

Spiritual Competence and Religious Moderation: Lessons from Christian Religious Education at SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae

Lukkas Minggo Pasaribu^{1*}, Boho Parulian Pardede²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: lukkasminggop@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The disruption era has redefined teacher competencies beyond subject mastery, emphasizing pedagogical, professional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Within Christian Religious Education (CRE), spiritual competence is central, as teachers are called to embody faith, model moral integrity, and nurture resilience among students in pluralistic contexts. This study examines the role of spiritual competence among CRE teachers in SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae, Sorkam Barat, where Christian students form a minority in a predominantly Muslim environment. A qualitative descriptive design was applied to capture lived experiences of spiritual competence. Data were collected from two CRE teachers, ten students, and the school principal through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was used to code and interpret data, with triangulation ensuring validity. Findings indicate that CRE teachers demonstrated spiritual competence primarily through faith integrity, integrating biblical reflection, prayer, and role modeling into teaching. Students valued teachers' authenticity, which reinforced the credibility of Christian education. Challenges arose in navigating resource limitations, legitimacy issues, and interfaith dynamics. Nevertheless, teachers emphasized respect and dialogue, reflecting both national commitments to religious moderation and biblical principles of peace (Romans 12:18). Integration of pedagogy and spirituality was evident in lessons that combined academic objectives with Christian values, such as environmental stewardship grounded in Genesis 2:15. Three interrelated dimensions of spiritual competence emerged: faith maturity, biblical rootedness, and contextual sensitivity. Together, these form a holistic framework for CRE teacher development. The study concludes that spiritual competence is vital for nurturing faith identity and fostering interreligious harmony in minority-Christian contexts, underscoring the need for professional development and institutional support to sustain authentic Christian pedagogy.

Keywords: *Spiritual Competence, Religious Moderation, Christian Religious Education*

INTRODUCTION

The disruption era has significantly redefined the notion of teacher competencies, extending far beyond mastery of subject matter. In this century, educators are no longer assessed solely on their academic expertise but also on their capacity to integrate pedagogical, professional, social, and spiritual dimensions of teaching (Supriyadi, 2022). This holistic framework underscores that teaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the shaping of learners as whole persons. Within Christian Religious Education (CRE), the spiritual dimension occupies a central place because it connects directly to the essence of faith-based education. Teachers of CRE are called not only to explain doctrines but also to embody Christian virtues, model moral integrity, and nurture spiritual resilience among their students (Nainggolan, 2021). Spiritual competence in this context refers to the teacher's ability to integrate faith, values, and practice in ways that inspire students to internalize and live out Christian principles. It includes faith maturity, integrity, authenticity, and the capacity to cultivate students' moral discernment and resilience in pluralistic environments. Importantly, spiritual competence is not confined to private belief but must be demonstrated in relational, social, and pedagogical practices that reflect Christ-like character (Purba, 2020). This competence becomes a powerful pedagogical force when CRE teachers intentionally integrate spirituality into classroom interactions, assessment, and formation of student character. SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae in Sorkam Barat presents a unique case study to explore this issue. The school operates in a context where Islam is the dominant religion, and Christian students form a minority group. Such a socio-religious landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for CRE teachers. On one hand, it provides fertile ground for cultivating interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect, consistent with Indonesia's national commitment to Unity in Diversity. On the other hand, it places responsibility on CRE teachers to ensure that Christian students remain rooted in their faith traditions while simultaneously learning to coexist harmoniously in a community shaped by Islamic culture. In such settings, spiritual competence becomes not only desirable but essential. Teachers are required to balance their role as faith nurturers with that of cultural bridge-builders, ensuring that Christian education does not create exclusivism but rather equips students with confidence in their faith and respect for others (Setiawan, 2019).

Globally, theological institutions and Christian education systems have long emphasized the centrality of spiritual formation. For example, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS, 2018) highlights personal and spiritual formation as an essential dimension of religious education. Yet, research shows that nearly half of theological schools lack a clear institutional definition of spiritual formation, resulting in varied and inconsistent practices. The same issue is reflected in the Indonesian context, where spiritual competence is often invoked as an educational ideal but rarely translated into concrete frameworks or measurable practices (Purba, 2020). Without clear guidelines, CRE teachers may struggle to integrate spirituality systematically into pedagogy, leaving students vulnerable to fragmented or superficial approaches. This challenge becomes even more pronounced in rural schools such as those in Sorkam Barat. Compared to urban educational environments, rural schools often face significant limitations in resources, professional development opportunities, and access to innovative pedagogical models

(Suryani, 2020). Teachers in these settings must navigate entrenched traditional practices while simultaneously responding to modern demands for this century competencies and interfaith engagement. In this situation, spiritual competence provides an anchor, ensuring that Christian teachers can remain faithful to their vocation while adapting to contextual realities. The urgency of addressing spiritual competence lies in its dual significance for both Christian formation and interreligious coexistence. For Christian students in Muslim-majority environments, spiritual competence of their teachers ensures that their faith identity is nurtured, strengthened, and contextualized meaningfully. At the same time, by modeling respect, tolerance, and openness, spiritually competent teachers contribute to the cultivation of peaceful interreligious relationships. This dual orientation reflects the biblical mandate of Christian education to love God wholeheartedly while also loving one's neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). This study seeks to critically examine the role of spiritual competence in Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae, situating it within a socio-religious context shaped by Islamic dominance. It explores how spiritual competence can be defined, operationalized, and strengthened in ways that empower teachers to fulfill their dual responsibilities: nurturing the faith of Christian students and promoting interreligious harmony in the broader community. By engaging with both theoretical insights and contextual realities, the research aims to contribute to the development of a more structured, holistic, and contextually relevant understanding of spiritual competence in Christian education.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design was implemented in this research, which was considered most suitable for exploring complex human experiences and competencies that are not easily reducible to numerical data. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue, qualitative approaches are particularly appropriate when the goal is to capture lived experiences, subjective perspectives, and contextual nuances. In this research, the focus was on understanding how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers conceptualized and enacted spiritual competence in their professional practice, especially within a socio-religious context dominated by Islam. A descriptive design provided the necessary flexibility to present a detailed and faithful account of participants' voices without imposing rigid theoretical frameworks, while still allowing systematic analysis of recurring themes. Participants were selected purposively to ensure that the study captured insights from those directly engaged with the processes of teaching and learning Christian Religious Education in SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae. The core participants consisted of two CRE teachers, each with more than five years of teaching experience. Their length of service was important because it ensured that they had sufficient exposure to the dynamics of teaching in a minority-faith context and had developed personal strategies for navigating challenges. To provide additional perspectives and enrich the data, the study also involved ten students-equally distributed between male and female respondents-who were enrolled in CRE classes. Their voices were important for understanding how spiritual competence was experienced not only from the teacher's perspective but also through the learners' eyes. Finally, the school principal was included as an additional participant, given their key role in shaping the school's culture, policies, and support for religious education. Together, these participants represented a diverse

range of experiences and perspectives necessary to build a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers, the principal, and the student participants. The interview questions explored teachers' personal definitions of spiritual competence, their daily practices for nurturing students' faith, and the specific challenges they encountered in an environment where Christianity was a minority. For students, interviews focused on their perceptions of how their teachers modeled Christian values, integrated spirituality into lessons, and supported them in navigating interfaith dynamics. Classroom observations were conducted over a four-week period, with the researcher attending multiple CRE lessons. These observations focused on how biblical principles were integrated into instruction, how prayer and devotional practices were incorporated, and how teachers provided moral guidance during both planned and spontaneous moments in class. Particular attention was given to teacher-student interactions, the use of scripture, and responses to ethical or interreligious issues raised in class. Document analysis allowed the researcher to cross-check whether the practices observed in the classroom were aligned with formal planning and institutional expectations. Interview transcripts and observation notes were carefully read and re-read for familiarity. Initial codes were generated to capture meaningful segments of text. The codes were grouped into potential themes such as "faith modeling," "integration of biblical principles," and "navigating interfaith challenges." The study sought to ensure that the findings provided a trustworthy and nuanced understanding of spiritual competence as lived and practiced within the context of SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of spiritual competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae, a school located in Sorkam Barat, where the majority of the community is Muslim and Christian students constitute a small minority. Using qualitative descriptive methods-interviews, observations, and document analysis-this research revealed significant insights into how spiritual competence was understood, enacted, and challenged within this unique socio-religious context. The discussion is organized around spiritual competence as faith integrity, challenges in a majority-Islam context, integration of pedagogy and spirituality, and movement toward a framework of competence. These themes illuminate both the lived realities of CRE teachers and the broader implications for Christian pedagogy in pluralistic environments.

The first and most consistent finding across all data sources was the understanding of spiritual competence as the embodiment of faith integrity. For the two CRE teachers involved in this study, teaching was not simply the transfer of biblical knowledge but the modeling of a life consistent with Christian principles. Both teachers emphasized that spiritual authority in the classroom derives not from position or doctrinal expertise alone but from visible alignment between belief and practice. One teacher articulated this conviction clearly: *"I must live what I teach; otherwise, the students will not see the truth in Christianity."* This echoes James 1:22, which exhorts believers to be doers of the word, not hearers only. In practice, this integrity was demonstrated through consistent spiritual

routines. Lessons typically began with prayer and biblical reflection, and teachers integrated scriptural wisdom into academic discussions. For example, in a lesson on honesty, the teacher not only cited biblical passages such as Proverbs 12:22 *“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy,”* but also shared personal stories of ethical dilemmas in daily life. This transparency reinforced the credibility of the message and helped students connect doctrine with lived reality. Observation of classroom interactions further confirmed the centrality of role modeling. Students reported that they respected their teachers because they could see evidence of Christian values in their teachers’ conduct outside the classroom. Teachers maintained respectful relationships with colleagues of other faiths, participated in community activities, and practiced humility in daily interactions. Such practices resonate with Supriyadi’s (2022) claim that teacher competence in the disruption era must include spiritual and moral authenticity as part of holistic education. At the same time, faith integrity was not understood as perfection but as commitment. Teachers openly acknowledged their limitations and invited students to grow together with them in faith. This attitude created a relational model of learning where teacher and student pursued spiritual maturity collectively rather than hierarchically. Such humility aligns with the Pauline vision of teaching as service (2 Corinthians 4:5), where the focus is not on the teacher’s authority but on pointing students toward Christ.

While faith integrity formed the foundation of spiritual competence, the teachers also reported significant challenges in practicing Christian pedagogy within a predominantly Islamic environment. The school is situated in a village where Islam shapes the cultural and social atmosphere. Most teachers and the majority of students identify as Muslims, and community events are often framed within Islamic practices. In such a context, CRE teachers and students navigate their Christian identity carefully. Interviews revealed that teachers occasionally encountered misunderstandings from peers or parents regarding the role of CRE. Some non-Christian parents questioned why Christian students needed separate religious instruction, perceiving it as unnecessary or even divisive. Although these tensions were not overtly hostile, they reflected underlying challenges of religious plurality in Indonesia. As Setiawan (2019) notes, the coexistence of multiple religions in close proximity often produces both opportunities for dialogue and risks of misunderstanding. Teachers also faced resource limitations, as Christian educational materials were less available compared to Islamic resources. While textbooks were provided by the government, teachers often supplemented them with church-based materials or personal resources to ensure that lessons were biblically grounded. In addition, the lack of professional development opportunities specific to CRE made it difficult for teachers to refine strategies for teaching in plural settings. Despite these obstacles, teachers emphasized the importance of fostering respect and dialogue. They frequently reminded students that Christian identity should not be expressed through defensiveness but through openness and love. This approach mirrors the national discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia, which emphasizes tolerance, mutual respect, and coexistence. From a biblical standpoint, this practice aligns with Romans 12:18 *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”* In practice, teachers encouraged students to participate respectfully in interfaith school activities, such as Independence Day celebrations, while remaining rooted in their Christian faith.

Maintaining this balance was not without tension. Teachers reported that some Christian students occasionally felt marginalized during broader school events where Islamic practices dominated. To address this, teachers created spaces within CRE classes where students could process their experiences, discuss feelings of difference, and reframe them in light of Christian faith. These pastoral practices were crucial in sustaining students' confidence and identity as minority Christians in a plural environment.

Another key finding was the integration of pedagogy with spirituality. The teachers at SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae consciously designed lessons that wove together biblical principles with academic objectives. For instance, one teacher integrated environmental stewardship into science-related topics by connecting Genesis 2:15, which highlights humanity's responsibility to care for creation. Students were tasked with small projects, such as planting trees or cleaning the school yard, and were encouraged to see these actions as expressions of Christian faith. Observations revealed that spiritual integration extended beyond lesson content to include pedagogical style. Teachers adopted dialogical approaches that encouraged students to share personal experiences, ask questions, and connect biblical teachings to everyday life. This practice aligns with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize student-centered inquiry (Vygotsky, 1978). In the CRE classroom, however, constructivism was given a spiritual dimension, as students' experiences were framed within biblical reflection and prayer. Teachers also used ritual practices—such as opening and closing prayers, memorization of verses, and singing hymns—as pedagogical strategies. These rituals were not mechanical but intentionally designed to cultivate spiritual habits. Over time, students reported that these practices gave them a sense of identity and security in their Christian faith, even in an environment where they were numerically marginalized. Both teachers admitted that they lacked formal training in how to systematically integrate pedagogy and spirituality. Their practices were largely based on personal conviction and experience rather than structured frameworks. This observation reflects broader findings from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS, 2018), which noted that many institutions of theological education lack clear definitions or structured frameworks for personal and spiritual formation. As a result, CRE teachers often improvise, relying on intuition rather than research-informed strategies. This limitation highlights the need for professional development programs that equip teachers with tools to intentionally integrate spirituality into pedagogy. Such programs could provide models for lesson planning, strategies for contextual sensitivity, and methods for assessing not only cognitive learning but also spiritual growth. Without such training, the risk remains that spiritual integration will be inconsistent, depending heavily on individual teachers' strengths and convictions.

From the analysis, three dimensions of spiritual competence emerged that may serve as a foundation for developing clearer institutional guidelines for CRE teacher formation: Spiritual competence begins with the teacher's own relationship with God, expressed through prayer, worship, integrity, and moral consistency. Without personal maturity, teaching risks becoming hollow, lacking the authenticity necessary to inspire students; Competence requires a strong grounding in biblical knowledge, not merely as abstract information but as living truth applied to ethical decisions, interpersonal relationships, and social challenges; In pluralistic environments, spiritual competence also entails the

ability to engage respectfully with people of other faiths while maintaining a clear Christian identity. This involves fostering tolerance, empathy, and the capacity for interfaith dialogue. These three dimensions are deeply interconnected. Faith maturity fuels biblical rootedness, which in turn equips teachers to engage contextually. Together, they form a holistic vision of spiritual competence that integrates personal formation, doctrinal fidelity, and social responsibility. From a theological standpoint, this framework resonates with biblical principles. Faith maturity reflects the call to holiness (1 Peter 1:16). Biblical rootedness corresponds to the Psalmist's declaration that those who delight in God's law "are like a tree planted by streams of water" (Psalm 1:3). Contextual sensitivity echoes Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians 9:22, where he became "all things to all people" in order to witness faithfully without compromising his identity in Christ. Educationally, this framework also aligns with holistic models of teacher competence proposed in Indonesian scholarship (Supriyadi, 2022; Nainggolan, 2021). By combining spiritual, pedagogical, and social dimensions, it offers a pathway for training and supporting CRE teachers in rural schools such as SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that spiritual competence is not an optional attribute but a defining quality for Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, particularly in contexts where Christianity exists as a minority faith. At SD Negeri 153023 Pasaribu Tobing Jae in Sorkam Barat, the research revealed that CRE teachers exercised their vocation by embodying faith integrity, integrating spirituality with pedagogy, and navigating the challenges of teaching within an Islamic-majority environment. Their role extended beyond the cognitive transmission of doctrine to the holistic formation of students' faith and character, thereby positioning spiritual competence as both the anchor of Christian education and a bridge for interreligious engagement. The findings affirmed that faith integrity served as the core of teachers' credibility. Students respected their teachers not primarily for doctrinal mastery, but because they witnessed consistency between belief and practice. Teachers modeled Christian virtues through prayer, biblical reflection, and ethical conduct, which reinforced the trustworthiness of their teaching. Such practices exemplify the biblical exhortation to be "*doers of the word*" (James 1:22) and confirm that authenticity in faith-based teaching stems from lived witness. In an environment where Christians are numerically marginalized, this alignment between faith and life provided students with both encouragement and a framework for resilience. The study also highlighted the complexity of teaching CRE in a Muslim-majority context. Teachers frequently encountered resource limitations, questions of legitimacy, and occasional misunderstandings from peers or parents. Yet rather than retreating into defensiveness, they emphasized respect, tolerance, and openness, aligning with Indonesia's broader vision of religious moderation. This demonstrates that spiritual competence equips teachers not only to strengthen Christian students' identity but also to nurture interfaith harmony. By modeling dialogue and mutual respect, CRE teachers contributed to peaceful coexistence, embodying the biblical principle of living at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18). Such contributions underscore the dual function of spiritual competence in contexts of religious plurality: safeguarding faith identity while building bridges of understanding. Equally important was the integration of spirituality into pedagogy. Teachers designed lessons that wove together biblical principles and academic objectives,

making learning both spiritually meaningful and contextually relevant. Whether through projects on environmental stewardship inspired by Genesis 2:15 or through daily rituals of prayer and hymn singing, teachers cultivated habits of faith that empowered students to live out Christian values in tangible ways. While these practices were effective, the absence of structured frameworks revealed a pressing need for professional development. Without systematic models for integrating spirituality into pedagogy, teachers risk relying on intuition alone, which may lead to inconsistency. Addressing this gap is critical for ensuring that spiritual formation in education is sustainable and comprehensive. From the analysis, three interrelated dimensions of spiritual competence emerged—faith maturity, biblical rootedness, and contextual sensitivity. Together, these elements provide a holistic framework for strengthening the preparation and support of CRE teachers. They highlight that authentic Christian teaching requires personal integrity, scriptural grounding, and the ability to engage plural environments respectfully without compromising identity. This framework resonates with both biblical principles and contemporary educational theories, offering a balanced vision of what it means to be a spiritually competent teacher in today's disruption era. In conclusion, this research underscores the urgency of recognizing and cultivating spiritual competence as a vital dimension of teacher professionalism in Christian education. For minority contexts such as Sorkam Barat, spiritual competence ensures that Christian students are nurtured in their faith while simultaneously being equipped for interreligious coexistence. For the broader field of education, it contributes to the development of teachers who can embody integrity, foster resilience, and promote peace. Strengthening institutional support, providing professional development, and creating clear frameworks for spiritual competence will therefore be essential steps in empowering CRE teachers to fulfill their vocation with faithfulness, courage, and wisdom in an increasingly pluralistic society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Association of Theological Schools. (2018). *Report on spiritual formation in theological education*. Pittsburgh, PA: ATS Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nainggolan, S. (2021). *Kompetensi spiritual guru Pendidikan Agama Kristen dalam pembentukan karakter siswa*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Purba, R. (2020). Spiritual competence in Christian education: Conceptual gaps and practical challenges. *Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen* 8(2), 112-124.
- Setiawan, Y. (2019). Religious plurality and educational challenges in Indonesia: Toward a culture of tolerance. *Indonesian Journal of Education and Society* 11(1), 45-60.

- Supriyadi, A. (2022). Redefining teacher competence in the disruption era: Pedagogical, professional, social, and spiritual dimensions. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 27(3), 215-230.
- Suryani, L. (2020). Educational innovation in rural schools: Challenges and opportunities. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Indonesia* 9(1), 88-100.
- The Holy Bible, New International Version. (2011). Zondervan. (Original work published 1978)
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.