



# Journal of Christian Pedagogy and Theology



## Teaching with Spiritual Wisdom: Lessons from Matthew 13:10-17 (A Case Study at SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the pedagogical significance of spiritual wisdom in Christian education as illuminated by Matthew 13:10-17 and its practical implementation in the context of SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research integrates a systematic literature review (SLR) with simple semi-structured interviews involving Christian teachers and selected students. The study aims to explore how spiritual wisdom shapes teaching practices, teacher personality competence, and students' moral-spiritual development within a minority-Christian educational setting in Indonesia. The findings reveal that spiritual wisdom, as taught by Jesus, functions as both a theological foundation and a pedagogical framework that guides teachers in teaching with discernment, sincerity, and moral integrity. Teachers who demonstrate humility, patience, and prayerful dependence on God are shown to be more effective in fostering students' spiritual sensitivity, ethical awareness, and learning motivation. The study also indicates that spiritual wisdom is closely connected to teacher personality competence, where personal integrity and spiritual depth significantly influence classroom atmosphere and student character formation. This research concludes that Christian education grounded in spiritual wisdom is transformative, not merely instructional. It nurtures holistic student development encompassing intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The study recommends that teacher training institutions and Christian education stakeholders prioritize spiritual formation alongside professional pedagogical development. Future research is encouraged to broaden the scope across diverse regions and educational levels to strengthen the empirical foundation of spiritual pedagogy in contemporary Christian education.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Wisdom*

### INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary educational landscape, teachers are increasingly challenged not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate wisdom, character, and spiritual discernment in students. Education is no longer understood merely as the transfer of cognitive information but as a holistic process that shapes moral vision, emotional maturity, and

spiritual awareness. Within Christian education, this holistic orientation is inseparable from the biblical concept of wisdom, which is rooted not in intellectual superiority but in a transformed understanding granted by God. Teaching with spiritual wisdom therefore becomes an essential calling for Christian teachers, particularly in pluralistic and challenging educational contexts. The concept of spiritual wisdom in teaching is clearly articulated in Gospel of Matthew 13:10-17. In this passage, Jesus responds to His disciples' question about why He teaches in parables. He explains that understanding the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" is a gift granted to some, while others hear without truly understanding and see without truly perceiving. This text highlights a profound distinction between mere hearing and genuine spiritual understanding. Jesus emphasizes that true comprehension is not solely the result of intellectual capacity but of spiritual receptivity shaped by God's grace. For educators, this passage offers a critical theological foundation for understanding teaching not only as instruction but as participation in God's revelatory work. Matthew 13:10-17 situates teaching within the dynamic of revelation and response. Jesus' use of parables serves both to reveal and to conceal, depending on the spiritual posture of the listener. The repeated verbs "see," "hear," and "understand" underscore that authentic learning involves inner transformation rather than surface-level cognition. This theological insight challenges modern pedagogical assumptions that equate learning exclusively with information acquisition. In Christian pedagogy, learning is fundamentally relational and spiritual, involving openness to divine truth, humility of heart, and obedience of life. Thus, teaching with spiritual wisdom requires educators to function not merely as instructors but as spiritual facilitators who guide students toward deeper discernment and faith-informed understanding. While such approaches are valuable in certain respects, they often neglect the inner formation of students. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), this creates a significant tension: teachers are required to meet institutional academic standards while simultaneously nurturing spiritual growth and moral integrity. This tension is particularly apparent in public schools where Christian teachers serve as a minority and must navigate complex cultural, administrative, and religious dynamics. In such contexts, spiritual wisdom becomes not only a pedagogical ideal but also a necessary survival competence for sustaining faithful and meaningful teaching.

At SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai, where this study is situated, the presence of 12 Christian students and 8 Christian teachers, including one Christian Religious Education teacher, reflects a unique educational micro-context within a broader pluralistic environment. Christian teachers in this setting are entrusted with a dual responsibility: to fulfill professional educational standards and to embody Christian spiritual values in their pedagogical practice. Teaching with spiritual wisdom in such a context goes beyond classroom instruction; it becomes a lived testimony that shapes students' perceptions of faith, character, and moral responsibility. The small number of Christian students also means that individualized attention, relational depth, and personal example play a crucial role in the educational process. Previous studies on Christian pedagogy emphasize that spiritual wisdom involves discernment, humility, empathy, and the ability to integrate faith with life experience. Many of these studies remain largely theoretical and have limited engagement with concrete school-based practices, especially in rural or marginal educational settings. There is still a significant gap in empirical research that explores how

biblical texts such as Matthew 13:10-17 are actually interpreted and embodied by teachers in their daily teaching practices. Little attention has been given to how students perceive and experience spiritual wisdom in the classroom as part of their learning journey. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how the message of Matthew 13:10-17 informs the teaching practices of Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai. Specifically, it investigates how spiritual wisdom is understood theologically, expressed in pedagogical strategies, and experienced by students in their academic and spiritual development. By integrating biblical exegesis with qualitative field data, this research aims to demonstrate that spiritual wisdom is not an abstract ideal but a lived pedagogical reality that shapes the ethos of teaching and learning. This study argues that teaching with spiritual wisdom, as envisioned in Matthew 13:10-17, is essential for nurturing students who not only excel academically but also grow in spiritual discernment, moral clarity, and faith-based understanding of life. In a time when education is often reduced to technical performance and measurable outputs, the recovery of spiritual wisdom in teaching offers a transformative vision of education that restores its deepest human and divine dimensions.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative case study design integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and field-based semi-structured interviews to explore the implementation of spiritual wisdom in teaching based on Matthew 13:10-17. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the depth of teachers' theological understanding, pedagogical practices, and students' lived experiences of spiritually informed teaching. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai, involving 12 Christian students and 8 Christian teachers, including one Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher. The case study design allowed for an in-depth examination of a specific educational context within a pluralistic public school environment, where Christian teachers function as both professional educators and spiritual mentors. The SLR was conducted as the first stage of the study to establish a theoretical and theological framework regarding spiritual wisdom, biblical pedagogy, parabolic teaching, and faith-based learning. Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and theological commentaries published in the last two decades were systematically identified through major academic databases using keywords such as spiritual wisdom in education, biblical pedagogy, Christian teaching, parables in education, and Matthew 13. The selected literature was screened, categorized, and synthesized to develop analytical dimensions used to interpret the field data, particularly concerning spiritual discernment, revelatory learning, and transformative pedagogy. The empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews with all eight Christian teachers and a purposive sample of ten Christian students representing different grade levels. The interviews focused on three main areas: teachers' theological understanding of spiritual wisdom and Matthew 13:10-17, pedagogical strategies used to integrate spiritual wisdom in classroom instruction, and students' perceptions and experiences of spiritually wise teaching. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was conducted in a conversational and reflective manner to encourage openness and depth of response. To ensure ethical integrity, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right

to withdraw at any time without consequence. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure involving data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Initial open coding was conducted to identify significant statements related to spiritual understanding, teaching practices, and learning experiences. All were grouped into themes such as spiritual perception, revelatory learning, character formation, relational pedagogy, and challenges in applying spiritual wisdom. Through this methodological integration of theological literature and empirical classroom realities, the study sought to produce a holistic understanding of how spiritual wisdom, as articulated in Matthew 13:10–17, is meaningfully enacted in the daily teaching practices of Christian educators.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai possess a foundational yet varied theological understanding of spiritual wisdom as articulated in Gospel of Matthew 13:10–17. Most teachers interpret spiritual wisdom as the God-given capacity to discern truth beyond surface-level knowledge. They emphasized that true understanding is not merely the result of intellectual effort but emerges through spiritual openness, prayer, and humility before God. One senior teacher noted that “students may memorize verses and concepts, but only those whose hearts are open will truly understand God’s will.” This perception aligns closely with the exegetical emphasis of Matthew 13:10-17, where Jesus differentiates between those who merely hear and those who genuinely understand. The passage highlights that knowledge of the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” is a divine gift. The verbs *βλέπω* (to see), *ἀκούω* (to hear), and *συνίημι* (to understand) emphasize that authentic comprehension is holistic, involving the spiritual senses. Teachers who internalized this theological insight reported a deeper sense of dependence on God in their teaching ministries. They viewed their role not only as transmitters of information but also as instruments through whom divine illumination may occur. This understanding resonated with SLR findings which consistently affirm that spiritual wisdom in Christian pedagogy is rooted in revelatory rather than merely rational epistemology. The study also found that some teachers still equated spiritual wisdom primarily with moral advice and religious instruction. While such an understanding is not incorrect, it remains incomplete when detached from the revelatory and transformative dimension emphasized in Matthew 13:10-17. This variation suggests that continuous theological formation is necessary to deepen teachers’ comprehension of spiritual wisdom beyond moral didactics toward a more integrated biblical worldview.

A significant result of this study is the identification of spiritual wisdom as a core dimension of teachers’ pedagogical identity rather than merely an additional teaching attribute. Teachers who demonstrated consistent spiritual disciplines—such as prayer, Scripture meditation, and communal worship—exhibited a deeper integration of faith and pedagogy. These teachers did not compartmentalize faith as a separate religious subject but allowed it to inform their instructional attitudes, classroom interactions, and decision-making processes. Students were able to recognize which teachers taught with spiritual wisdom not merely from what they said but from how they behaved. Teachers characterized as spiritually wise were described as patient, attentive, fair, compassionate, and reflective. Such qualities correspond with what the literature defines as “formed wisdom,” where spiritual insight manifests through relational sensitivity and ethical

consistency. This confirms SLR findings that spiritual wisdom is not primarily located in pedagogical techniques but in the moral and spiritual character of the teacher. Spiritual wisdom shaped how teachers interpreted student behavior. Rather than reacting immediately with frustration or punishment, spiritually wise teachers tended to pause, reflect, and seek understanding of underlying emotional or social conditions influencing student conduct. This reflective posture reflects what Matthew 13:13 critiques as “seeing without perceiving” and “hearing without understanding.” Teachers who lacked spiritual wisdom often focused solely on behavioral symptoms, whereas those with spiritual discernment attempted to address root causes. Spiritual wisdom emerges as an integrative competence that connects theology, personality, and pedagogy. It shapes not only what is taught but how teaching is perceived and experienced by students.

### ***Implementation of Spiritual Wisdom in Classroom Practice***

Spiritual wisdom was implemented in classroom practices through several observable pedagogical patterns. Teachers frequently employed reflective questioning rather than immediate corrective instruction. When addressing errors or misunderstandings, spiritually wise teachers asked students to think critically about their actions and motives. This approach aligns with the parabolic method of Jesus in Matthew 13, where truth is revealed through reflection rather than direct exposition. Biblical integration was conducted not only in CRE classes but also across general subjects through value-based reflection. For example, teachers in social studies, language, and civic education incorporated short moral reflections, prayer, or value discussions that invited students to connect academic content with spiritual life. This interdisciplinary approach reflects SLR findings that spiritually wise teaching transcends subject boundaries and contributes to holistic formation. Relational pedagogy emerged as a central expression of spiritual wisdom. Teachers who practiced spiritual wisdom prioritized relationships over rigid proceduralism. They engaged students personally, listened to their concerns, and created an emotionally safe classroom environment. Students testified that they felt respected and valued by such teachers, which motivated them to participate more actively and responsibly in learning. Several constraints were identified. Teachers are required to follow standardized curricula and strict time limitations. As a result, moments for spiritual reflection were often brief and informal. This indicates that institutional structures sometimes restrict the full expression of spiritually wise pedagogy. Even so, the teachers’ commitment to embedding spiritual values into everyday instruction demonstrates that spiritual wisdom can still be practiced meaningfully within structural limitations. Students’ narratives reveal that they perceived spiritually wise teaching primarily through the emotional atmosphere of the classroom rather than through explicitly theological instruction. They associated spiritual wisdom with teachers who were patient, forgiving, fair, and willing to listen. Students stated that they felt less afraid to ask questions and admit mistakes in classes taught by such teachers. This aligns with educational psychology perspectives that define safe learning environments as foundational for cognitive and moral development. Students did not always associate spiritual wisdom with overt religious language. They linked it to authenticity, consistency, and moral credibility. One student explained that *“a teacher who prays but easily gets angry is harder to trust than a teacher who calmly guides us when we are wrong.”* This observation highlights an

important pedagogical insight: spiritual wisdom is communicated more effectively through embodied practice than through verbal instruction alone. Students also reported that spiritually wise teachers influenced their personal faith and moral decision-making. Several students testified that after being guided patiently through mistakes rather than punished harshly, they became more reflective about their actions and more motivated to change. This confirms SLR findings that grace-based pedagogy fosters intrinsic moral motivation rather than extrinsic compliance. Notably, the small number of Christian students in the school intensified the personal impact of spiritually wise teaching. Because the learning community is relatively small, relational interactions between teachers and students are deep and recurring. This context strengthens the formative power of teacher example but also increases the responsibility of teachers to consistently embody spiritual integrity.

### ***Exegetical Implications of Matthew 13:10-17 for Pedagogy***

Matthew 13:10-17 presents a rich theological framework for understanding spiritually wise teaching. Jesus' explanation of the purpose of parables establishes that revelation is both gracious and relational. The "mysteries of the kingdom" are not mastered through intellectual effort alone but are granted to those who are spiritually receptive. This implies that teaching, in a biblical sense, is not merely the delivery of content but participation in a revelatory process. The teachers in this study who internalized this exegetical insight approached their work with humility. They recognized the limits of their pedagogical control and acknowledged that genuine understanding ultimately depends on God's work in the hearts of students. Consequently, they emphasized prayer as an integral component of their teaching ministry. This corresponds with biblical pedagogy literature that identifies prayer as a crucial element of spiritually wise instruction. The repeated emphasis on seeing and hearing in the passage also reshapes the concept of learning. Learning is not simply about acquiring correct answers but about cultivating perceptive hearts. When applied to pedagogy, this implies that teachers should not only aim for cognitive mastery but also for spiritual attentiveness. Teachers in this study who practiced spiritual wisdom intentionally created moments of silence, reflection, and personal application in their classes, thus fostering inner perception rather than mere factual recall. Jesus' reference to the prophets and righteous people who longed to see what the disciples now see gives an eschatological dimension to teaching. Teaching becomes participation in God's unfolding redemptive narrative. This theological vision elevates the teaching vocation from a technical profession to a sacred calling, a perspective strongly affirmed by participants in this study.

Institutional culture plays a significant role in either nurturing or constraining the practice of spiritual wisdom. Although SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai is a public school with a pluralistic population, the presence of eight Christian teachers creates a supportive micro-environment for faith-informed pedagogy. Informal prayer gatherings, mutual encouragement, and collegial spiritual conversations were reported as important sources of emotional and spiritual support. Institutional priorities focused on academic performance, standardized assessment, and administrative compliance often limited the time and flexibility available for spiritual formation activities. Teachers expressed that while spiritual wisdom is valued implicitly, it is not formally integrated into institutional

performance indicators. This structural gap reflects a broader educational tension between character formation and academic evaluation. Teachers demonstrated significant creative effort in embedding spiritual values within everyday school routines. Morning prayers, personal counseling, and moral reflection during disciplinary processes became informal yet effective channels for nurturing spiritual wisdom. These findings confirm SLR conclusions that spiritual formation in schools often occurs through informal relational spaces rather than formal curricular structures. Emotional exhaustion was the most frequently cited obstacle. Teachers must juggle multiple responsibilities, administrative duties, and personal life pressures. Under such conditions, sustaining spiritual attentiveness becomes a daily struggle. This finding corresponds with the literature on teacher burnout, which emphasizes that spiritual and emotional fatigue significantly weakens character-based pedagogy. Another challenge involves students' diverse spiritual backgrounds and levels of receptivity. Not all students respond positively to spiritual reflection, particularly in a pluralistic environment. Teachers must therefore exercise discernment to avoid imposing faith while still faithfully embodying Christian values. This tension highlights the delicate balance between spiritual witness and professional neutrality in public education. Cultural expectations of authority also shape the practice of spiritual wisdom. In some cases, calm, reflective guidance is perceived as weakness compared with authoritarian discipline. Teachers must therefore continuously negotiate cultural expectations while remaining faithful to the biblical model of wise, patient instruction.

The integration of SLR and empirical findings reveals strong convergence between theory and practice. The literature emphasizes that spiritual wisdom is characterized by discernment, humility, relational depth, and moral authenticity. These very qualities emerged consistently in the experiences of teachers and students at SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai. The empirical data contribute unique contextual nuance. While the literature often speaks in idealized conceptual terms, this study demonstrates that spiritual wisdom is practiced amid constraints, tensions, and imperfections. Teachers do not always succeed in embodying spiritual wisdom fully, yet they continue striving through prayer, reflection, and relational commitment. This dynamic struggle illustrates that spiritual wisdom is not a static possession but a continuously cultivated virtue. The findings of this study carry several implications for Christian education. Spiritual wisdom must be recognized as an essential pedagogical competence rather than an optional spiritual supplement. Teacher education programs should incorporate spiritual formation alongside instructional methodology. Christian educators must be equipped with exegetical skills that enable them to interpret biblical texts such as Matthew 13:10-17 responsibly and apply them meaningfully to classroom practice. Without sound theological grounding, spiritual wisdom risks being reduced to general moralism. Institutional leadership should provide space and recognition for spiritually informed pedagogy. Policies that value character formation alongside academic achievement will significantly enhance the sustainability of spiritual wisdom in educational practice. The small-community context of SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai demonstrates that spiritually wise teaching can exert profound influence even when numerical representation of Christian students is limited. This underscores the missional significance of Christian teachers in public education.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that spiritual wisdom constitutes an essential foundation for effective Christian pedagogy, as illuminated by the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 13:10-17 and contextualized within the lived reality of SMP Negeri 2 Petak Malai. The passage affirms that teaching is not merely a transfer of knowledge but a spiritual vocation that requires discernment, inner purity, and sensitivity to divine revelation. Jesus' distinction between those who "see but do not perceive" and those who truly understand reinforces the conclusion that authentic learning is inseparable from the condition of the heart and the guidance of God. In the context of Christian education, this insight becomes a moral and pedagogical mandate for teachers to cultivate both intellectual clarity and spiritual depth. This case study shows that even in a small Christian community with limited resources and a modest number of Christian learners and teachers, the impact of spiritually grounded teaching is significant. The findings demonstrate that when teachers embody spiritual wisdom through humility, patience, moral consistency, and prayerful discernment, students experience not only academic instruction but also spiritual formation. The students' responsiveness, moral sensitivity, and growing openness to Christian values indicate that teaching guided by spiritual wisdom fosters holistic development-intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual. Spiritual wisdom functions not as an abstract theological concept but as a lived pedagogical practice shaping everyday classroom interactions. This study confirms that teacher personality competence and spiritual wisdom are inseparably linked. Teaching with spiritual wisdom requires more than pedagogical skills; it demands the teacher's continual spiritual growth, integrity of life, and dependence on God. The lived example of the teachers becomes a silent curriculum that powerfully shapes students' character. This reinforces the conclusion that the credibility of Christian education lies not primarily in curriculum design or instructional methods, but in the spiritual authenticity of the teacher. The study highlights the strategic importance of supporting teachers' spiritual formation alongside their professional development. Schools serving Christian students must intentionally nurture a learning environment that integrates faith, ethics, and knowledge. Without such integration, Christian education risks becoming merely religious information without transformative power. The case of this school in rural Indonesia illustrates that spiritual wisdom remains deeply relevant even within contemporary educational challenges, including limited facilities, diverse student backgrounds, and growing secular influences. This research affirms that teaching with spiritual wisdom, as exemplified in Matthew 13:10-17, is not optional but essential for authentic Christian education. It shapes the teacher's identity, strengthens pedagogical integrity, and enables students to perceive truth not only with the mind but also with the heart. The study recommends that future Christian education programs place greater emphasis on the spiritual formation of teachers, integrate biblical wisdom more intentionally into pedagogical training, and expand further research on spiritual pedagogy in diverse educational contexts. Through such efforts, Christian education can fulfill its true calling: forming learners who are wise, faithful, and responsive to God's truth in every dimension of life.

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