only emotional calm but also spiritual resilience amid pressure. In the context of contemporary schooling, where students face cyberbullying, academic competition, and socio-cultural tensions, the teacher’s role as a peace-builder becomes increasingly strategic. The slightly lower score may reflect the complexity of cultivating deep peace formation in adolescents rather than a deficiency in teacher commitment. It signals an area for pedagogical enrichment, particularly through structured peace education, restorative dialogue practices, and socio-emotional learning integration.

From a holistic perspective, the descriptive statistical analysis indicates that the CRE teacher’s spiritual competence is functioning effectively as an integrative pedagogical force. The high overall mean supports the theoretical proposition that spiritual competence is a multidimensional construct encompassing affective presence, relational ethics, devotional leadership, and emotional regulation. Importantly, the minority context of the school amplifies the significance of these findings. In environments where Christian students and teachers are numerically limited, the credibility of CRE instruction often depends less on institutional dominance and more on the authenticity of teacher spirituality. The data suggest that the teacher at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala has been able to sustain spiritual credibility in such a context. The discussion becomes more meaningful when situated within the broader challenges of modern education. Contemporary schooling is increasingly shaped by digital acceleration, moral relativism, and psychological stress among adolescents. These dynamics demand that CRE teachers move beyond content transmission toward spiritually formative pedagogy. The high scores in joyful spirituality and gentleness indicate that the teacher is already functioning as a relational and emotional stabilizer for students. This supports the argument that spiritual competence contributes directly to classroom climate quality. Students who experience emotionally safe and spiritually encouraging classrooms are more likely to develop resilience, moral clarity, and learning motivation. The moderate variability observed in prayerfulness and peace-building dimensions suggests the need for strategic professional development. One interpretive possibility is that while the teacher demonstrates strong personal spirituality, the pedagogical translation of that spirituality into structured formative practices is still evolving. This is a common phenomenon in CRE contexts, where teachers possess deep personal faith but have limited training in spiritually integrative pedagogy. Strengthening this area could involve designing reflective prayer pedagogies, contemplative learning moments, and structured peace-building activities that make spiritual formation more experientially accessible to students. Another important layer of interpretation relates to the sociocultural setting of Aceh Tenggara, a region known for its strong religious identity within Indonesia’s pluralistic framework. In such contexts, CRE teachers must exercise spiritual competence with cultural sensitivity and educational professionalism. The high ratings across all dimensions suggest that the teacher has been able to embody a form of spirituality that is both distinctly Christian and socially harmonious. This aligns closely with the Pauline vision in Philippians 4:5 that gentleness should be “evident to all.” In other words, authentic

Christian spirituality in public education must be publicly constructive rather than socially isolating. The findings also have implications for teacher formation programs, particularly within institutions such as IAKN Tarutung where the user is professionally engaged. The data reinforce the need to conceptualize spiritual competence as measurable, observable, and pedagogically actionable. Teacher education programs should therefore integrate exegetical theology, socio-emotional pedagogy, and reflective spiritual practices within CRE curricula. The case of SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala demonstrates that when these dimensions converge, even small minority classrooms can become spiritually formative environments. The results highlight the importance of student perception as a valid evaluative lens for teacher spirituality. Often, assessments of spiritual competence rely heavily on self-report or administrative evaluation. However, students are the primary recipients of pedagogical spirituality in practice. The high but differentiated scores across indicators confirm that students can meaningfully discern variations in teachers' spiritual behaviors. Future research could build on this by incorporating mixed-method approaches, including classroom observation and student focus groups, to deepen interpretive richness. The study demonstrates that the CRE teacher at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala exhibits a strong level of spiritual competence in addressing modern educational challenges, particularly through joyful presence and relational gentleness. While prayer integration and peace formation are already functioning well, they represent the most strategic areas for further pedagogical strengthening. The findings affirm the continuing relevance of Philippians 4:4-7 as a framework for spiritually grounded teaching in contemporary schools. Educationally, the study underscores that in an era of accelerating change, the spiritual competence of teachers remains a critical factor in nurturing resilient, peaceful, and faith-rooted students.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in addressing the challenges of modern education through an exegetical reflection on Philippians 4:4-7 at SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala, Aceh Tenggara. Based on quantitative analysis of responses from 53 Christian students, the findings demonstrate that the CRE teacher exhibits a high level of spiritual competence across the four examined dimensions: joyful spirituality, gentleness, prayerfulness, and peace-oriented presence. These results confirm that spiritual competence is not merely a private devotional quality but a pedagogically observable capacity that significantly shapes students' learning experiences and spiritual formation. The strongest dimension identified in the study is joyful spirituality, indicating that the teacher consistently creates a hopeful and encouraging classroom atmosphere. This finding underscores the importance of affective and relational dimensions of teaching in contemporary education, where students often face psychological pressure, digital distraction, and identity challenges. Gentleness also emerged as a well-developed competency, reflecting the teacher's ability to balance authority with empathy in managing classroom interactions. Together, these two strengths position the CRE teacher as an emotionally stabilizing presence within the minority Christian learning context of the school. The dimensions of prayerfulness and peace-oriented presence, while still categorized as high, showed relatively greater variability. This suggests that although devotional practices and peace-

building efforts are present in classroom life, their formative depth and consistency can still be enhanced. From the perspective of Philippians 4:4-7, effective spiritual competence requires not only joyful and gentle demeanor but also intentional pedagogical strategies that cultivate students' capacity to manage anxiety through prayer and to embody God's peace in daily relationships. Therefore, future professional development for CRE teachers should emphasize the pedagogical operationalization of spiritual practices, not only their theological understanding. The minority context of SMA Negeri 3 Lawe Sigala-Gala highlights the strategic role of spiritually competent teachers in sustaining Christian identity within pluralistic public education. The findings indicate that authentic, relationally expressed spirituality enables CRE teachers to remain impactful even when institutional support and numerical strength are limited. This reinforces the broader implication that teacher spirituality, when embodied through professional competence, functions as a key resource for resilient faith formation in modern schools. In conclusion, the study affirms that the spiritual competence of CRE teachers is a critical factor in responding to the complexities of contemporary education. Grounded in the theological framework of Philippians 4:4-7, spiritually competent teachers are able to nurture joyful, prayerful, gentle, and peace-filled learning environments that support students' holistic development. Future research is recommended to employ mixed-method designs, expand comparative school contexts, and explore longitudinal impacts of teacher spirituality on student outcomes. Strengthening the integration between exegetical theology and pedagogical practice will remain essential for preparing CRE teachers who can faithfully and professionally guide students amid the evolving challenges of modern education.

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