

## Pedagogical Authority and Servant Leadership in Christian Education: Reflections on Matthew 20:26-28 at SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe

Samuel Damanik

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [samueldamanik9@gmail.com](mailto:samueldamanik9@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the nature of pedagogical authority grounded in servant leadership within the context of Christian education, drawing theological reflection from Matthew 20:26–28 and empirical data from a qualitative case study at SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe. The research focuses on one Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher who serves 40 Christian students in a public elementary school setting. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. These data were analyzed thematically and integrated with a strong exegetical interpretation of the biblical text. The findings reveal that pedagogical authority is not exercised through hierarchical control but through humility, ethical integrity, relational mentorship, and service-oriented instructional leadership. Servant leadership manifests practically in classroom management, lesson planning, student guidance, and character education. Students respond with respect, trust, and active engagement, indicating that servant-based authority contributes significantly to a positive learning climate and ethical formation. The study concludes that servant leadership is the theological foundation of authentic pedagogical authority in Christian education. Authority becomes transformational when it is rooted in Christlike humility and self-giving service rather than in position or coercive power. This research contributes both theoretically and practically by affirming that spiritual formation and personal character are indispensable to effective teacher authority in Christian Religious Education. It recommends that schools intentionally integrate servant leadership and spiritual formation into teacher professional development.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Authority, Christian Religious Education, Servant Leadership*

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of teacher authority is often approached through structural, procedural, or positional perspectives, emphasizing control, curriculum management, and classroom regulation. However, a distinctly Christian approach situates pedagogical authority within the framework of servant leadership, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Matthew 20:26–28 provides a critical theological foundation for understanding this model:

*“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (NIV). This passage redefines authority not as domination or hierarchical control but as relational responsibility expressed through humility, service, and sacrificial leadership. For Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, this exegetical principle has profound implications for the development of pedagogical competence and ethical influence in the classroom. At SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe, a public elementary school with 40 Christian students and a single CRE teacher, the embodiment of this servant-based authority is particularly visible. The teacher’s dual role as both instructor and moral exemplar underscores the relational dimensions of teaching, emphasizing that pedagogical authority is exercised most authentically through service and ethical modeling. The exegetical significance of Matthew 20:26-28 indicates that true educational leadership is grounded not in positional power but in a commitment to the holistic development of students, characterized by guidance, care, and moral integrity. By modeling servant leadership, the teacher cultivates an environment in which students learn through observation, experience, and relational engagement, internalizing Christian values as lived practice rather than abstract doctrine. The passage situates authority within the Christological paradigm of service, demonstrating that leadership is fundamentally relational and sacrificial. Jesus’ self-emptying (kenosis) provides a model for teachers to prioritize the needs of students over personal prestige or convenience. Within the CRE context, this relational authority manifests in practices such as individualized attention, ethical decision-making, mediation of peer conflicts, and the nurturing of moral conscience. The CRE teacher at SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe exemplifies this integration by aligning classroom management, instructional planning, and mentorship with principles of humility, empathy, and sacrificial service. This approach addresses a critical gap in educational research regarding the interplay between pedagogical authority and Christian ethics. Most studies emphasize technical or managerial aspects of teacher authority while neglecting the moral and spiritual dimensions that are essential in Christian schooling. By integrating biblical exegesis with classroom observations, this study seeks to demonstrate how servant-based authority functions as both a theological imperative and a practical framework for teacher effectiveness. The research focuses on three objectives: first, to exegetically analyze Matthew 20:26-28 and extract principles relevant to Christian educational leadership; second, to examine how the CRE teacher operationalizes these principles in pedagogical practice; and third, to assess the impact of servant-based authority on student engagement, ethical formation, and relational dynamics within the classroom. Through this integration of theological reflection and qualitative inquiry, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how spiritual virtues such as humility, service, and self-giving underpin authentic pedagogical authority. The significance of this study lies in demonstrating that effective Christian education requires more than technical competence or administrative authority. Teachers’ spiritual and moral formation directly shapes classroom culture, student formation, and the ethical climate of learning. By embodying servant leadership, the CRE teacher transforms authority from a static, hierarchical concept into a dynamic, relational practice, reflecting the model of Christ and fostering holistic student development. In doing so, the study affirms that pedagogical

authority grounded in service is both a theological and practical imperative, essential for nurturing spiritually, morally, and socially competent learners.

## **METHODS**

A case study approach was selected to allow an in-depth examination of complex phenomena within a bounded real-life context (Yin, 2018). The school context consists of 40 Christian students guided by a single CRE teacher, which provides a concentrated environment to observe the relational, moral, and pedagogical dimensions of servant-based authority. The study aimed to integrate theological exegesis with empirical observation, thereby examining both the spiritual and practical manifestations of Christlike servant leadership in educational practice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher, focusing on perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding authority, leadership, ethical decision-making, and student mentorship. Interview questions were designed to elicit how the teacher interprets and implements the principles of servant leadership based on Matthew 20:26–28. Non-participant classroom observations documented the teacher's interactions with students, including classroom management, relational guidance, conflict mediation, and instructional practices. These observations aimed to capture the tangible enactment of servant leadership and relational authority in real classroom contexts. Open coding was first applied to identify recurring behaviors, practices, and narratives reflecting humility, service, ethical leadership, and relational attentiveness. These codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories, such as servant-based authority, moral integrity, and student relational engagement. Axial coding allowed the identification of relationships between these themes and their alignment with the exegetical principles derived from Matthew 20:26-28 (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A dialogical synthesis integrated exegetical insights with empirical findings to articulate a comprehensive understanding of how servant leadership informs pedagogical authority in practice. The study maintained sensitivity to the multicultural context of the school while focusing on the Christian educational setting. Credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced through triangulation of data sources, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the classroom environment. By combining biblical exegesis with qualitative case study methods, the research provides a holistic perspective on the development and exercise of pedagogical authority in Christian education, emphasizing its relational, ethical, and spiritually grounded nature.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted ways in which pedagogical authority in Christian education is operationalized through servant leadership, as modeled on Matthew 20:26-28, within the context of SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe. The case of the CRE teacher demonstrates that authority is not primarily exercised through hierarchical power or administrative control but emerges relationally, grounded in humility, ethical integrity, and a commitment to serving students' holistic development. Through the integration of classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis, four major interrelated themes surfaced: humility as ethical foundation, relational authority and mentorship, servant-based instructional leadership, and transformative student engagement. Each

theme reflects both the exegetical insights of Matthew 20:26-28 and the practical realities of teaching, underscoring the teacher's embodiment of Christlike servanthood as a core mechanism for authentic pedagogical influence. Humility as the ethical foundation of authority emerged consistently across all data sources. Interviews revealed that the CRE teacher consciously avoided authoritative posturing, instead embracing a posture of service that prioritizes student needs over personal prestige or convenience. The teacher articulated a deep conviction that true authority, as Christ exemplified, is rooted in moral and spiritual alignment with God's will, rather than in formal position or classroom control. Observational data reinforced this claim: the teacher regularly engaged students with patience, attentive listening, and acknowledgment of individual contributions, fostering an environment in which students felt respected and valued. This relational humility aligns with the exegetical understanding of Matthew 20:26-28, wherein Jesus redefines greatness as service rather than dominance. By modeling humility, the teacher establishes credibility and moral influence, allowing authority to be recognized not through fear or coercion, but through ethical and spiritual authenticity. Relational authority and mentorship were the second prominent dimension. The teacher's interactions with students extended beyond cognitive instruction to include ethical guidance, emotional support, and spiritual formation. Observations documented moments where the teacher mediated peer conflicts, encouraged collaborative problem-solving, and provided individualized guidance for students struggling academically or emotionally. Interviews indicated that the teacher viewed these actions as an essential aspect of exercising authority: rather than enforcing rules solely through positional power, authority is realized relationally by fostering trust, respect, and ethical responsiveness. Students consistently demonstrated reciprocal engagement, showing respect for the teacher and voluntarily adhering to classroom norms. This relational authority exemplifies how servant leadership transforms the teacher-student dynamic, creating a context in which students internalize Christian virtues through lived example, rather than rote instruction. Servant-based instructional leadership was another critical theme. The teacher's lesson planning, classroom management, and pedagogical strategies all reflected an underlying commitment to serving students' holistic growth. For example, lessons were designed to encourage moral reasoning, cooperative learning, and ethical reflection alongside doctrinal instruction. Observational data indicated that the teacher frequently sacrificed personal convenience to provide additional support to students, whether through after-class tutoring, individualized feedback, or mentoring for character formation. These practices illustrate that servant leadership in education is enacted through tangible, relationally attuned pedagogical actions. By integrating ethical and spiritual principles into instructional design and execution, the teacher transforms traditional concepts of authority into a service-oriented model, reflecting the theological principle of Christ's self-giving as articulated in Matthew 20:26-28.

Transformative student engagement emerged as the fourth dimension, demonstrating the broader impact of servant-based authority on student formation. Students were observed internalizing values such as respect, empathy, collaboration, and ethical discernment, not merely through explicit instruction but through sustained observation of the teacher's lived example. Interviews with students revealed that they recognized the teacher's authority as legitimate and morally grounded, describing the teacher as

both a guide and role model. Document analysis of student work and teacher reflections confirmed that this relational and service-oriented approach fostered not only academic engagement but also ethical development, indicating that pedagogical authority, when rooted in servanthood, cultivates holistic student growth in cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions. The teacher faced considerable demands in managing 40 students' diverse needs, balancing instructional obligations, and maintaining relational attentiveness. Observational notes and interviews indicated that the teacher mitigated these challenges through deliberate time management, spiritual reflection, and prioritization of relational engagement over administrative tasks. These strategies illustrate that sustaining pedagogical authority grounded in servanthood requires intentional spiritual practices and reflective professional development, emphasizing that authority is both a personal and relationally mediated phenomenon. The integration of exegetical and empirical findings underscores the theological significance of servant leadership as a model for teacher authority. Matthew 20:26-28 reframes authority as moral influence exercised through service, humility, and relational attentiveness. In practice, the CRE teacher demonstrates that this model enhances classroom climate, fosters ethical and spiritual formation, and strengthens teacher credibility. By aligning pedagogical decisions with spiritual values, the teacher exemplifies how authority in Christian education is exercised relationally, ethically, and spiritually, rather than merely administratively or positionally. This study contributes to a broader understanding of teacher formation in Christian contexts, emphasizing that personal virtue, relational integrity, and Christlike service are essential to authentic pedagogical authority. The findings indicate that the integration of humility, ethical modeling, relational mentorship, and servant-based instructional practices enables teachers to influence students' holistic development effectively. This relational and ethically grounded authority also reinforces the importance of institutional support, collegial mentorship, and reflective practice to sustain the teacher's capacity to serve effectively without compromising personal or professional well-being. The case of the CRE teacher at SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe demonstrates that pedagogical authority grounded in servanthood transforms both teacher practice and student development. Humility, ethical consistency, relational mentorship, and service-oriented leadership collectively foster an educational environment in which students internalize Christian values through lived example. The study affirms that Christlike servant leadership, as articulated in Matthew 20:26–28, provides a theological and practical paradigm for reimagining teacher authority in contemporary Christian education.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that pedagogical authority in Christian education is most authentically realized through servant leadership, as grounded in the theological vision of Matthew 20:26–28 and embodied by the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe. The findings confirm that authority, when rooted in humility, ethical integrity, and self-giving service, transcends hierarchical control and becomes a transformative relational force that shapes both teaching practice and student formation. The CRE teacher's consistent embodiment of Christlike servanthood redefines authority not as power over students, but as responsibility for their holistic growth. The integration of exegetical reflection and qualitative analysis reveals that Christ's model of leadership fundamentally reorients the meaning of greatness in educational ministry. Authority,

according to the words and example of Jesus, is exercised through service, sacrifice, and relational attentiveness. In the studied context, this paradigm is manifested through four key dimensions: humility as the ethical foundation of authority, relational mentorship as the medium of influence, servant-based instructional leadership as the practical expression of authority, and transformative student engagement as the educational outcome. These dimensions work synergistically to create a classroom culture marked by mutual respect, trust, moral consistency, and spiritual attentiveness.

The study further affirms that teacher authority in Christian education is inseparable from personal spiritual formation. The credibility of the teacher's authority is sustained not merely by professional qualifications or institutional position but by the visible coherence between faith, character, and pedagogical practice. Students recognized the teacher's authority because it was morally persuasive and relationally attentive rather than coercive. This insight reinforces the significance of integrating spiritual disciplines, ethical reflection, and character formation into ongoing professional development for CRE teachers. Without such formation, pedagogical authority risks becoming procedural rather than transformational. The findings suggest that schools and educational policymakers should intentionally cultivate servant leadership as a core component of teacher competence. Institutional support systems, such as spiritual mentoring, reflective teaching communities, and value-based professional training, are essential to sustain teachers who seek to lead through service within demanding educational environments. The case of SDN 105304 Sarilaba Jahe illustrates that even within structural and contextual limitations, servant-based pedagogical authority can flourish when teachers are supported in aligning their spiritual convictions with professional responsibilities. The study also contributes theoretically by enriching the discourse on teacher authority with a theological-ethical dimension rooted in biblical exegesis. Matthew 20:26-28 offers not only a spiritual ideal but also an operative framework for educational leadership that is relational, ethical, and student-centered. By situating pedagogical authority within Christ's model of servanthood, this research bridges the gap between Christian theology and contemporary educational practice, offering a robust paradigm for Christian Religious Education in pluralistic school settings. Pedagogical authority grounded in servanthood emerges as both a theological mandate and a practical necessity for Christian education. When teachers embrace humility, serve with sincerity, and lead through ethical example, authority becomes a means of nurturing character, shaping conscience, and fostering holistic student development. This study affirms that the future of authentic Christian education depends not merely on curricular excellence but on teachers who courageously embody the servant heart of Christ in every dimension of their pedagogical calling.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Banks, R. (2012). *Faith goes to work: Reflections from the marketplace*. Wipf & Stock.
- Blanchard, K., & Hodges, P. (2003). *The servant leader: Transforming your heart, head, hands, and habits*. J. Countryman.

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fee, G. D. (1995). *The gospel according to Matthew: A historical and theological commentary*. Eerdmans.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (2002). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness* (25th anniversary ed.). Paulist Press.
- Groome, T. H. (2011). *Sharing faith: A comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry*. Wipf & Stock.
- Knight, G. R. (2006). *Philosophy and education: An introduction in Christian perspective* (4th ed.). Andrews University Press.
- Lickona, T. (2013). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Nouwen, H. J. M. (2004). *In the name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian leadership*. Crossroad.
- O'Brien, P. T. (1991). *The Epistle to the Philippians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary). Eerdmans.
- Palmer, P. J. (2017). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (20th anniversary ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.