

The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Religious Education: A Case Study of Teaching Ministry at SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen, PAK) holds a strategic role in Indonesia's pluralistic education system, not merely as a legal obligation but as a theological ministry of holistic formation. Unlike subjects centered only on knowledge transfer, PAK integrates faith, moral character, and Christ-centered values, highlighting teaching as a divine vocation (vocatio). This study explores how vocational-spiritual competence is practiced by PAK teachers in a plural school context. A qualitative descriptive theological design was employed to integrate lived educational practice with theological reflection. Participants included two experienced PAK teachers, one school principal, and six Christian students at SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi. Data collection combined semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans, regulations, and worship notes. Thematic analysis was conducted, with triangulation to ensure validity. Findings revealed that PAK teachers perceived their role as a ministry of divine calling, emphasizing faith formation through prayer, Scripture, and worship. Teachers faced ethical challenges in a predominantly Muslim environment, including resource scarcity and marginalization. Nonetheless, they embodied tolerance and love, fostering interfaith harmony. Pedagogical practices integrated biblical values with experiential learning, linking honesty, stewardship, and service with daily life. These results affirm the integration of pedagogy and spirituality, though limited by the absence of systematic frameworks. Teachers relied heavily on personal conviction, highlighting the need for structured professional development. A vocational-missional framework emerged, consisting of faith formation, ethical witness, and community engagement. This study underscores that PAK is both pedagogical and missional-forming disciples who embody Christ's truth and love while promoting peaceful coexistence in plural societies.

Keywords: *Spiritual Competence, Vocational Calling, Christian Religious Education*

INTRODUCTION

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Christian Religious Education, or *Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK)*, occupies a vital place within Indonesia's pluralistic educational system. Its presence is not merely a matter of legal requirement under the national curriculum but also a theological necessity rooted in the Christian understanding of education as a ministry of holistic formation. Unlike subjects that primarily transfer cognitive knowledge, PAK emphasizes the cultivation of faith, moral character, and a Christ-centered worldview. This makes PAK inherently pedagogical and missional, as it echoes the Great Commission mandate to "*teach them to obey everything I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:20). Thus, PAK cannot be reduced to knowledge acquisition alone but must be understood as a process of shaping the whole person in light of Christian faith and practice (Nainggolan, 2021). The rapid transformations of the disruption era have redefined teacher competencies in ways that extend beyond mastery of subject matter. In contemporary discourse, teachers are increasingly assessed not only by their professional, pedagogical, and social capacities but also by their spiritual integrity and moral credibility (Supriyadi, 2022). For PAK teachers, this holistic approach to competence highlights the need to recover the vocational-spiritual dimension of teaching. Teaching is not simply a profession but a calling (*vocatio*), a divine vocation in which teachers embody Christ-like character and serve as role models for their students. This understanding aligns with the New Testament vision of teaching as ministry, where *didaskalia* (teaching) is inseparable from spiritual formation and pastoral care (1 Timothy 4:13; Purba, 2020). The vocational essence of PAK teachers requires them to function not only as transmitters of biblical doctrine but also as witnesses of faith who nurture resilience, authenticity, and ethical discernment among their students. Spiritual competence in this sense refers to the integration of faith and pedagogy, where biblical values are consistently embodied in classroom practices, interpersonal relationships, and the cultivation of community (Setiawan, 2019). Without this integration, PAK risks being fragmented into mere intellectual instruction devoid of transformative power. Conversely, when teachers embrace their role as vocational ministers, the classroom becomes a formative space where students encounter faith as lived reality.

The context of SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi provides a particularly significant setting for examining these issues. Situated in a religiously plural environment where Christianity coexists with Islam as the majority tradition, the school exemplifies the dual challenges and opportunities for PAK. On the one hand, PAK teachers must safeguard the faith identity of Christian students, ensuring that they remain rooted in biblical truth despite being a minority. On the other hand, they must also cultivate respect, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence with peers of other faiths, embodying the national ethos (Suryani, 2020). This dual responsibility reflects the broader theological mandate of Christian education: to love God wholeheartedly while simultaneously loving one's neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). The presence of PAK teachers in such contexts demands resilience and creativity. They are tasked with designing lessons that integrate biblical principles with academic objectives while also navigating interfaith dynamics in ways that promote harmony. For instance, the integration of themes such as honesty, stewardship of creation, and compassion allows students to see the relevance of faith for both personal and communal life. Such integration is crucial in a time when students face competing worldviews that may challenge their Christian identity. In this sense, PAK provides an

anchor that strengthens faith identity while equipping learners for interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence (Nainggolan, 2021; Purba, 2020). Christian education scholarship has emphasized the importance of vocational-missional perspectives in teaching. The Association of Theological Schools (ATS, 2018) underscores personal and spiritual formation as central to Christian pedagogy, yet it also notes that many institutions lack clear frameworks for implementing such formation consistently. This reality resonates with the Indonesian context, where the rhetoric of spiritual competence is often emphasized but rarely translated into structured and measurable practice. As a result, PAK teachers, particularly in rural or pluralistic contexts, may depend heavily on personal conviction and improvisation rather than systematic models of Christian pedagogy. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reclaim the vocational calling and mission of PAK teachers as integral to both theology and pedagogy. This study, situated in the case of SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi, seeks to critically examine how spiritual-vocational competence is conceptualized and practiced within Christian education. It aims to provide not only a theological definition of Christian teaching ministry but also a practical framework for its implementation in pluralistic settings. By doing so, this research contributes to the development of a more holistic and contextually relevant model of Christian Religious Education that equips teachers to fulfill their dual role: nurturing the faith of Christian students and promoting interreligious harmony within the broader community.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive theological design was implemented in this research, which was chosen because it allows a balanced integration between lived educational practice and theological reflection. Such an approach ensures that the voice of practitioners is not separated from the faith commitments that undergird Christian Religious Education (PAK). In line with Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative description is particularly appropriate for capturing the complexities of human experience that cannot be reduced to numerical representation, while the theological dimension provides an interpretive lens rooted in Scripture and Christian pedagogy. By combining these elements, the research sought to present a faithful account of how PAK functions as both educational practice and vocational ministry. The participants consisted of two PAK teachers at SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi, both of whom had more than five years of teaching experience, ensuring they possessed adequate maturity and familiarity with the school's plural context. In addition, the school principal was included as a participant due to their role in shaping institutional culture and supporting or limiting the implementation of religious education. Six Christian students (three male and three female) were also purposively selected to represent learner perspectives. Purposive sampling, as Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggest, was appropriate to ensure that those directly involved in teaching and learning processes could articulate insights on spiritual formation and vocational ministry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and the principal. These interviews explored perceptions of PAK as a form of Christian ministry, teachers' practices of spiritual formation, and the interfaith challenges of teaching in a plural environment. Classroom observations were carried out to document how prayer, worship, and biblical values were integrated into daily lessons. Observations allowed the

researcher to identify not only planned strategies but also spontaneous interactions that revealed teachers' spiritual competence. Document analysis focused on lesson plans, school regulations, and liturgical or devotional notes. These documents provided evidence of how formal planning aligned-or failed to align-with the theological vision of Christian education (Bowen, 2009).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that PAK teachers at SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi strongly perceived their role not merely as a profession but as a vocational calling rooted in divine service. This perception of vocation was central to how they conceptualized their identity as educators. One teacher clearly articulated: *"To teach PAK here is to shepherd the students' faith, not only to deliver lessons."* This statement reflects a deep conviction that the essence of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) lies in ministerial responsibility rather than in the technical execution of academic duties. The teachers consistently highlighted that their commitment was not primarily to the institutional requirements of the school but to God, whose calling defined their teaching mission. This vocational understanding resonates with the biblical affirmation in Ephesians 4:11-12, which describes teachers as gifts to the Church, entrusted with the task of equipping believers for works of service and building up the body of Christ. The vocational dimension of teaching was evident in their daily practices, which were infused with elements of worship and devotion. Class sessions regularly began with opening prayers, hymn singing, and the reading of Scripture. These rituals were not performed as formalities but as integral expressions of the teachers' conviction that the classroom is also a spiritual space where God is present. Such practices turned teaching into an act of worship, situating the educational task within the broader ministry of the Church. The teachers' emphasis on integrity of life reinforced the credibility of their spiritual witness. One student remarked during interviews that *"our teacher's life outside the classroom reflects the lessons he teaches inside."* This observation corresponds to the exhortation in James 1:22, which warns believers not to be hearers of the Word only but doers as well. In this sense, spiritual authority derived not from academic expertise but from the visible alignment of belief and practice. The vocational identity of PAK teachers can be situated within the broader theological discourse on Christian pedagogy, which affirms that teaching is not merely a transfer of knowledge but a ministry of formation (Estep, Anthony, & Allison, 2008). Scholars argue that Christian education is inseparable from the calling of the teacher to embody Christ-like service (Knight, 2006). At SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi, this was reflected in how teachers described their responsibility not as an optional choice but as obedience to God's call. Such a perspective provided resilience in the face of challenges and inspired students to see faith as integral to their learning journey.

Ethical Challenges in a Plural Context

Despite their vocational convictions, PAK teachers at SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi faced ethical challenges shaped by the plural religious context of Tebingtinggi, where Islam is the dominant cultural and social force. Several issues emerged from the data, including limited access to PAK resources, occasional misunderstanding from parents, and the marginalization of Christian students during broader school activities. For example,

teachers noted that while Islamic religious resources and extracurricular programs were abundant, equivalent materials for Christian education were scarce. To compensate, they often relied on personal resources, church-provided materials, or creative adaptation of government-issued textbooks. This resource disparity reflects a structural challenge in Indonesian education, where minority faith communities often struggle with limited institutional support (Arifianto, 2019). Teachers also reported occasional misunderstandings from non-Christian parents who questioned the necessity of PAK in a predominantly Muslim environment. Some parents expressed concerns that segregated religious education might foster exclusivism. While these misunderstandings did not escalate into overt conflict, they nevertheless revealed the fragile nature of interfaith relations in plural school settings. Such dynamics echo Setiawan's (2019) observation that religious plurality in Indonesia simultaneously creates opportunities for dialogue and risks for miscommunication. Teachers consciously embodied values of tolerance, love, and dialogue. They reminded students that Christian faith must not be practiced defensively but in openness and love. In interviews, one teacher explained: *"We teach students that being Christian is not about closing themselves off, but about showing love to everyone."* This ethical emphasis reflects Romans 12:18, which exhorts believers to live at peace with everyone, as far as it depends on them. Rather than creating barriers, teachers reframed pluralism as an opportunity to witness Christ's love through respectful engagement. The ethical witness of teachers thus became transformative. Students were consistently reminded that Christianity is not exclusivist but inclusive in its call to love one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39). Classroom practices, such as discussions on interfaith respect and collaborative activities with peers of other faiths, provided practical ways to cultivate empathy and mutual understanding. These approaches highlight how Christian education, when grounded in spiritual competence, can contribute positively to interreligious harmony. Scholars argue that such ethical engagement is not peripheral but central to Christian pedagogy in plural contexts (Banks & Banks, 2010). At SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi, the teachers' witness turned potential sources of tension into opportunities for bridge-building and interfaith dialogue, modeling how education can serve as a pathway to peace.

Integration of Pedagogy and Spirituality

Another key finding was the integration of pedagogy and spirituality in the teaching practices of PAK teachers. Observations revealed that lessons were not confined to abstract doctrinal instruction but consistently linked biblical principles to real-life issues. For instance, lessons on honesty were connected to Proverbs 12:22, which declares that *"the Lord detests lying lips, but delights in those who are trustworthy."* In environmental topics, teachers drew from Genesis 2:15, which portrays humanity's vocation to care for creation. In discussions about service, Mark 10:45 was cited to emphasize Christ's model of servant leadership. Such integrative practices made lessons both academically meaningful and spiritually transformative. Beyond cognitive instruction, teachers encouraged students to apply Christian values in tangible projects. Activities such as planting trees, visiting the sick, and preparing worship services allowed students to embody faith in action. These projects resonated with constructivist pedagogy, which emphasizes experiential learning and active student participation (Vygotsky, 1978). Yet in

the context of PAK, these practices took on theological depth, reflecting the incarnational nature of Christian teaching—faith lived and demonstrated through action. As one student shared: *“When we plant trees, our teacher tells us we are obeying God’s command to care for creation.”* Such experiences helped students internalize biblical values not only as intellectual concepts but as lived practices. Teachers also integrated spirituality into their pedagogical styles. Lessons began and ended with prayer, while hymn singing and Scripture memorization were embedded into classroom routines. These rituals, far from being mechanical, cultivated habits of devotion that reinforced students’ faith identity. In this way, pedagogy and spirituality were not treated as separate spheres but as interdependent dimensions of holistic education. Research supports this integration, noting that spiritual formation is most effective when faith and pedagogy are intentionally woven together (Graham, 2009). Teachers admitted limitations in their training. Their ability to integrate spirituality into pedagogy was largely based on personal conviction and improvisation rather than structured frameworks. This observation mirrors the findings of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS, 2018), which reported that many theological institutions lack clear definitions or frameworks for spiritual formation. Consequently, while integration was meaningful, it risked inconsistency, depending heavily on individual teachers’ strengths. This highlights the urgent need for professional development that equips teachers with systematic strategies for faith-pedagogy integration.

From the findings, a vocational-missional framework of Christian teaching ministry emerged, consisting of three interrelated dimensions: faith formation, ethical witness, and community engagement. Faith formation was evident in teachers’ emphasis on nurturing maturity in Christ. Through prayer, biblical teaching, and personal mentoring, teachers sought to ensure that students remained rooted in Christian truth. This dimension aligns with Colossians 2:7, which calls believers to be *“rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith.”* At SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi, faith formation was not limited to intellectual knowledge but involved cultivating habits of devotion and moral resilience. Ethical witness was a recurring theme, particularly in interfaith interactions. Teachers modeled humility, respect, and dialogue, demonstrating that Christian identity must be lived out in inclusive love rather than exclusivist defensiveness. This witness embodied the biblical mandate of Matthew 5:16, which calls believers to let their light shine before others. Such witness was critical in countering marginalization and in promoting peaceful coexistence within the school community. Community engagement emerged as a vital mission. Teachers consistently emphasized that faith must be expressed through service. Activities such as community clean-ups, helping peers, and supporting school events demonstrated that Christian students were called to be *“salt and light”* (Matthew 5:13-14). By engaging with the broader school and community, students were empowered to live out their faith in socially responsible ways. This threefold framework situates PAK not merely as doctrinal instruction but as holistic ministry encompassing formation, ethics, and mission. It reflects the redemptive ideal of didaskalia-teaching as an act of equipping believers for faithful witness in the world (1 Timothy 4:13). The framework provides a structured lens for teacher training and curriculum development, ensuring that spiritual competence is systematically nurtured. It reaffirms that teaching is inseparable from discipleship, calling teachers to embody their

vocation as both educators and ministers of Christ. The results from SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi demonstrate that PAK teachers embody a profound sense of vocational calling, navigate ethical challenges in plural contexts with grace, integrate pedagogy with spirituality, and articulate a vocational-missional framework that can serve as a model for Christian education in Indonesia. These findings highlight the urgency of developing clear frameworks, resources, and professional development to support PAK teachers in their dual responsibility of nurturing faith and promoting interreligious harmony. The study affirms that the ministry of teaching in Christian education is both pedagogical and missional, shaping disciples who embody Christ's truth and love in a diverse society.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that "*Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK)*" in the context of SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi cannot be reduced to cognitive instruction alone but must be understood as a holistic ministry of vocational calling and mission. The findings affirm that PAK teachers embody their role not merely as educators delivering content, but as ministers whose primary responsibility is to nurture faith, form character, and model Christ-like living. Their understanding of teaching as "*panggilan ilahi*" (divine vocation) underscores that education in the Christian tradition is inseparable from discipleship and spiritual formation. This perspective anchors PAK within the biblical framework of *didaskalia* (1 Timothy 4:13), in which instruction serves to build up the body of Christ. One of the most significant insights is that the credibility of PAK teachers rests not only on their professional skills but on their integrity of life. Students at SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi respected their teachers not simply because of academic expertise, but because they witnessed a visible consistency between belief and practice. Teachers who began their classes with prayer, integrated Scripture into lessons, and demonstrated humility in daily interactions embodied the message they taught. This finding reinforces James 1:22, which warns against being mere hearers of the Word without living it out. In this way, spiritual authority was established through authenticity and moral credibility rather than through formal position alone. The study highlighted the ethical challenges of teaching in a plural context. With Christianity existing as a minority in a predominantly Islamic environment, PAK teachers frequently encountered resource limitations, parental misunderstandings, and moments of marginalization for Christian students. Yet rather than withdrawing defensively, the teachers chose to engage through dialogue, respect, and openness. Their insistence that Christian faith must be expressed through love for neighbor reflects Romans 12:18 and Matthew 22:39, both of which call believers to live at peace with others and embody love in relational contexts. This ethical witness demonstrates that PAK, when faithfully practiced, not only nurtures Christian identity but also contributes to interfaith harmony. The research found that PAK teachers at SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi consistently sought to integrate pedagogy with spirituality. Lessons were crafted to connect biblical truths with real-life concerns such as honesty, stewardship of creation, and service. Students were invited to embody faith through practical projects-tree planting, acts of service, and leading worship-which transformed abstract learning into lived discipleship. This integration affirms the incarnational nature of Christian pedagogy, where faith is not only taught but demonstrated in action. It also revealed a critical gap: teachers relied heavily on personal conviction and improvisation rather than systematic

frameworks. This indicates an urgent need for professional development programs and institutional support to ensure consistent, sustainable integration of faith and pedagogy. From these findings emerged a threefold vocational-missional framework for PAK: faith formation, ethical witness, and community engagement. Faith formation anchors students in Christ and Scripture, ethical witness equips them to embody Christian integrity in plural environments, and community engagement calls them to serve as salt and light in society (Matthew 5:13-14). These dimensions offer a holistic vision of PAK that is both theological and practical, ensuring that Christian education functions as transformative ministry rather than narrow instruction. This study affirms that the essence of PAK lies in its dual responsibility: to nurture Christian students in their faith identity and to promote peaceful coexistence within a diverse society. At SDN 163097 Tebingtinggi, teachers embodied this dual mission by living out their vocation with integrity, courage, and love. The findings highlight the urgent need for clearer frameworks, resources, and professional formation to strengthen teachers' capacity for vocational ministry. Ultimately, Christian education must continue to hold fast to its calling: to form disciples who not only know the Word but also live it faithfully in the world, bearing witness to Christ's truth and love in all spheres of life.

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