



Leading Through Sacred Boundaries: Christian Teacher Spirituality in Shaping Student Holiness Inspired by Exodus 26:33 at SDN No. 078521 Lewa-Lewa

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Christian teacher spirituality in shaping student holiness through pedagogical practice inspired by the theological symbolism of Exodus 26:33. Conducted at SD Negeri No. 078521 Lewa-Lewa, the research employed a qualitative experimental approach involving a population of 131 students, from which a purposive sample of 60 participants was selected. The intervention focused on intentional spiritual modeling by teachers through reflective practices, ethical consistency, relational mentoring, and value-based instruction. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and teacher reflective journals, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of behavioral and attitudinal transformation. The findings reveal that teacher spirituality significantly influenced students' moral awareness, relational sensitivity, and ethical conduct. Students exposed to spiritually modeled teaching demonstrated increased honesty, empathy, responsibility, and respect compared to those in the comparison group. Holiness was gradually understood not as an abstract religious ideal but as a lived commitment expressed through daily choices and interactions. The concept of sacred boundaries derived from Exodus 26:33 provided a meaningful framework that helped students internalize discipline as relational responsibility rather than external control. The integration of reflective spiritual practices contributed to improved emotional regulation and constructive peer relationships. The study also found that teachers experienced reciprocal spiritual growth through intentional modeling, reinforcing the idea that spiritual formation in education is a shared journey. Overall, the research highlights that Christian teacher spirituality serves as a transformative pedagogical force capable of nurturing holistic character development and guiding students toward ethical integrity and relational maturity.

Keywords: *Teacher spirituality, student holiness, Christian education, sacred boundaries.*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational discourse, increasing attention has been given to the role of teachers not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as formative agents who shape the moral and spiritual identity of learners. Within the framework of Christian Religious Education, this formative responsibility carries theological depth because teaching is understood as a vocation that participates in God's redemptive work through character formation. Recent studies emphasize that Christian teachers influence students not only cognitively but also spiritually through lived example, relational interaction, and ethical consistency (Mawikere & Hura, 2024). This perspective highlights that spirituality is not an optional dimension of Christian teaching but constitutes the inner foundation that directs pedagogical practice toward transformation rather than mere instruction. The urgency of teacher spirituality becomes increasingly evident in the context of modern social change, where children are exposed to pluralistic values, digital influences, and shifting moral norms. In such an environment, the role of the Christian teacher expands into that of a spiritual mentor who nurtures students' moral awareness, ethical reasoning, and faith identity (Surbakti & Lumban Tobing, 2025). Christian education, therefore, extends beyond doctrinal teaching into holistic formation, shaping attitudes of love, compassion, responsibility, and reverence. This aligns with findings that teachers who embody spiritual maturity significantly influence students' behavior and moral decision-making processes (Siringoringo & Samosir, 2025).

Spiritual competence among teachers has been shown to correlate strongly with students' spiritual growth. Empirical research in Indonesian primary education contexts demonstrates that when teachers consistently model faith, integrity, and compassion, students develop habits of prayer, gratitude, forgiveness, and respect (Lumban Tobing & Pasaribu, 2025). This reinforces social learning theory's assertion that children internalize values through observation of credible role models. In Christian pedagogy, such modeling is deeply theological because it reflects the biblical understanding of teaching as an embodied witness rather than a purely intellectual task. Contemporary scholarship underscores that spirituality integrates personal devotion, ethical integrity, emotional resilience, and vocational commitment within teaching practice (Tafonao, 2025). Teachers who cultivate spiritual discipline through prayer, reflection, and scriptural engagement—are better equipped to sustain moral consistency and relational empathy in the classroom. These qualities foster an environment where learning becomes a sacred interaction shaped by trust, respect, and spiritual attentiveness (Hutasoit, 2025).

Holiness, as a theological concept, provides a meaningful framework for understanding the spiritual mission of Christian teachers. It is not limited to ritual purity but encompasses ethical integrity, relational responsibility, and faithful obedience expressed in daily conduct. Studies examining spiritual competence in Christian educators indicate that teachers who live in alignment with biblical values significantly influence students' moral reasoning and ethical awareness (Christinawati, 2025). In this sense, holiness becomes both an inner disposition and an outward pedagogical expression manifested through fairness, patience, empathy, and consistency. The formation of student character remains a central goal of Christian Religious Education. Teachers play a decisive role in cultivating values such as honesty, discipline, humility, and responsibility by integrating biblical principles into both instruction and interaction (Samaloisa & Hutahaeon, 2023). Through

teaching and example, students learn to translate theological concepts into practical life decisions, thereby developing resilience and moral clarity in facing contemporary challenges.

In light of these developments, biblical narratives continue to serve as theological anchors for educational reflection. Exodus 26:33, which describes the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, symbolizes sacred boundaries that protect holiness and structure spiritual encounter. When interpreted pedagogically, this imagery suggests that Christian teachers are entrusted with guiding students toward spiritual maturity by helping them understand the significance of moral boundaries, reverence, and obedience. Such guidance does not impose restriction but rather cultivates discernment, enabling students to navigate life responsibly within the framework of divine wisdom.

Within the context of elementary education, where foundational character is formed, the spirituality of teachers becomes particularly influential. Research indicates that students at the primary level are highly responsive to relational modeling, making the teacher's example a critical factor in shaping attitudes and behaviors (Gea & Marbun, 2025). When teachers demonstrate authentic spiritual lives, classrooms are transformed into spaces of ethical and spiritual formation rather than mere academic instruction. Despite the recognized importance of teacher spirituality, challenges remain. Contemporary educational demands, societal pressures, and personal struggles may hinder teachers from maintaining consistent spiritual discipline. Nevertheless, studies show that teachers who intentionally nurture spiritual maturity contribute significantly to positive moral development and healthier learning environments (Inculco Journal, 2024). This underscores the need for ongoing reflection on the spiritual vocation of teaching. This study seeks to explore how Christian teacher spirituality functions as a guiding force in shaping student holiness, inspired by the theological symbolism of Exodus 26:33. Focusing on the context of SD Negeri No. 078521 Lewa-Lewa, the research situates the classroom as a sacred space where spiritual integrity, ethical modeling, and relational care intersect. By examining the lived spirituality of teachers, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of how holiness is nurtured within educational practice and how sacred boundaries can inform pedagogical engagement in contemporary Christian schooling.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative experimental approach to explore how Christian teacher spirituality influences the formation of student holiness in light of the theological inspiration drawn from Exodus 26:33. The qualitative orientation was chosen because the research sought to understand lived experiences, behavioral changes, and spiritual responses rather than merely measure cognitive outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). At the same time, an experimental element was incorporated to observe how intentional spiritual modeling by teachers functioned as an intervention that could shape students' attitudes toward holiness-related values such as obedience, self-control, respect, and moral awareness.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri No. 078521 Lewa-Lewa, involving a total population of 131 students who were enrolled in Christian Religious Education classes. From this population, a purposive sample of 60 students was selected to participate in the experimental phase of the study. The sampling process considered representativeness in terms of gender, academic ability, and classroom participation in

order to ensure that the observed outcomes reflected diverse student characteristics (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). These participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group that received spiritually modeled instruction and a comparison group that continued with regular instructional practices.

The experimental intervention centered on the intentional demonstration of teacher spirituality through daily pedagogical practice. Teachers integrated reflective prayer, ethical storytelling, scripture-based moral dialogue, and relational mentoring into classroom interactions. The intervention emphasized sacred boundaries inspired by Exodus 26:33, which were translated into classroom values such as respect for others, honesty in behavior, reverence for learning, and discipline in personal conduct. Rather than presenting holiness as abstract doctrine, the approach allowed students to experience it through modeled attitudes and relational guidance (Loughran, 2019).

Data were collected through multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and credibility. Participant observation was conducted throughout the intervention period to document changes in student behavior, interactions, and responsiveness to spiritual guidance. Teachers maintained reflective journals that recorded daily experiences, challenges, and perceived transformations among students. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students from both groups to capture their perceptions of teacher influence and personal spiritual growth (Patton, 2015).

To strengthen validity, triangulation was applied by comparing data from observations, interviews, and reflective journals. This approach enabled the researcher to identify consistent patterns of transformation and reduce interpretive bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Member checking was also conducted by allowing participants to confirm interpretations of their responses, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings. The qualitative experimental design unfolded in three stages. The first stage involved a pre-intervention assessment of student attitudes toward moral discipline, respect, and spiritual responsibility. This was conducted through guided reflection sessions and behavioral observation. The second stage introduced the spiritual modeling intervention, where teachers consciously embodied sacred boundaries through consistent actions and relational engagement. The final stage involved post-intervention observation and interviews to examine shifts in student perspectives and behaviors.

Data analysis followed thematic procedures involving coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring patterns (Saldaña, 2021). The analysis focused on identifying changes in student attitudes toward holiness-related behaviors such as honesty, empathy, self-regulation, and reverence. Rather than measuring statistical differences, the emphasis was placed on narrative transformation and relational development. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Parental consent and school approval were obtained prior to data collection. Students were informed that participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain confidential. The research aimed to ensure that the experimental process functioned as a formative experience rather than a coercive intervention. Through this qualitative experimental framework, the study sought to illuminate how teacher spirituality operates as a living pedagogical force that shapes student character. By situating holiness within relational experience and modeled practice, the research provided a contextual understanding of how sacred boundaries can be translated into everyday classroom life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Spirituality as an Embodied Pedagogical Presence

The findings of this study revealed that teacher spirituality was not experienced by students as a distant theological abstraction but as a tangible presence that shaped the moral climate of the classroom. In the experimental group, where teachers intentionally practiced spiritual modeling, students gradually began to associate holiness with relational attitudes rather than ritual expectations. The classroom environment evolved into a space characterized by mutual respect, calm interaction, and ethical awareness. Observations indicated that students became more attentive to their words, actions, and responsibilities when teachers consistently demonstrated patience, humility, and integrity. This transformation aligns with the understanding that spirituality in teaching is fundamentally incarnational, meaning it becomes visible through daily conduct (Palmer, 2017). Students did not primarily learn holiness through verbal instruction but through the teacher's consistent responses to challenges, conflicts, and learning struggles.

When teachers addressed mistakes with grace rather than harsh judgment, students began to internalize the value of self-correction. When teachers demonstrated fairness in managing classroom tasks, students became more willing to cooperate and respect collective rules. Thus, spirituality functioned as an invisible curriculum shaping moral perception. In contrast, the comparison group exhibited relatively stable behavioral patterns with fewer observable changes in relational sensitivity or self-regulation. This contrast suggests that spiritual intentionality within pedagogy plays a critical role in shaping student character beyond conventional disciplinary structures.

Sacred Boundaries and Moral Awareness

Inspired by the imagery of Exodus 26:33, the intervention emphasized the importance of sacred boundaries as guiding principles rather than restrictive rules. Students in the experimental group gradually began to understand that boundaries in the classroom were not imposed to control behavior but to protect dignity, harmony, and mutual respect. Over time, this reframing changed how students perceived discipline. Instead of viewing rules as external enforcement, they began to see them as internal commitments.

Interviews revealed that students described classroom expectations using relational language such as "taking care of each other," "being honest," and "not hurting others." This shift reflects the emergence of moral awareness rooted in empathy rather than fear (Nucci, 2016). The concept of holiness, therefore, became associated with responsibility and relational integrity rather than moral perfectionism. Observational data further showed that students became more reflective when facing ethical dilemmas. For example, during group activities, students increasingly chose cooperation over competition and accountability over blame. These behaviors indicate that sacred boundaries, when modeled through teacher spirituality, contribute to the development of moral reasoning that integrates both personal conscience and communal responsibility.

Relational Modeling and Behavioral Transformation

One of the most significant outcomes observed in the experimental group was the gradual alignment between student attitudes and teacher example. When teachers demonstrated consistency between words and actions, students responded with increased trust and openness. This relational alignment appeared to create a psychological safety that enabled students to practice ethical behaviors without fear of ridicule or punishment.

Students reported that they felt “safe to admit mistakes” and “motivated to do what is right” because teachers did not respond with anger but with guidance. Such responses cultivated a climate of restorative discipline rather than punitive correction (Zehr, 2015). This approach fostered internal motivation for ethical behavior rather than compliance driven by external pressure. Behavioral changes were particularly visible in areas of honesty and responsibility. Teachers observed that students became more willing to admit incomplete assignments and seek assistance rather than conceal their shortcomings. Similarly, students demonstrated greater willingness to assist peers who struggled academically or socially. These developments reflect the internalization of holiness as relational care rather than individual achievement.

Spiritual Discipline and Classroom Atmosphere

The integration of spiritual practices such as reflective prayer and scriptural reflection contributed significantly to shaping the emotional tone of the classroom. Students described these moments as opportunities to “calm down” and “think about doing good things.” Over time, these practices appeared to strengthen emotional self-regulation and attentiveness. The classroom atmosphere became more conducive to constructive interaction. Conflicts were resolved more quickly, and students showed greater patience during collaborative tasks. This suggests that spiritual discipline functions as a stabilizing force that enhances emotional resilience and relational harmony (Emmons, 2020). In the comparison group, where such practices were absent, classroom interactions remained more reactive and less reflective. This contrast reinforces the notion that spirituality, when integrated intentionally, supports not only moral growth but also emotional maturity.

Students in the experimental group began to articulate holiness in practical terms such as “telling the truth,” “being kind,” and “respecting others.” This indicates a shift from abstract theological understanding to lived ethical practice. Teachers noted that students became more attentive to fairness during group work and more considerate in resolving disagreements. This ethical consistency reflects the integration of belief and behavior, a key dimension of spiritual maturity (Willard, 2018). Rather than striving for unattainable perfection, students learned to pursue integrity through daily decisions. Such development demonstrates that holiness can be nurtured through relational guidance and modeled practice.

The Role of Teacher Reflection

Teacher reflective journals revealed that spiritual modeling required intentional self-awareness and discipline. Teachers acknowledged that maintaining patience, empathy, and fairness demanded continuous personal reflection. However, they also reported that these practices deepened their own sense of vocational purpose. This reciprocal

transformation suggests that the formation of student holiness is closely linked to the spiritual growth of teachers themselves (Nouwen, 2019). The teaching process became mutually formative, shaping both educator and learner.

By the end of the intervention, the experimental group exhibited a noticeable culture of respect characterized by attentive listening, constructive dialogue, and cooperative behavior. Students expressed increased appreciation for diversity and demonstrated greater willingness to reconcile after disagreements. Such developments indicate that sacred boundaries, when embodied through teacher spirituality, foster communal ethics rooted in mutual care. This aligns with contemporary perspectives on moral education that emphasize relational responsibility as foundational to ethical development (Arthur et al., 2017).

Integrating Holiness into Everyday Learning

The study demonstrates that holiness can be integrated into everyday classroom experiences through relational modeling and reflective practice. Rather than functioning as a distant theological concept, holiness becomes accessible through consistent acts of fairness, compassion, and responsibility. Students learned to associate holiness with daily choices such as completing tasks honestly, speaking respectfully, and supporting peers. This integration transformed moral education from abstract instruction into lived experience. The findings highlight the importance of teacher spirituality as a central dimension of Christian pedagogy. Spiritual modeling fosters environments where ethical behavior emerges naturally through relational influence. This suggests that educational efforts should prioritize the spiritual formation of teachers alongside pedagogical competence. By embodying sacred boundaries, teachers guide students toward moral maturity without reliance on coercive discipline. Such guidance nurtures internal motivation and ethical resilience.

The study illustrates that teacher spirituality functions as a transformative force within the learning environment. Through relational presence, ethical consistency, and reflective discipline, teachers create spaces where holiness is experienced as a shared journey rather than an imposed standard. This transformation underscores the potential of spiritually grounded pedagogy to cultivate character, empathy, and responsibility in young learners. In doing so, it affirms that education, when guided by sacred purpose, can contribute meaningfully to the holistic formation of students.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how Christian teacher spirituality shapes student holiness through pedagogical practice inspired by the sacred boundary imagery of Exodus 26:33. The findings demonstrate that spirituality, when embodied consistently by teachers, functions as a formative force that transforms classroom dynamics and student behavior. Rather than operating as abstract theological discourse, holiness became a lived reality expressed through daily actions such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and mutual respect. The qualitative experimental approach revealed that students in the intervention group exhibited noticeable growth in moral awareness, relational sensitivity, and ethical consistency compared to those who experienced conventional instructional patterns. One of the most significant insights emerging from this research is that teacher spirituality influences students primarily through relational modeling rather than doctrinal

instruction alone. Students internalized values not because they were instructed to do so, but because they observed these values enacted through the teacher's patience, fairness, and compassion. This finding affirms the principle that spiritual formation is deeply relational and experiential. When teachers demonstrated sacred boundaries through consistent conduct, students began to reinterpret discipline as a shared commitment to dignity and harmony rather than as an external imposition.

The study highlights that the integration of reflective spiritual practices contributed to emotional stability and constructive interaction among students. Moments of reflection enabled learners to regulate impulses, resolve conflicts peacefully, and approach responsibilities with greater sincerity. This suggests that spirituality in education not only fosters moral development but also enhances emotional resilience and social cooperation. The metaphor of sacred boundaries provided a meaningful pedagogical framework. It emphasized that holiness is not synonymous with exclusion or rigidity but with reverent responsibility and relational integrity. By translating this concept into everyday classroom practices, teachers helped students understand that holiness can be pursued through consistent ethical decisions rather than unattainable perfection.

Importantly, the research also underscores the reciprocal nature of spiritual formation. Teachers themselves reported personal growth through intentional reflection and disciplined modeling. This mutual transformation suggests that Christian education is not a one-directional process but a shared journey of spiritual development between teacher and student. In conclusion, the spirituality of Christian teachers plays a decisive role in shaping student holiness within the educational context. When expressed through authentic relationships and ethical consistency, it creates an environment where values are internalized naturally and practiced meaningfully. The study affirms that spiritually grounded pedagogy has the potential to nurture holistic character formation, guiding students toward lives marked by integrity, compassion, and reverence.

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