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Pedagogical Integrity in Christian Education Grounded in Christ's Humility (Matthew 23:12): A Case Study at SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar

Erna Lenta Angelia Pasaribu

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: ernapasaribu210@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Pedagogical integrity is a core dimension of Christian Religious Education (CRE) that integrates spiritual character, ethical consistency, and professional responsibility. This study investigates how Christ's teaching on humility in Gospel of Matthew 23:12 serves as the theological foundation of pedagogical integrity among Christian teachers at SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar, where there are 19 Christian students and 5 Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. Using a qualitative case study design combined with a biblical-exegetical approach, the research integrates theological interpretation with empirical classroom practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically through a process of coding, categorization, and interpretation. The findings reveal that Christ's humility is understood by teachers as a conscious posture of obedience, service, and self-emptying before God rather than as weakness or passivity. This theological understanding is translated into pedagogical integrity through consistent behavior, fairness in assessment, respectful communication, servant leadership, and the avoidance of authoritarian teaching styles. Teachers' humility also strengthens interreligious harmony and students' trust in the learning process. The study concludes that pedagogical integrity grounded in Christ's humility is a dynamic process of continuous spiritual and professional formation. It provides a theological-ethical framework that enhances teacher credibility, fosters a trustworthy learning environment, and contributes significantly to character education in public schools. The findings offer important implications for CRE teacher formation and professional development programs.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Integrity, Christian Religious Education, Humility*

INTRODUCTION

Integrity is a central value in the educational profession, particularly for teachers who function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral and spiritual exemplars. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), integrity transcends professional ethics and becomes deeply rooted in theological convictions. Public schools in Indonesia provide a unique context for the practice of Christian pedagogical integrity, especially when

Christian teachers serve within multi-religious and multicultural environments. At SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar, Christian teachers-including one CRE teacher-carry the dual responsibility of meeting national educational standards while faithfully embodying Christian virtues before their students. One of the most foundational biblical teachings on integrity and humility is found in Matthew 23:12: “*For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*” This verse occurs within Jesus’ sharp critique of religious leaders who outwardly display righteousness but inwardly seek honor and social recognition. Exegetically, the Greek verb *hypsōthēsetai* (will be exalted) appears in a passive, divine form, indicating that true honor comes not from self-promotion but from God’s sovereign action. Conversely, *tapeinōsei heauton* (to humble oneself) reflects deliberate self-lowering rooted in obedience, not self-degradation. Thus, humility in Matthew 23:12 is not weakness but a conscious ethical-spiritual posture that resists pride, hypocrisy, and abuse of authority. Humility becomes the foundation of integrity. A teacher who is humble acknowledges limitations, treats students respectfully, avoids the misuse of authority, and remains open to learning. For CRE teachers in public schools, humility is especially crucial because they are often under social pressure to justify their faith-based identity within a secular educational structure. Pedagogical integrity, therefore, is not merely about adhering to curricular rules or professional codes but about sustaining coherence between Christian confession, ethical conduct, and classroom practice. Several contemporary studies emphasize that teacher integrity strengthens students’ trust, moral development, and learning motivation. However, many of these studies approach integrity from a general ethical or psychological perspective and rarely integrate it with Christological humility as a theological foundation. This creates a conceptual gap between Christian doctrine and pedagogical practice. Moreover, limited research addresses how such integrity is lived out in small, rural public schools with a minority Christian population, such as SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar.

This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating how the humility of Christ in Matthew 23:12 informs the pedagogical integrity of Christian teachers in their daily teaching practices. With only 19 Christian students and 5 Christian teachers, the school represents a micro-context in which faith, professionalism, and interreligious interaction intersect closely. The small number of Christian students also places the CRE teacher in a particularly strategic yet challenging position as both educator and spiritual mentor. The research is guided by three main questions: How is the humility of Christ in Matthew 23:12 theologically understood by Christian teachers at SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar? How is this humility translated into concrete expressions of pedagogical integrity in classroom practice? What challenges and enabling factors influence the embodiment of Christ-centered pedagogical integrity in this public school context? Understanding pedagogical integrity through the lens of Christ’s humility is crucial not only for the professional identity of CRE teachers but also for the moral formation of students. When teachers embody humility, they model a form of authority that is service-oriented rather than power-centered. Such modeling is essential for nurturing students who value honesty, responsibility, and respect for others. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to Christian educational theology and practically to the formation of CRE teachers in Indonesia.

METHODS

The qualitative design was chosen, combined with a biblical-exegetical approach to explore pedagogical integrity grounded in Christ's humility at SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar. It allows for in-depth understanding of lived experiences, values, and meaning-making processes among Christian teachers within their natural educational setting. The case study approach was particularly appropriate given the specific and limited context of the school, which includes 19 Christian students and 5 Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. The exegetical component focused on Matthew 23:12 using historical-grammatical interpretation. The analysis involved examination of the original Greek text, literary context within Matthew 23, and theological implications concerning humility and authority. This exegetical foundation served as the theological framework for interpreting empirical findings related to teacher behavior and pedagogical integrity. Data collection was conducted over a three-month period through three primary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews were carried out with the CRE teacher, two Christian classroom teachers, and two school administrators who interacted closely with Christian teachers. The interviews explored participants' understanding of humility, their experiences of ethical challenges, and their reflections on integrity in teaching practice. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and was audio-recorded with informed consent. Classroom observations were conducted during CRE lessons and selected general classroom sessions taught by Christian teachers. Observations focused on teacher-student interactions, decision-making patterns, disciplinary practices, and expressions of humility and fairness. Field notes were systematically recorded using an observation guide developed from indicators of pedagogical integrity and Christ-like humility. Document analysis included assessment records, were examined to identify the alignment between planned instruction, evaluation practices, and ethical consistency. Initial open coding identified recurring patterns related to humility, authority, consistency, and ethical tension.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Christ's humility in Matthew 23:12 functions as both a theological ideal and a lived pedagogical ethic among Christian teachers at SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar. The results are organized into four major thematic dimensions: theological understanding of humility, integrity in classroom practice, servant leadership in education, and challenges in sustaining pedagogical integrity. Regarding theological understanding, the CRE teacher and Christian classroom teachers consistently interpreted humility not as self-devaluation but as obedience to God expressed through service to others. Participants associated humility with "not seeking personal recognition," "being willing to learn from students," and "placing students' needs above personal comfort." This interpretation closely aligns with the exegetical meaning of Matthew 23:12, where humility is presented as a voluntary self-lowering before God rather than a socially imposed inferiority. Teachers perceived that authentic authority in education flows from moral credibility rather than positional power. Pedagogical integrity was evident in daily classroom practices. Teachers demonstrated consistency between what they taught and how they acted. This was observable in their fairness in assessment, transparency in

grading procedures, and equal treatment of students regardless of religious or social background. Observations revealed that Christian teachers avoided favoritism, even toward Christian students, despite their minority status. Such impartiality reflects integrity as moral coherence, where professional decisions are guided by ethical principles rather than personal interests. Humility shaped the way teachers corrected students. Instead of using harsh or authoritarian language, teachers employed dialogical and restorative approaches to discipline. Students were invited to reflect on their mistakes and to take responsibility for their actions. This practice not only reinforced ethical behavior but also modeled Christ-like gentleness and patience. The CRE teacher, in particular, consistently reminded students that learning is a shared journey, not a hierarchical transaction. This pedagogical posture reduced emotional distance between teacher and students and cultivated a climate of trust. Servant leadership emerged as a central expression of pedagogical integrity. Teachers understood leadership not as dominance but as willingness to serve. They routinely participated in school cleaning activities, assisted students outside class hours, and collaborated with colleagues in administrative tasks without seeking recognition. This reflects a practical embodiment of Christ's teaching that true greatness is found in humble service. In the CRE classroom, servant leadership was expressed through the teacher's accessibility to students, openness to questions, and readiness to provide pastoral care for students facing family or emotional difficulties. Servant leadership also influenced interreligious relationships within the school. Because the majority of students are non-Christian, Christian teachers were careful to demonstrate respect, tolerance, and cooperation. Their humility prevented the imposition of faith-based identity onto others, while still maintaining a clear Christian ethical stance. This balance strengthened social harmony and reduced potential tensions in a plural educational environment. Teachers sometimes experienced tension between bureaucratic demands and their desire to prioritize relational and character-focused teaching. Limited facilities and teaching resources also tested their patience and emotional resilience. In some instances, fatigue and frustration tempted teachers to revert to more authoritarian styles of classroom control. Teachers must always appear strong and authoritative. This cultural perception sometimes conflicted with the biblical model of humble leadership. Teachers reported that demonstrating gentleness could be misinterpreted as weakness by some students or colleagues. To navigate this tension, teachers emphasized the importance of inner spiritual discipline, prayer, and mutual accountability among Christian colleagues. The small number of Christian students also presented unique pastoral challenges. The CRE teacher often had to address students' faith struggles arising from being a religious minority in both school and community. In this context, pedagogical integrity required not only professional competence but also emotional sensitivity and spiritual maturity. The teacher's humility enabled an empathetic approach that validated students' experiences while nurturing their faith identity. These findings affirm that pedagogical integrity in Christian education cannot be reduced to compliance with professional standards alone. Instead, it must be rooted in a Christological ethic of humility that shapes identity, motivation, and practice. Integrity emerges as a dynamic interaction between inner spiritual formation and outward professional conduct. When humility is internalized as a theological virtue, it transforms authority into service and power into responsibility. This study also contributes to the discourse on Christian education in public schools by demonstrating

that faith-based pedagogical values can coexist with national educational frameworks. The embodiment of Christ's humility does not weaken professional credibility; rather, it strengthens it by enhancing moral trustworthiness and relational effectiveness. Therefore, pedagogical integrity grounded in Christ's humility is not only spiritually significant but also educationally strategic.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pedagogical integrity in Christian education, when grounded in the humility of Christ as articulated in Matthew 23:12, emerges as a holistic integration of spiritual identity, ethical consistency, and professional responsibility. At SD Negeri SP3 Lae Mbentar, where Christians constitute a minority among students and teachers, the embodiment of Christ-like humility plays a decisive role in sustaining the credibility and effectiveness of Christian educators. The findings demonstrate that humility is not merely a theological concept but a practical pedagogical virtue that shapes classroom interaction, leadership style, disciplinary approaches, and interreligious relations. Christian teachers who internalize Christ's humility exhibit integrity through fairness, transparency, servant leadership, and relational sensitivity. Their authority is not rooted in positional power but in moral coherence and spiritual authenticity. Such integrity fosters trust, enhances learning motivation, and supports the character formation of students. The study also reveals that maintaining pedagogical integrity within a public school context is not without tension. Institutional demands, cultural expectations of authoritative teaching, limited resources, and the emotional burden of serving minority students pose continuous challenges. These pressures require teachers to engage in ongoing spiritual formation and communal support in order to remain faithful to Christ-centered values while fulfilling professional obligations. This research enriches the field of Christian educational studies by integrating biblical exegesis with empirical classroom practice. It affirms that Christology, particularly the theology of humility, provides a robust ethical foundation for teacher professionalism. The findings suggest that programs for CRE teacher development should prioritize spiritual character formation alongside pedagogical and administrative competencies. Pedagogical integrity grounded in Christ's humility is not a static moral achievement but a lifelong process of spiritual growth and professional refinement. When sustained intentionally, it becomes a transformative force that shapes not only teaching practice but also the moral culture of the school community.

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