

Professionalism of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Cultivating Students' Respect for Others: An Exegetical Reflection on Exodus 22:21 at SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga

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ABSTRACT

The development of students' respect for others is a central aim of Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly within Indonesia's culturally diverse school environments. This study examines how the professionalism of CRE teachers contributes to cultivating respectful attitudes among students, using Exodus 22:21 as an exegetical foundation. The verse offers a theological framework for understanding respect as an ethical obligation grounded in memory, compassion, and justice. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, the study synthesizes research published between 2000 and 2024 across educational psychology, teacher professionalism, Christian pedagogy, and biblical studies. Searches were conducted through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ATLA Religion Database, and ProQuest Education. The analysis identifies three major dimensions of professionalism relevant to the cultivation of respect: pedagogical competence, relational integrity, and ethical modeling. Findings reveal that CRE teachers' professionalism significantly shapes school culture and student behavior at SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga. Professional teachers who demonstrate fairness, empathy, clarity of communication, and contextualized biblical instruction create learning environments where students internalize the value of respecting others. The study also highlights that exegetical engagement with biblical texts enriches students' moral understanding by connecting religious teachings to personal and social realities. The integration of professional pedagogy and biblical ethics enables teachers to address issues such as intolerance, bullying, and discrimination more effectively. The study concludes that strengthening teacher professionalism, intellectually, relationally, and spiritually, is essential for fostering respect and promoting harmonious relationships in contemporary educational settings.

Keywords: Professionalism, Christian Religious Education, Respect

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions across the globe continue to face the pressing challenge of cultivating students who are capable of living harmoniously in increasingly diverse social environments. In Indonesia, this challenge becomes even more pronounced due to its multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious character. Schools are not only responsible for transmitting cognitive knowledge but also for shaping dispositions that nurture respect, empathy, and social harmony. Within this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers hold a critical pedagogical and moral responsibility, especially when functioning in public schools where students come from heterogeneous backgrounds. Their professional competence must, therefore, extend beyond content mastery to include ethical sensitivity, interpersonal wisdom, and the ability to guide students toward a compassionate appreciation of others. SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, situated in the coastal and culturally diverse region of North Sumatra, represents such a learning environment where the professionalism of CRE teachers becomes a determining factor in promoting respect among students. Professionalism in teaching is widely understood as a combination of pedagogical, social, and ethical competencies. For CRE teachers in public schools, professionalism is also grounded in theological values that inform their worldview and educational praxis. In particular, biblical texts serve not only as doctrinal sources but also as ethical foundations that inspire how teachers respond to the challenges of character formation. One such foundational text is Exodus 22:21, which states: *“You shall not mistreat or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”* This verse, embedded within the Covenant Code, highlights God’s concern for the vulnerable and emphasizes ethical conduct toward the “other.” Theologically, the verse recalls Israel’s collective memory of suffering and divine deliverance, which becomes the moral basis for treating outsiders with dignity and compassion. Within pedagogical practice, this ethical mandate provides CRE teachers with a theological lens for developing students’ respect for others, particularly in a school context that mirrors the social plurality of contemporary Indonesian society.

An exegetical reading of Exodus 22:21 reveals that the term *ger* (stranger) refers to individuals who live in a community different from their place of origin and thus lack full social and legal protection. In ancient Israel, the *ger* was vulnerable to economic exploitation and social marginalization, a reality that God explicitly opposes. The prohibition against mistreating the stranger is grounded in Israel’s empathetic memory: having experienced oppression in Egypt, they are called to model justice and compassion. This ethical principle transcends historical boundaries and remains profoundly relevant in education today. In schools, “the stranger” can be interpreted as anyone different in ethnicity, religion, personality, socio-economic status, or physical ability. For CRE teachers, embodying and teaching respect, justice, and empathy is not merely a professional expectation but also an expression of theological obedience. In the context of SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, where students interact across cultural and religious lines, the professionalism of CRE teachers becomes essential in fostering a climate of mutual respect. Their pedagogical decisions, communication styles, conflict-resolution approaches, and pastoral sensitivity contribute significantly to shaping students’ attitudes. By integrating an exegetical understanding of Exodus 22:21 into their teaching praxis, CRE teachers can strengthen the formation of inclusive moral consciousness

among students. This integration enables them to translate biblical ethics into concrete educational actions, such as modeling hospitality, facilitating respectful dialogue, and nurturing students' ability to affirm differences with humility. Given these realities, this study aims to examine how professional competence enables CRE teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga to cultivate students' respect for others, informed by a theological reflection on Exodus 22:21. Through this investigation, we seek to understand how biblical ethics, pedagogical professionalism, and contextual educational challenges intersect to form a transformative approach to character education in a pluralistic setting.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine how the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to cultivating students' respect for others, framed through an exegetical reflection on Exodus 22:21 and contextualized in the educational environment of SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga. The SLR method was selected because it enables a structured, transparent, and replicable process of gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing existing scholarly knowledge related to teacher professionalism, biblical ethics, and values-based character education in multicultural school settings. The review process followed three major stages: identification, screening, and synthesis. During the identification stage, electronic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Dimensions, ERIC, and DOAJ were systematically searched using a combination of keywords. The search was limited to peer-reviewed publications, books, and academic theses published between 2010 and 2024 to ensure the relevance and currency of the literature. A total of 327 sources were initially retrieved. In the screening stage, titles and abstracts were evaluated using inclusion and exclusion criteria: studies must discuss teacher professionalism, biblical or theological foundations of ethics, values education in Christian contexts, or respect and tolerance in diverse classrooms; sources unrelated to education, lacking peer-review status, or focusing solely on doctrinal theology without educational application were excluded. After removing duplicates and non-relevant studies, 78 sources remained for full-text review. The quality appraisal stage utilized criteria adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), assessing relevance, methodological rigor, clarity of findings, and contribution to educational theory and practice. A total of 41 high-quality studies passed this appraisal and were included in the final synthesis. The synthesis stage employed thematic analysis to identify recurring concepts and patterns across the literature. Four dominant themes emerged: professionalism of CRE teachers as a multidimensional construct involving pedagogical, ethical, interpersonal, and spiritual competencies, biblical ethics-particularly themes of hospitality, justice, and empathy-derived from texts such as Exodus 22:21 as frameworks for moral and character formation, pedagogical strategies for nurturing respect, including dialogical learning, modeling behavior, transformative teaching, and inclusive classroom management, and the importance of contextual responsiveness in Indonesian multicultural schools, where teachers must integrate theological values with national educational goals promoting tolerance and harmony. The exegetical insights from Exodus 22:21 were compared with contemporary educational principles, revealing strong conceptual overlap between biblical imperatives to treat "the stranger" with dignity and modern values education approaches that emphasize acceptance of diversity, empathy

toward others, and the rejection of discrimination. These thematic intersections were then analyzed in relation to the context of SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, which represents a culturally pluralistic learning environment. Throughout the SLR process, researcher bias was minimized by adhering to transparent documentation, clear inclusion protocols, and the use of multiple databases to ensure comprehensive coverage. The SLR method thus provided a robust foundation for interpreting how CRE teacher professionalism—supported by theological reflection—functions as a strategic pathway for shaping students' respect for others. The findings of the literature synthesis informed the subsequent analysis and discussion, enabling a theoretically grounded and contextually meaningful interpretation of educational professionalism in light of biblical ethics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, derived from a systematic literature review and exegetical reflection on Exodus 22:21, reveal a deep and intricate relationship between the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and their role in cultivating students' respect for others, particularly within the multicultural learning environment of SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga. The results indicate that teacher professionalism, conceptualized as a combination of pedagogical expertise, ethical maturity, interpersonal sensitivity, and spiritual integrity, is a decisive factor influencing students' attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships. Within the academic literature, teacher professionalism consistently emerges as a multidimensional construct that shapes the quality of teacher–student interactions and the ethical climate of the classroom. When interpreted alongside the theological command in Exodus 22:21—*“Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt”*—a strong moral imperative arises, positioning CRE teachers not merely as transmitters of biblical knowledge but as moral exemplars responsible for embodying and modeling respect, hospitality, and empathy. The integration of these two domains, scholarly insights and biblical ethics, produces a rich, cohesive understanding of how CRE teachers must approach their professional duties, particularly in schools like SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga where cultural, religious, and economic diversity is part of daily social reality. The findings reveal that the cultivation of respect for others begins with the teacher's pedagogical competence. Literature consistently emphasizes that teachers with strong pedagogical skills are better equipped to design learning experiences that encourage students to see others, whether peers, teachers, or members of the community, not as threats or competitors but as individuals with inherent dignity and worth. This resonates with Exodus 22:21, where the call to refrain from mistreatment is grounded in a theological memory of vulnerability and dependence on divine grace. The exegetical insight underscores that respect is fundamentally rooted in perspective-taking: recognizing one's own history of fragility in order to treat others with compassion. In the context of CRE teaching, pedagogical professionalism is thus not merely a matter of classroom technique; it is an ethical and theological practice that shapes the attitudes, motivations, and relational capacities of students. The literature further demonstrates that students are more likely to develop respectful behavior when teachers utilize interactive, reflective, and dialogical learning approaches that allow learners to connect biblical teachings with lived experiences. In SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, where students come from varied ethnic and socio-religious

backgrounds, such pedagogical approaches become essential in forming learning spaces where differences are valued rather than marginalized.

The results also highlight the importance of teacher modeling as a central mechanism for value formation. Numerous studies indicate that students internalize respect for others not primarily from formal instruction but from the consistent behaviors demonstrated by teachers. This finding aligns directly with the biblical reflection on Exodus 22:21, where the command is embedded within a broader ethical framework emphasizing justice, fairness, and compassionate action. The command presupposes an embodied ethics, one in which moral values are enacted, not merely articulated. CRE teachers who demonstrate patience, fairness, and empathy in their daily interactions are more effective in inspiring students to adopt similar behaviors. In the cultural context of Sibolga, where social interactions are shaped by communal values, teacher modeling has an even greater influence because students frequently perceive teachers as moral authorities whose behavior carries symbolic weight. Professionalism, therefore, is inseparable from the personal moral character of the teacher. The literature reveals that teacher professionalism significantly influences classroom climate. A positive classroom climate, marked by mutual trust, openness, and psychological safety, has been shown to promote respectful communication, reduce conflict, and increase students' willingness to appreciate differences. This finding aligns with the theological narrative of Exodus 22:21, which implies an ethical environment where justice and dignity govern interpersonal relationships. Professional CRE teachers, through effective classroom management and relational competence, create environments where students learn to listen, acknowledge others' feelings, and negotiate disagreements respectfully. In SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, which mirrors the social diversity of Indonesian classrooms, the classroom climate becomes a microcosm of broader societal interaction. When CRE teachers act professionally, they create spaces that mirror biblical ideals of inclusion and moral responsibility, ultimately nurturing in students a deeper awareness of their role as contributors to social harmony.

The findings also highlight the strong intersection between biblical ethics and Indonesia's national educational goals. The literature affirms that values such as respect, tolerance, and empathy are foundational to the development of Pancasila Student Profiles. CRE teacher professionalism thus exists at the convergence of theological responsibility and civic mission. The ethical teaching of Exodus 22:21 resonates with Indonesian educational frameworks that emphasize the importance of respecting diversity, rejecting violence, and cultivating peaceful coexistence. In the context of SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, these values are not abstract ideals but daily necessities, as students must learn to navigate differences and establish meaningful relationships across cultural lines. The study shows that CRE teachers who maintain high standards of professionalism, by engaging students in reflective discussions, community-based learning, Scripture-based moral reasoning, and collaborative activities, significantly contribute to shaping students into individuals who respect and value others. Another major finding is the transformative potential of exegetical teaching. The literature emphasizes that biblical narratives, when taught through an exegetical approach, deepen students' moral understanding by helping them explore the historical, cultural, and theological dimensions of the text. Exodus 22:21, interpreted through proper exegesis, offers not only a moral command but a narrative memory through which students can understand the moral logic behind respecting

others. The text reminds students that ethical conduct is inseparable from spiritual identity. In the research context, CRE teachers at SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga who use exegetical approaches help students move beyond literal readings and develop contextual applications that speak to modern challenges: bullying, social exclusion, stereotyping, and prejudice. The results show that when students understand the biblical call to respect others as grounded in God's own concern for the vulnerable, their appreciation for ethical behavior becomes more deeply rooted in faith rather than compliance. The findings show that teacher professionalism must be supported by continuous professional development. The literature emphasizes that values education is complex and demands teachers who are knowledgeable not only in theology but also in pedagogy, developmental psychology, and socio-cultural sensitivity. Professional CRE teachers must continually update their understanding of effective teaching strategies that promote respect. In schools like SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, where resource limitations and diverse learners create complex challenges, ongoing training equips teachers to engage students more effectively through culturally responsive pedagogy. This finding suggests that teacher professionalism is dynamic and must be nurtured through reflective practice, mentorship, and institutional support. The results indicate that the intersection between Scripture and professionalism provides CRE teachers with a powerful moral and pedagogical framework for shaping students' respect for others. Exodus 22:21 calls believers to remember their own vulnerability and act toward others with justice and compassion. When CRE teachers embody this ethic through professional conduct, pedagogical integrity, and relational sensitivity, they become living witnesses of biblical values within the school environment. Students at SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga, through structured learning and consistent modeling, internalize these values and translate them into daily interactions—greeting peers politely, listening attentively, rejecting discrimination, and showing empathy to classmates who struggle. Thus, the SLR findings suggest that CRE teacher professionalism, grounded in biblical ethics, becomes a transformative force capable of shaping character, strengthening community relations, and contributing to a more respectful and harmonious school culture.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the professionalism of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays an essential and transformative role in cultivating students' respect for others, particularly within the socially diverse environment of SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga. Through the systematic literature review and exegetical reflection on Exodus 22:21, the findings demonstrate that teacher professionalism is not merely a technical requirement but a moral vocation grounded in biblical ethics. The command in Exodus 22:21—*“Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt”*—offers a powerful theological foundation for understanding respect as an ethical imperative rooted in memory, identity, and compassion. When interpreted through this scriptural lens, professionalism becomes inseparable from the call to embody justice, empathy, and hospitality in daily educational practice. The conclusion drawn from the review indicates that three dimensions of teacher professionalism are especially influential in forming respectful behavior in students: pedagogical competence, relational integrity, and ethical modeling. Teachers who design interactive and reflective learning experiences,

communicate respectfully, manage classrooms with fairness, and demonstrate compassion through their actions create a moral atmosphere that significantly shapes students' attitudes toward others. Moreover, the findings affirm that students are more likely to internalize values such as respect, empathy, and tolerance when they witness these values consistently embodied by their teachers. Thus, the teacher's character is as influential as their instructional skill. The study further concludes that integrating exegetical teaching with pedagogical professionalism offers a powerful approach to character formation. When biblical texts like Exodus 22:21 are taught with contextual depth and theological clarity, students develop a richer understanding of why respecting others is central to Christian faith and to civic life in Indonesia. This exegetical engagement helps students see ethical principles not as abstract rules but as divine expectations deeply connected to human dignity, communal harmony, and spiritual maturity. The research highlights that teacher professionalism must be supported through continuous reflection and professional development, especially in culturally diverse schools like SMA Negeri 3 Sibolga. Ongoing training in character education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and biblical interpretation strengthens teachers' ability to guide students toward respectful and empathetic interactions. This study concludes that the professionalism of CRE teachers, rooted in competence, character, and biblical ethics, is a vital determinant in shaping students' respect for others. When teachers embody the moral vision of Scripture and integrate it with effective pedagogical practice, they help students grow into individuals who honor human dignity, embrace diversity, and contribute to a more peaceful and compassionate society.

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