

## Enhancing the Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers through the Servant Leadership Model at SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem

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### ABSTRACT

*Teacher competence is a decisive factor in ensuring the quality of education, particularly in Christian Religious Education, where teaching involves not only the transfer of biblical knowledge but also the holistic formation of students' character and spirituality. Within Indonesia's multicultural society, CRE teachers face the dual responsibility of nurturing Christian values while fostering respect for diversity. However, challenges such as limited professional development, insufficient leadership support, and lack of reflective opportunities often hinder their growth. This study investigates how the implementation of the servant leadership model at SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem has influenced the enhancement of CRE teachers' competence. Employing a qualitative approach supported by a systematic literature review, the research analyzed observations, documents, and teacher reflections to assess the impact of servant leadership on the four dimensions of competence outlined in Indonesian education standards: pedagogical, professional, social, and personal. Findings reveal that servant leadership, characterized by empathy, empowerment, and role modeling, significantly transformed the school culture from hierarchical to collaborative. Teachers reported greater professional confidence, pedagogical creativity, and deeper spiritual reflection. They increasingly employed active learning methods, integrated technology, and fostered student engagement in faith-based practices. Moreover, a culture of collaboration and continuous reflection emerged, providing sustainable pathways for growth. In conclusion, the study highlights that the enhancement of CRE teachers' competence cannot be reduced to technical training alone but must be supported by leadership grounded in service and Christian values. Servant leadership thus emerges as both a strategic and theological model for advancing transformative Christian education.*

**Keywords:** Competence, Christian Religious Education, Servant Leadership Model

### INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence stands as one of the fundamental pillars in determining the success of education. In the realm of Christian Religious Education (CRE), competence is not

confined merely to the transfer of biblical knowledge but extends to the holistic formation of students' character and spirituality. CRE teachers are expected to nurture learners who embody Christian values, live with moral integrity, and actively contribute to the common good of society (Novianto & Mustaqim, 2020). Within the Indonesian multicultural context, this role becomes even more crucial, as CRE teachers are not only tasked with developing students' intellectual capacity but also with fostering an attitude of respect and openness toward diversity. Thus, beyond pedagogical competence, CRE teachers must embody Christian witness through their personal lives while simultaneously demonstrating professional and social competence of high quality (Arifianto & Christiani, 2019). Despite this noble vision, the improvement of CRE teacher competence faces persistent challenges. Among the most common issues are the limited availability of training programs tailored for CRE, insufficient motivation among teachers to pursue independent learning, and inadequate leadership support from school principals. These obstacles often result in stagnation in pedagogical innovation and hinder the integration of faith with contemporary educational demands (Suyatno et al., 2021). Teachers may also feel isolated in their practice, lacking the collaborative and reflective opportunities that are essential for sustained professional growth (Subagyo, 2018). Consequently, strategic interventions are needed to empower teachers in ways that resonate with the values and ethos of Christian education. One promising approach to address these challenges is the adoption of the servant leadership model. This concept, first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s, emphasizes that a true leader is first and foremost a servant. Servant leadership departs from conventional hierarchical models by placing priority on serving others, empowering communities, and nurturing holistic growth (Greenleaf, 2002). In educational contexts, servant leadership translates into practices where school leaders actively listen to teachers, foster egalitarian relationships, create supportive environments, and prioritize the professional and personal well-being of their staff (Eva et al., 2019). Instead of being mere administrators, principals become mentors, facilitators, and motivators who inspire teachers to reach their fullest potential (Irving, 2017).

At SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, servant leadership has begun to take root in school management practices. The principal has shown attentiveness to teacher well-being, cultivated open communication channels, and encouraged collaboration among teaching staff. These actions have helped to dismantle structural and personal barriers that previously hindered the growth of CRE teachers. By prioritizing empowerment and collegiality, the principal has laid the groundwork for a school culture where teacher competence can flourish. In such an environment, CRE teachers are more likely to develop pedagogical creativity, engage in continuous professional learning, and embody the Christian values they seek to instill in their students (Sendjaya, 2015). This study therefore seeks to explore how the servant leadership model is implemented by the school principal and how it impacts the enhancement of CRE teacher competence. The research focuses on the four dimensions of teacher competence mandated by the Indonesian Ministry of National Education Regulation No. 16 of 2007: pedagogical competence, professional competence, social competence, and personal competence. Investigating these dimensions within the framework of servant leadership provides an opportunity to link educational leadership theory with the lived experiences of teachers in a faith-based

context. Furthermore, this research contributes to broader scholarly discussions on how Christian values can shape inclusive and transformative educational leadership practices (Page & Wong, 2000). Strengthening the competence of CRE teachers cannot be reduced to technical improvements alone but must involve the cultivation of a supportive leadership culture grounded in service, humility, and empowerment. By examining the specific case of SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, this article aims to enrich the theoretical discourse on servant leadership while offering practical insights for school leaders committed to advancing Christian education in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

## **METHODS**

This study incorporated a systematic literature review (SLR) to strengthen theoretical grounding and provide a comparative framework. Following guidelines from Snyder (2019), the SLR involved identifying, screening, and synthesizing peer-reviewed studies on servant leadership in education and teacher professional development. Databases such as Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar were searched using keywords like servant leadership, Christian education, teacher competence, and professional development. Inclusion criteria emphasized studies published within the last decade, with a focus on educational contexts in multicultural or faith-based settings. The literature review revealed consistent evidence that servant leadership fosters teacher empowerment, collaboration, and holistic growth (Eva et al., 2019; Sendjaya, 2015). By juxtaposing field data with global scholarship, the study situates the case of SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem within broader academic discourse, ensuring both contextual relevance and theoretical rigor, with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the practices of servant leadership exercised by the school principal and its impact on enhancing the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem. A qualitative design was deemed appropriate because it allows researchers to capture meanings, experiences, and subjective interpretations of participants involved in the educational process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike quantitative methods that emphasize measurement and generalization, qualitative inquiry prioritizes the exploration of lived experiences and contextual realities, which are essential for understanding leadership dynamics and professional growth in a school setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Document analysis included school meeting minutes, teacher training programs, and evaluation reports, which provided additional layers of evidence to support data. The reduced data were then displayed in narrative accounts and thematic matrices, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, contrasts, and relationships among variables. Through this methodological design, it aims to provide a comprehensive and trustworthy account of how servant leadership can contribute to the transformation of CRE teacher competence. The integration of fieldwork with a systematic literature review enriches the analysis, offering both empirical insights and theoretical contributions toward understanding leadership practices rooted in Christian values and their transformative implications in education.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study, derived from observations and document analysis of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, reveal that the

implementation of servant leadership significantly contributed to the improvement of both professional and pedagogical competencies. Unlike traditional hierarchical leadership, which often emphasizes control and compliance, the servant leadership model cultivated a supportive and empowering school environment. This environment became a key driver for holistic transformation among CRE teachers, not only in their technical skills but also in their professional identity and spiritual orientation. Prior to the adoption of servant leadership practices, many CRE teachers experienced stagnation in professional growth. Data indicated that only 35% of CRE teachers consistently engaged in professional development activities such as training, workshops, or seminars. The lack of structural support from school leadership and insufficient encouragement for self-reflection hindered their professional progression. The majority of teachers relied heavily on lecture-based methods. Lessons tended to focus on rote memorization of biblical content without contextual application, which limited students' ability to connect spiritual values to everyday life. Teachers rarely employed interactive strategies such as group discussions, project-based learning, or reflective practices that could engage students in deeper meaning-making (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The organizational culture of the school compounded these challenges. It was characterized by rigidity, minimal collaboration, and limited openness to innovation. Teachers often worked in isolation and felt excluded from decision-making processes. This lack of recognition reduced motivation and weakened their sense of belonging within the institution. In this environment, CRE teachers struggled to sustain enthusiasm and creativity in their teaching practices.

### ***Transformation of Teacher Competence through Servant Leadership***

The introduction of servant leadership, initiated at the beginning of the academic year, marked a turning point. The school principal deliberately shifted from an authoritarian stance to a facilitative, relational, and supportive leadership style. Rather than acting as a distant superior, the principal positioned themselves as a mentor, listener, and enabler of professional growth. Teachers were given greater autonomy to voice their perspectives, reflect on their experiences, and receive concrete support such as targeted professional training and personalized mentoring. These actions aligned with Greenleaf's (1977) original conception of servant leadership, where leaders prioritize serving others, empower followers, and cultivate trust. Interviews highlighted a strong sense of appreciation among teachers. One CRE teacher remarked: *"Our principal now listens more, even asking how I can be supported in improving my teaching. That makes me feel valued and motivated to do better."* Such testimonies underscored how recognition and empathy, core elements of servant leadership, restored teachers' intrinsic motivation. Pedagogically, teachers began adopting more active learning approaches. Methods such as small-group discussions, case studies, and values-based reflection activities were increasingly integrated into CRE lessons. Furthermore, teachers embraced educational technology, creating video resources, using digital Bible applications, and incorporating interactive presentations to enhance student engagement.

### ***Enhancement of Professional Competence and Spiritual Reflection***

One of the most notable outcomes was the improvement of professional competence. Teachers demonstrated growth in several domains: Teachers became more adept at designing lesson plans aligned with students' needs, abilities, and contexts. They developed clear learning objectives and structured assessments that went beyond rote knowledge, emphasizing authentic evaluation of moral and spiritual understanding; Teachers reported greater confidence in managing classrooms, fostering inclusive environments where students felt respected and encouraged to participate; The willingness to experiment with diverse strategies indicated an increased capacity for adaptive teaching, consistent with 21st-century pedagogical standards (Schleicher, 2018). Beyond professional skills, teachers deepened their sense of spiritual vocation. Servant leadership anchored teacher development in Christian values such as humility, love, and faithfulness. Teachers reported becoming more reflective about their spiritual responsibilities, viewing themselves not only as transmitters of knowledge but as shepherds guiding students toward authentic faith formation. This dual emphasis on competence and spirituality resonates with the Christian educational philosophy that integrates intellectual excellence with spiritual maturity (Estep & Anthony, 2015). Another significant transformation was the emergence of a collaborative school culture. The principal actively encouraged regular meetings among CRE teachers and across subject areas. These meetings evolved into open forums where teachers exchanged interdisciplinary insights, collaboratively addressed student challenges, and shared best practices. This shift fostered a sense of collective identity among teachers. Whereas collaboration had previously been minimal, the new culture emphasized empathy, shared responsibility, and professional solidarity. As teachers themselves articulated, these spaces became "safe zones" where they felt understood, supported, and inspired by peers. This aligns with research showing that servant leadership enhances trust and cooperation in educational institutions (Eva et al., 2019).

The transformation in leadership and teacher competence directly influenced the quality of CRE instruction. Lessons became more interactive and relevant, linking biblical teachings to students' lived experiences. Teachers designed activities that encouraged personal reflection, moral reasoning, and community engagement. As a result, students became more active learners. Instead of passively absorbing content, they engaged in discussions, asked questions, and critically examined the application of Christian values in their social and cultural contexts. Formative assessments showed measurable improvements in student understanding of faith concepts, Christian ethics, and moral decision-making. Equally significant was the increased student participation in spiritual activities. Attendance and engagement in morning devotions, social service projects, and character-building events rose noticeably. This suggests that servant leadership not only enhanced teacher competence but also indirectly enriched students' holistic formation (Bryk et al., 2010). Servant leadership also promoted reflective practices among teachers. The principal encouraged teachers to consistently evaluate their teaching methods, solicit peer feedback, and set realistic goals for improvement. Reflection became a central part of the school's culture, shifting from an occasional activity to a systematic process. Teachers increasingly recognized their strengths and weaknesses, and demonstrated greater openness to constructive criticism. They actively sought resources-academic literature, online tools, and workshops-to improve their skills. The principal reinforced

this reflective culture by offering both group coaching sessions and one-on-one mentoring. These sessions helped teachers identify specific goals and strategies for professional development. This reflective dimension is crucial in education. According to Schön (1983), reflective practice bridges the gap between theory and action, enabling teachers to refine their craft through iterative learning. In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem, servant leadership institutionalized reflection as a sustainable pathway for teacher growth. The adoption of servant leadership was not without obstacles. Some teachers initially resisted the shift, having been accustomed to hierarchical leadership models. For them, the emphasis on shared decision-making and personal accountability represented a cultural adjustment. Resource limitations also posed challenges. Teachers identified constraints such as limited training opportunities, inadequate technological infrastructure, and time pressures. These issues occasionally slowed the pace of change. However, the principal's consistent demonstration of patience, presence, and moral support gradually alleviated these challenges. Over time, even resistant teachers became more receptive, acknowledging the tangible benefits of the servant leadership approach.

### ***Correlation between Servant Leadership and the Vision of Christian Education***

The findings of this study affirm the intrinsic compatibility between servant leadership and the vision of Christian education. The ultimate goal of Christian pedagogy is the holistic formation of individuals into Christlike character-loving, humble, and service-oriented (Knight, 2016). Servant leadership embodies this vision by positioning leaders as shepherds who guide with compassion rather than authority. In this context, CRE teachers experienced not only professional growth but also personal spiritual renewal. They began to see their role as a vocation, not merely a job. This vocational awareness enhanced their authenticity as moral exemplars for students. As such, servant leadership can be understood as both an educational strategy and a theological expression of Christian discipleship in practice. Servant leadership creates conditions for continuous learning and professional renewal, essential in responding to rapid educational changes. By integrating professional, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions, servant leadership supports holistic approaches to education that transcend narrow academic metrics. Although grounded in a Christian school context, the principles of servant leadership are adaptable to diverse educational settings where relational trust and moral formation are valued. The results clearly demonstrate that servant leadership plays a transformative role in enhancing the competence of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem. By reshaping professional practices, fostering reflection, and cultivating a collaborative culture, this leadership model aligned with the Christian vision of education and significantly improved both teacher performance and student outcomes. The study affirms that servant leadership should not be viewed merely as a leadership style but as a cultural paradigm. When embraced authentically, it redefines the relationship between leaders and teachers, between teachers and students, and ultimately between education and spiritual formation.

## CONCLUSION

Findings of this study reveal that the implementation of the servant leadership model has had a significant impact on improving the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Pinem. This leadership approach proved effective in fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment, with a strong emphasis on developing the potential of each teacher. The practice of servant leadership exercised by the principal not only enhanced teachers' professional and pedagogical skills but also nurtured spiritual awareness and the values of service within their teaching practice. The application of this model has led to a fundamental shift in how teachers perceive their vocation. They no longer regard themselves merely as transmitters of knowledge but as educators committed to guiding students holistically-intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Teachers became more reflective, receptive to change, and proactive in developing learning strategies aligned with students' needs. Through active engagement in discussions, training, and mentoring facilitated by the principal, teachers experienced tangible growth in both their pedagogical competence and professional development. Moreover, the transformation observed demonstrates that the core values of servant leadership—such as empathy, accompaniment, empowerment of individual potential, and role modeling—are consistent with the principles of Christian education. This model functions not only as an administrative strategy but also as a spiritual approach that reflects the love of Christ within the sphere of school leadership. As a result, teachers not only improved their competencies but also deepened their integration in fulfilling their calling as CRE educators. The success of servant leadership implementation did not occur instantly. It required patience, consistent modeling, and perseverance in addressing the challenges posed by organizational culture change within the school. Sustaining servant leadership further demands inclusive and continuous school policies, relevant professional training, and participatory spaces where teachers can grow. In conclusion, this research underscores that the enhancement of CRE teachers' competence is not merely dependent on technical aspects of instruction but is profoundly shaped by the leadership model adopted within the school. Servant leadership, therefore, can be recommended as both a strategic and theological approach to building a high-quality, meaningful, and transformative Christian Religious Education in the midst of increasingly complex educational dynamics.

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