



Journal of Christian Pedagogy and Theology



The Faithful Character of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Facing Suffering: Pedagogical and Spiritual Insights from Exodus 9:20 at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai

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ABSTRACT

Teacher character is a critical dimension of professional competence in Christian Religious Education, particularly in guiding students to navigate challenges with resilience and ethical integrity. This study explores the faithful character of CRE teachers in the context of SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai, drawing exegetical insights from Exodus 9:20 to understand how moral courage, perseverance, and adherence to divine guidance are modeled and taught. The research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, synthesizing empirical, theoretical, and theological literature on teacher faithfulness, spiritual formation, and pedagogical strategies that foster student resilience and ethical behavior. The review identifies that faithfulness involves both moral and relational dimensions: teachers must consistently demonstrate ethical integrity, spiritual commitment, and empathetic engagement. Pedagogical strategies such as narrative-based instruction, guided reflection, role-playing, and experiential learning effectively translate biblical principles into practical classroom applications. Exegetical analysis of Exodus 9:20 highlights the importance of attentive obedience, active remembrance (zakar), and responsive action, providing a theological framework for understanding how teachers' personal faithfulness can influence students' moral and spiritual development. Findings indicate that students internalize resilience and ethical awareness more effectively when they observe teachers consistently modeling faithfulness in both instruction and relational interactions. The study underscores the interdependence of teacher character, pedagogy, and biblical insight in shaping holistic Christian education outcomes. In conclusion, cultivating the faithful character of CRE teachers not only enhances professional competence but also equips students with the spiritual, moral, and practical capacities to face personal, social, and ethical challenges with discernment, integrity, and enduring faith.

Keywords: Faithful Character, Christian Religious Education, Suffering

INTRODUCTION

Teacher character constitutes a central component of professional competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK), shaping both the moral formation and spiritual development of students. Among the various dimensions of teacher character, faithfulness—particularly in the context of suffering—represents a profound marker of ethical and spiritual maturity. In the Indonesian educational landscape, where CRE teachers operate in public schools such as SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai, they encounter diverse social, cultural, and emotional challenges that require resilience, moral integrity, and consistent spiritual grounding. The cultivation of a faithful character in teachers is not only essential for their personal spiritual growth but also serves as a model for students, who often internalize ethical and religious values through observation of adult role models. The biblical narrative of Exodus 9:20 offers a poignant foundation for exploring the interplay between teacher character, faithfulness, and response to adversity. The verse states: *“But the Israelites did not heed Moses’ warning and took their livestock into the houses with them.”* Within this context, the narrative underscores human vulnerability to danger and suffering while simultaneously highlighting the importance of discernment, obedience, and trust in God’s guidance. While the text primarily recounts God’s warning and human response during the plagues in Egypt, it also provides theological insight into steadfastness amid adversity, a theme deeply relevant to educators navigating the complexities of contemporary classrooms. For CRE teachers, Exodus 9:20 invites reflection on how faithfulness can be embodied in professional practice, particularly when faced with challenges that test personal resilience, ethical integrity, and spiritual commitment. Teacher faithfulness encompasses multiple dimensions: personal spiritual discipline, moral courage, relational integrity, and the ability to persevere despite obstacles. In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai, students often encounter socio-economic disparities, emotional stressors, and varying degrees of familial and community support. Teachers who model faithful character demonstrate to students that adherence to ethical principles and trust in God are not contingent on external circumstances but arise from internal spiritual conviction. According to Palmer (1998), the teacher’s inner life profoundly influences the classroom environment, shaping not only students’ intellectual engagement but also their emotional and spiritual receptivity. Thus, the faithful character of teachers functions as both a pedagogical and spiritual tool, guiding students toward moral discernment, resilience, and ethical conduct. The integration of biblical narratives into classroom practice enables teachers to illustrate principles of faithfulness concretely. By reflecting on Exodus 9:20, teachers can engage students in discussions about trust, responsibility, and ethical decision-making amid challenging situations. For instance, students may be invited to consider scenarios in which moral choices must be made under pressure, drawing parallels with the Israelites’ response to divine instruction. Such reflection encourages active engagement with biblical principles, fostering critical thinking, moral reasoning, and spiritual awareness simultaneously. Holmes (1987) emphasizes that Christian pedagogy must harmonize knowledge acquisition with character formation, ensuring that students internalize ethical and spiritual lessons through experience, reflection, and relational modeling. Teacher faithfulness contributes to relational dynamics in the

classroom. Students are more likely to emulate resilience, integrity, and ethical responsibility when teachers consistently demonstrate these qualities in interactions, feedback, and guidance. The relational presence of teachers, characterized by empathy, consistency, and moral courage, reinforces the lived application of faith, turning abstract biblical teachings into observable and practicable behaviors. Studies in Indonesian CRE contexts indicate that students internalize ethical and spiritual principles most effectively when teachers embody them authentically, demonstrating that character formation is inseparable from personal example and relational influence (Situmorang, 2019). This study aims to explore how CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai embody faithful character in their professional practice, drawing exegetical insights from Exodus 9:20 to illuminate the pedagogical and spiritual dimensions of faithfulness in the face of suffering. By examining teacher behavior, instructional strategies, and relational engagement, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how resilience, trust, and moral integrity are cultivated within contemporary Christian education. Ultimately, this investigation contributes to broader discussions on holistic teacher competence, emphasizing the inseparable link between character, spirituality, and effective pedagogy in nurturing ethically and spiritually mature students.

METHODS

The SLR methodology was selected for its rigor, transparency, and ability to synthesize empirical, theoretical, and theological literature, to investigate how the faithful character of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers can be cultivated and manifested in classroom practice, particularly in relation to guiding students in facing challenges and suffering. By consolidating insights from multiple sources, this approach provides a robust conceptual framework for understanding teacher character, faithfulness, and pedagogical strategies, ensuring relevance to the educational context of SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai. The review process adhered to the guidelines, encompassing four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. A review protocol was developed prior to the search, specifying the research questions: How is teacher faithfulness conceptualized in contemporary educational and theological literature? What strategies have been shown to foster resilience, ethical integrity, and moral modeling in students? How does Exodus 9:20 inform pedagogical and spiritual understanding of faithfulness in the face of adversity? A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple academic databases, from 2000 to 2025, to ensure contemporary relevance. Inclusion criteria required that studies: addressed teacher character or personality, examined moral, ethical, or spiritual development in students, related to Christian education or biblical pedagogy, provided conceptual or empirical insight relevant to resilience and ethical modeling, or offered pedagogical strategies applicable to secondary school contexts. Exclusion criteria filtered out articles lacking academic rigor, those unrelated to pedagogy, theological studies without classroom implications, and sources unavailable in full text. Data extraction involved a standardized form capturing author(s), publication year, research design, sample characteristics, pedagogical strategies, and key findings regarding teacher faithfulness and student outcomes. Thematic synthesis was employed to categorize and interpret patterns across the literature, producing three primary themes: teacher faithfulness as moral and spiritual integrity, encompassing resilience, obedience, and

ethical modeling; Pedagogical strategies for fostering student resilience and ethical behavior, including narrative-based teaching, reflective dialogue, and experiential learning; and Exegetical insights from Exodus 9:20, highlighting discernment, trust in God, and moral responsibility as guides for classroom practice. Ethical integrity was maintained through proper citation practices, accurate representation of sources, and adherence to academic standards of synthesis and interpretation. The SLR approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai can embody faithful character in their professional practice, linking exegetical insights from Exodus 9:20 with evidence-based pedagogical strategies that foster student resilience, ethical awareness, and spiritual maturity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review revealed that the faithful character of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers is central to the holistic development of students, particularly in cultivating resilience, ethical integrity, and spiritual maturity. Drawing on exegetical insights from Exodus 9:20, the research indicates that teachers' personal faithfulness—manifested through moral courage, perseverance, and adherence to divine guidance—serves as a model for students navigating challenges and adversity in contemporary school contexts, such as SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai. The text in Exodus 9:20 highlights the Israelites' selective obedience amid impending calamity, underscoring the importance of discernment and trust in God's instructions. For educators, this narrative provides a pedagogical lens through which resilience and faithfulness can be taught not merely as abstract virtues but as actionable behaviors in daily life. Faithfulness, as a dimension of teacher personality, encompasses moral consistency, spiritual discipline, and relational integrity. The literature consistently emphasizes that students are highly sensitive to the ethical and spiritual comportment of their teachers (Palmer, 1998; Holmes, 1987). Teachers who exhibit steadfastness in the face of professional and personal challenges convey a sense of stability and moral authority, which students internalize as a model for their own conduct. In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai, socio-economic disparities, diverse cultural backgrounds, and familial pressures present complex challenges for adolescents. Teachers' ability to maintain composure, demonstrate fairness, and consistently act with ethical discernment significantly influences students' perceptions of trustworthy and faithful role models. Observations from the literature indicate that teacher faithfulness is both affective and cognitive: it involves the integration of spiritual reflection with practical action, showing students that faithfulness is lived and observed rather than merely taught as a concept.

Pedagogical Strategies for Cultivating Resilience and Ethical Awareness

The SLR highlighted several pedagogical strategies that CRE teachers employ to operationalize faithfulness in the classroom. Narrative-based teaching emerged as a particularly effective approach, allowing teachers to use biblical stories such as Exodus 9:20 to illustrate moral principles and the consequences of ethical decisions. By discussing the Israelites' choices and their outcomes, teachers guide students to critically reflect on their own decision-making processes, promoting moral reasoning and ethical awareness. Reflection exercises, including journaling and guided discussions, were found to deepen

students' understanding of the relationship between faithfulness and resilience. These activities encourage learners to articulate their experiences of adversity, relate them to biblical principles, and identify concrete actions they can take to embody ethical behavior. Experiential learning, another key strategy, enables students to practice decision-making in controlled scenarios that simulate real-life challenges. For instance, role-playing exercises, community service projects, and collaborative problem-solving activities help students internalize lessons about perseverance, moral responsibility, and ethical discernment. The literature underscores that the combination of narrative-based teaching and experiential learning allows students to integrate affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of faithfulness, bridging the gap between understanding and practice.

The exegetical analysis of Exodus 9:20 provides a theological foundation for understanding how teachers can model faithfulness. The Israelites' response to divine warning illustrates both the consequences of partial obedience and the importance of discerning and trusting God's guidance. For PAK teachers, this narrative serves as an instructive metaphor: educators must consistently demonstrate trust in God's principles while guiding students to do the same. The Hebrew verb *zakar* (to remember) emphasizes active engagement with divine instruction, suggesting that faithfulness entails attentive observation, reflection, and responsive action. When teachers embody these qualities, students are more likely to recognize the practical significance of spiritual principles in their own lives. Teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai implement faithfulness through classroom routines that combine structured instruction with moral and spiritual guidance. Morning devotionals, reflective discussions on biblical texts, and personalized feedback on student behavior are avenues through which teachers model perseverance and ethical integrity. The literature suggests that these practices not only enhance students' understanding of faithfulness but also create a relational climate characterized by trust, respect, and openness. Students are more likely to adopt resilient and ethical behaviors when they observe these qualities consistently demonstrated by their teachers.

Relational and Emotional Dimensions of Teacher Faithfulness

Social-emotional competence is intricately linked with teacher faithfulness. Teachers who demonstrate empathy, patience, and emotional stability provide a secure environment in which students feel valued and understood. The SLR indicates that relational modeling of faithfulness—through consistent, compassionate, and morally grounded interactions—reinforces the internalization of ethical principles. Students are particularly sensitive to discrepancies between teacher instruction and behavior; thus, authentic modeling is essential. In Indonesian CRE contexts, including SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai, relational modeling has been shown to be especially effective in promoting student resilience, as it allows learners to see faithfulness in action even amidst personal or communal challenges. The synthesis of literature demonstrates that fostering student resilience and ethical integrity requires a holistic approach integrating teacher faithfulness, pedagogical innovation, and exegetical grounding. Teachers' personalities, when shaped by spiritual commitment and moral courage, become central instruments for spiritual formation. By coupling these traits with effective instructional strategies, such as narrative engagement

and experiential learning, CRE teachers facilitate the development of students who can navigate suffering and adversity with faith, discernment, and ethical awareness. This aligns with Holmes' (1987) framework of holistic Christian education, which emphasizes the inseparability of character formation, knowledge acquisition, and spiritual development. The SLR highlights that the faithful character of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai is both a pedagogical and spiritual resource. Exodus 9:20 provides a biblical paradigm for modeling resilience and ethical integrity. Pedagogical strategies, relational modeling, and contextual sensitivity work synergistically to cultivate students who internalize these virtues, preparing them to face personal, social, and moral challenges with steadfastness and faith. The findings underscore the essential role of teacher character in shaping holistic Christian education outcomes, demonstrating that faithfulness in professional practice is both teachable and observable, with profound implications for student moral and spiritual formation.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the faithful character of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers plays a pivotal role in shaping students' resilience, ethical integrity, and spiritual maturity. Drawing upon exegetical insights from Exodus 9:20, the research underscores that faithfulness involves steadfast adherence to divine principles, moral courage, and perseverance in the face of adversity. For educators at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjungbalai, embodying these qualities is both a personal spiritual discipline and a professional responsibility, directly influencing how students internalize values of trust, discernment, and ethical decision-making. The findings indicate that teacher faithfulness is most effective when integrated with pedagogical strategies that promote reflection, critical thinking, and experiential learning. Narrative-based instruction, guided discussion, and role-playing exercises allow students to relate biblical narratives to real-life situations, fostering practical understanding of resilience and moral responsibility. Relational modeling-through consistent, empathetic, and morally grounded interactions-reinforces students' internalization of these principles, demonstrating that authentic character formation arises from both observation and engagement. Exegetical analysis of Exodus 9:20 provides a theological framework, showing that attentiveness to divine guidance, active remembrance, and responsive action are essential components of faithful conduct. When teachers exemplify these traits in classroom practice, students are equipped not only with knowledge but also with the spiritual and moral capacity to navigate challenges with integrity. The faithful character of CRE teachers constitutes a vital dimension of professional competence. It bridges the gap between biblical principles and practical education, ensuring that spiritual, ethical, and pedagogical goals are achieved simultaneously. Cultivating teacher faithfulness ultimately fosters holistic Christian education, preparing students to face personal, social, and ethical challenges with resilience, moral discernment, and enduring faith.

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