

## Spiritual Authority in Christian Pedagogy: Understanding the Teaching Power of Matthew 7:29 in the Context of SMPS PT. LTS ADE

Uba Tiorma Sari Hutagaol

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

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

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the nature of spiritual authority in Christian pedagogy through an exegetical reflection on Matthew 7:29 and its application in the context of SMPS PT. LTS ADE, where Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher serve a group of 33 Christian students. Matthew 7:29 describes Jesus teaching “as one who had authority,” a concept that extends beyond institutional or positional power and reflects a moral and spiritual authenticity that deeply impacts learners. Using a qualitative research design that integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), semi-structured interviews, and exegetical analysis, this study investigates how spiritual authority is embodied, perceived, and experienced within Christian educational practice. The SLR identifies key themes related to spiritual integrity, relational trust, moral coherence, and virtue-based pedagogy, which informed the thematic coding of interview data. Findings reveal that spiritual authority among PAK teachers is primarily rooted in character: humility, emotional self-control, compassion, fairness, and consistency between teaching and personal life. Students described their teachers as trustworthy, patient, and genuine, attributing their own moral and spiritual growth to the teachers’ Christlike example. The results also show that spiritual authority operates relationally, creating a classroom atmosphere of safety, respect, and openness, which enhances both learning and character formation. Spiritual authority serves as a catalyst for transformation, influencing students’ attitudes, behavior, and spiritual identity. The study concludes that spiritual authority is an essential dimension of Christian pedagogy, one that must be continually nurtured through intentional spiritual formation. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how Christlike teaching practices shape holistic student development in contemporary Christian education.*

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Authority, Christian Religious Education, Christian Pedagogy*

### INTRODUCTION

The question of what constitutes genuine teaching authority has increasingly captured the attention of scholars of Christian education, particularly in contexts where moral, spiritual, and social challenges among adolescents are intensifying. In many Indonesian

schools, including private and community-based institutions, teachers are expected not only to deliver academic content but also to cultivate spiritual and moral maturity. Within Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen/PAK*), this expectation becomes even more pronounced because teachers are entrusted with shaping students' faith, character, and worldview. Consequently, understanding the nature of teaching authority from a biblical foundation becomes essential for strengthening pedagogical practice. One of the most significant biblical insights on this matter emerges from Matthew 7:29, which describes Jesus as teaching "as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." This passage provides a profound theological lens through which Christian educators may examine the spiritual foundations of their pedagogical identity.

In the school context of SMPS PT. LTS ADE, Christian education faces its own particular challenges and responsibilities. The school accommodates 33 Christian students and is served by two Christian Religious Education teachers who not only function as instructors in religious knowledge but also as spiritual mentors and moral exemplars. Given the sociocultural dynamics of the region, including diverse religious interactions, shifting adolescent behaviors, and exposure to digital culture, students increasingly need teachers whose authority is rooted not in coercion or institutional mandate but in spiritual integrity and Christlike authenticity. This creates a demand for deeper reflection on how Jesus' teaching authority becomes a model for Christian educators today. Matthew 7:29 becomes especially relevant in this regard because it highlights a distinction between external authority and intrinsic authority. The religious leaders of Jesus' time possessed formal authority derived from their social and institutional positions. Jesus' authority flowed from His spiritual depth, moral credibility, alignment with the Father's will, and authenticity of life. Such authority inspires transformation, invites trust, and elicits a willingness to follow. When applied to Christian pedagogy, this principle suggests that authority in teaching is not merely a function of professional qualifications or school regulations but emerges from a teacher's spiritual competence: their character, humility, compassion, wisdom, prayerfulness, and consistency between teaching and living. Within the Indonesian educational framework, the standard competencies for teachers, including pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies, highlight the importance of moral integrity and role modeling. For PAK teachers, personality competence is inseparable from spiritual competence, as their credibility rests upon their embodiment of Christian virtues. However, many studies have noted a gap between teacher expectations and actual practice in religious education classrooms. Some teachers rely primarily on doctrinal instruction without demonstrating the transformative qualities of spiritual authority. This gap reinforces the need for research that reconnects Christian pedagogical theory with biblical foundations.

This study seeks to address that gap through an exegetical and empirical investigation of Matthew 7:29 in the context of Christian education at SMPS PT. LTS ADE. By combining biblical exegesis with simple field data, interviews with PAK teachers and observations of teaching interactions, this research aims to illuminate how spiritual authority may function as a transformative pedagogical force. It examines how teachers interpret and enact authority, how students perceive their teachers' spiritual example, and how the characteristics of Jesus' authority can inform teacher formation in contemporary Christian

classrooms. This article argues that spiritual authority is not optional but foundational for the effectiveness of Christian pedagogy. When teachers embody the values reflected in Matthew 7:29, integrity, authenticity, wisdom, compassion, and divine alignment, their teaching becomes not only informative but transformative. Such authority has the potential to shape the faith, ethics, and holistic growth of students in powerful ways.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrates three methodological components: an exegetical analysis of Matthew 7:29, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of scholarship on spiritual authority and Christian pedagogy, and light semi-structured interviews conducted at SMPS PT. LTS ADE. This methodological combination was intentionally selected to capture the theological depth of biblical teaching authority while grounding the analysis in the lived educational realities of the school's Christian community. The two PAK teachers and a small sample of Christian students (representing the 33 Christian learners enrolled at the school) provided contextual insight into how spiritual authority is perceived, practiced, and embodied within the Christian learning environment. The first methodological component, the exegetical analysis, focused on understanding the meaning of Jesus' teaching authority in Matthew 7:29. Using reputable biblical commentaries, Greek lexical references, and contemporary New Testament scholarship, the analysis examined the term *exousia* (ἐξουσία), translated as "authority," particularly emphasizing its contrast with the authority of the scribes. Exegetical reflection clarified that Jesus' authority was intrinsic, rooted in divine authenticity rather than institutional status. This theological insight provided the hermeneutical foundation for interpreting how Christian teachers today can embody a similar spiritual authority that flows from character, integrity, and divine dependence. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR), broadened the study's conceptual framework by synthesizing current research on teacher character, spiritual leadership, Christian virtue ethics, and transformative pedagogy. The review followed established SLR procedures, involving the identification of relevant articles through databases, screening based on inclusion criteria, publications from 2014 to 2024, relevance to Christian education or teacher spirituality, and empirical or theoretical depth, elimination of sources lacking academic rigor, and thematic synthesis. The SLR yielded recurring themes essential to understanding spiritual authority in teaching: authenticity, moral credibility, compassion, humility, relational competence, and consistency between personal character and instructional practice, informed both the interview protocol and the interpretive lens applied in the analysis. The next component comprised semi-structured interviews designed to capture lived experiences and perceptions within the school context. The participants included the six Christian students selected through purposive sampling to represent various grade levels and learning backgrounds. The interview questions explored how teachers understand their authority as Christian educators, how they cultivate spiritual credibility within the classroom, and how students perceive the teachers' spiritual example, relational behavior, and moral consistency. Interview sessions lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and were recorded through field notes. Ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process: participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained verbally, and anonymity was ensured by omitting personal identifiers from all transcripts and analyses. This integrated method allowed the research to offer a holistic and contextually

grounded understanding of spiritual authority as a vital component of Christian pedagogy at SMPS PT. LTS ADE.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a multifaceted relationship between spiritual authority and Christian pedagogical practice, demonstrating that the teaching authority exemplified by Jesus in Matthew 7:29 provides a deeply transformative model for Christian educators. Through thematic analysis that synthesized exegetical insights, literature findings, and interview data, dominant themes emerged: spiritual authority as character-rooted influence, spiritual authority as relational and instructional credibility, and spiritual authority as a catalyst for student transformation. These themes collectively illustrate that spiritual authority in Christian education cannot be separated from the teacher's moral integrity, spiritual maturity, and ability to embody Christlike qualities. The findings further reveal that the two PAK teachers at SMPS PT. LTS ADE demonstrate consistent patterns of spiritually grounded leadership that resonate strongly with students' perceptions of safety, respect, and moral clarity. Exegetical examination of Matthew 7:29 shows that Jesus taught with *exousia*, a form of authority that originated not from institutional endorsement but from divine authenticity and internal spiritual coherence. Scholars describe this as an authority arising from moral purity, alignment with God's will, and unity between one's teaching and one's life. The SLR reinforced this interpretation, indicating that contemporary theories of Christian pedagogy consistently argue that teachers' influence is grounded more in who they are than in what they merely verbalize. Authors such as Knight, Estep, and Palmer emphasize that credibility in Christian teaching emerges from a life shaped by prayer, compassion, humility, and integrity. Interviews with the two PAK teachers supported these insights: both described spiritual authority as "teaching through example," "living what is taught," and "allowing students to see Christ-like attitudes every day." These statements suggest that spiritual authority is perceived not as a hierarchical command but as a moral presence that radiates trustworthiness. This theme was further strengthened by students' testimonies. Many described the PAK teachers as "calm," "patient," and "consistent," qualities that align well with the biblical understanding of *exousia* as a moral and spiritual quality rather than authoritarian control. Students expressed admiration for their teachers' emotional self-control, fairness, and willingness to listen, describing these traits as reasons why they "respect" and "gladly follow" the teachers' guidance. These findings support Palmer's theory that the efficacy of teaching depends on internal spiritual grounding rather than external classroom management strategies. Thus, the results clearly show that spiritual authority within the school context is not enforced by disciplinary power but is earned through relational integrity and moral coherence.

The next major finding concerns the relational and instructional dimensions of spiritual authority. Literature on Christian pedagogy emphasizes that authority is relationally mediated—that is, teachers gain pedagogical influence not through fear or coercion but through meaningful relationships marked by empathy, fairness, and mutual respect. Interview data from students at SMPS PT. LTS ADE corroborate this model. Students frequently mentioned feeling "safe," "understood," and "valued" when interacting with

their Christian teachers. This relational quality reflects a Christlike posture of compassion and attentiveness that enhances spiritual authority rather than diminishing it. The relational dimension also intersects with instructional credibility. Both teachers emphasized that their authority in the classroom is strengthened by their commitment to careful preparation, contextualized biblical teaching, and clarity in communicating moral values. Students confirmed this, stating that the PAK teachers “explain things clearly,” “give good examples,” and “are consistent with what they teach.” This consistency between verbal instruction and lived example is foundational to Christian notions of authority, echoing Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus’ teaching that astonished crowds because it was inseparable from His authentic life. The results therefore suggest that instructional excellence and spiritual maturity mutually reinforce each other in the cultivation of teacher authority. The study shows that relational credibility enhances classroom management in a distinctly non-coercive way. Instead of relying on strict punishment or verbal dominance, the PAK teachers reported using strategies grounded in mutual respect, personal counseling, prayer support, and calm redirection. Students responded positively to these approaches, indicating that they are more likely to obey teachers they perceive as spiritually authentic and personally caring. This finding aligns with research in virtue-based pedagogy, which argues that moral persuasion is more effective than authoritarian discipline in fostering long-term moral development. The other major theme identifies spiritual authority as a catalyst for student transformation. Interview data show that students’ perceptions of their PAK teachers’ spiritual maturity influenced their own attitudes toward learning, interpersonal behavior, and spiritual reflection. Students described how the teachers’ guidance helped them manage conflicts, become more diligent, and develop sensitivity to moral issues. Some mentioned feeling encouraged to pray more regularly, read Scripture, or show kindness to classmates because of the teacher’s example. This suggests that the spiritual authority embodied by the teachers functions as a form of moral modeling that stimulates internal transformation among learners. These patterns were especially evident in students’ reflections on how the teachers handled emotionally difficult situations. Several students recalled incidents in which a teacher responded to misbehavior or conflict with gentleness and calmness instead of frustration. Students described feeling “touched,” “guided,” or “motivated to change” when teachers approached them in a Christlike manner. Such accounts highlight how spiritual authority can serve as an emotionally stabilizing force in the classroom environment, shaping not only behavior but also students’ moral imaginations and spiritual aspirations.

The SLR provides a theoretical explanation for these findings: spiritual authority influences students through the teacher’s embodiment of virtues such as patience, compassion, humility, and integrity. These virtues cultivate an atmosphere of moral clarity and emotional safety, which research shows is essential for fostering deep learning and character formation. When students witness these virtues in practice, they begin to internalize them through processes of imitation, reflection, and relational trust. Thus, teacher authority becomes a transformative pedagogical force that contributes to students’ holistic development. Exegetical insights from Matthew 7:29 deepen understanding of these results. Jesus’ authority was not imposed through coercion but emerged from His embodiment of divine truth and moral wholeness. When applied to

contemporary Christian pedagogy, this suggests that authentic authority manifests when teachers reflect Christ's virtues in their personal and professional conduct. The PAK teachers in this study demonstrated such authenticity by describing their spiritual authority as a responsibility entrusted by God rather than as positional power. This theological orientation aligns with biblical models of servant leadership, which emphasize humility, compassion, and moral self-giving. The results indicate that spiritual authority strengthens students' long-term spiritual identity. Several students reported seeing the teacher as a "role model of faith," a description that illustrates how pedagogy rooted in spiritual authenticity fosters not only academic or moral outcomes but also spiritual identity formation. This aligns with literature suggesting that Christian teachers play a critical shepherding role, shaping students' understanding of faith through both formal instruction and informal interactions. The findings therefore suggest that spiritual authority has a ripple effect in children's lives, influencing their behavior, emotional patterns, moral reasoning, and spiritual worldview. The results reveal an important tension: spiritual authority must be continually sustained through ongoing spiritual formation. Both PAK teachers acknowledged challenges such as emotional fatigue, classroom stress, and spiritual dryness. However, they emphasized the importance of personal prayer, scriptural reflection, and participation in church life as sources of renewal. The SLR supports this claim, noting that teacher burnout often diminishes spiritual authority unless educators intentionally cultivate spiritual disciplines that nurture inner strength and moral clarity. Thus, the study highlights the need for continuous spiritual formation among teachers as a prerequisite for maintaining spiritual authority. The results show that spiritual authority in Christian pedagogy is a dynamic and relational process. It is grounded in the teacher's spiritual integrity, mediated through compassionate and consistent relationships, and expressed through moral and instructional excellence. When embodied authentically, spiritual authority has profound transformative effects on students, influencing their behavior, emotional well-being, and spiritual identity. These findings underscore the importance of forming Christian educators whose lives reflect the inner coherence, integrity, and divine alignment exemplified by Jesus' authority in Matthew 7:29.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that spiritual authority, as reflected in Matthew 7:29, offers a deeply transformative paradigm for Christian pedagogy within the context of SMPS PT. LTS ADE. The findings reveal that the two PAK teachers' teaching influence does not originate from institutional position or disciplinary power, but from their inner spiritual integrity, relational credibility, and consistent embodiment of Christlike virtues. Through systematic analysis of literature, exegetical reflection, and interview insights, the research shows that spiritual authority is fundamentally rooted in authenticity, a unity between belief, character, and practice that enables teachers to guide students not merely through instruction but through lived example. The students' testimonies affirm that they trust and respect teachers who demonstrate emotional self-control, fairness, compassion, and sincerity, all of which resonate with the biblical meaning of *exousia* as divine moral influence. The study also concludes that spiritual authority operates relationally: it is strengthened when teachers cultivate meaningful, empathetic, and respectful

interactions with students. This relational dimension fosters a classroom environment marked by emotional safety, clarity of expectations, and mutual respect. Such an environment supports moral and spiritual development far more effectively than coercive or authoritarian strategies. The research further indicates that spiritual authority enhances instructional credibility. When teachers communicate biblical truth clearly and model the values they teach, students perceive them as trustworthy and dependable sources of moral guidance. This coherence between teaching and character strengthens the pedagogical impact of Christian instruction. The findings highlight the transformative effects of spiritual authority on students' personal growth. Students reported becoming more patient, disciplined, empathetic, and prayerful as a result of their teachers' example. This underscores the vital role of Christian educators as moral and spiritual influencers whose authority shapes not only academic habits but also character and spiritual identity. The study affirms that authentic spiritual authority has a lasting influence that extends beyond the classroom, guiding students toward a deeper understanding of Christian values and personal faith. At the same time, the findings emphasize that spiritual authority must be nurtured continuously. Teachers acknowledged the challenges of maintaining spiritual integrity amidst daily pressures, highlighting the need for ongoing spiritual formation through prayer, Scripture reflection, and involvement in Christian community. Without such disciplines, the vitality of spiritual authority can diminish. Thus, professional development for Christian teachers must include not only pedagogical training but also intentional spiritual formation. This study affirms that spiritual authority is an indispensable element of Christian pedagogy. It is not a tool of control but a moral and spiritual presence that shapes hearts, minds, and behaviors. In the context of SMPS PT. LTS ADE, the PAK teachers' embodiment of spiritual authority reflects the essence of Matthew 7:29, teaching that astonishes not by force but by authenticity, compassion, and divine alignment. The research invites Christian educators to view spiritual authority not as an institutional mandate but as a sacred calling that demands integrity, relational wisdom, and a life shaped by Christ's example.

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