



## The Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers and the Growth of Students' Sense of Care: A Study Based on Colossians 3:14–15 at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the relationship between the social competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers and the development of caring attitudes among elementary students at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol, North Tapanuli. Grounded in Colossians 3:14-15, the research frames social competence as a spiritual vocation rooted in agapē (love) and eirēnē (peace), rather than merely a professional skill. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study investigates how the PAK teacher's relational attitudes, communication practices, and classroom interactions shape students' socio-moral growth. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with one PAK teacher, two classroom teachers, and ten students, as well as document analysis of lesson plans and reflection notes. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, encompassing data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation to ensure credibility. The findings reveal that the PAK teacher demonstrated a holistic understanding of social competence as koinonia-building fellowship and sharing love within the learning community. His pedagogical practice, characterized by empathy, patience, and inclusivity, created a peaceful and caring classroom environment. Programs such as "Caring Friday" fostered students' awareness of compassion, cooperation, and stewardship, transforming moral instruction into lived Christian experience. Students exhibited observable growth in empathy, gratitude, and peer support, reflecting the peace of Christ ruling in their hearts. The study concludes that the PAK teacher's social competence, grounded in biblical love and peace, functions as a transformative ministry of reconciliation. It affirms that Christian education must integrate faith and pedagogy, forming communities of grace where both teachers and students embody Christlike character.*

**Keywords:** Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Caring Attitude

## INTRODUCTION

Education within the Christian worldview is fundamentally a process of spiritual and moral formation that transcends the boundaries of mere knowledge acquisition. It seeks to shape the heart as well as the mind-to cultivate love, empathy, and moral responsibility that reflect the character of Christ in daily living (Knight, 2006). Within the elementary school context, the teacher's vocation goes far beyond the intellectual transmission of biblical concepts. It involves the embodiment of relational warmth, compassion, and social awareness that can be tangibly observed and imitated by students. Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen, or PAK*) teachers hold a uniquely transformative position in this regard, as they are called not only to teach about Christ but to teach in the way of Christ-through love, patience, and relational integrity. The Indonesian educational framework recognizes that effective teaching demands more than cognitive expertise. According to *Permendiknas No. 16 of 2007*, teacher competence encompasses four dimensions-pedagogical, professional, personal, and social. Among these, social competence plays a pivotal role in determining how teachers communicate, collaborate, and cultivate harmony within the classroom and the wider school community. Social competence includes the ability to engage empathetically with learners, appreciate cultural and individual differences, and contribute to a learning environment grounded in mutual respect and cooperation (Suprihatin, 2021). In Christian education, this competence gains deeper theological significance. It reflects the biblical command to embody love and unity as the essence of Christian relationships, as stated in Colossians 3:14-15: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." This passage offers more than a moral exhortation-it provides a theological framework for relational life in education. The Greek term *agapē* denotes self-giving love that seeks the good of others, while *eirēnē* refers to peace that restores and reconciles relationships (Barclay, 2001). When applied to the educational context, these virtues shape the ethos of the classroom as a space of communion rather than competition, empathy rather than exclusion. The PAK teacher, by embodying *agapē* and *eirēnē*, becomes an instrument through which students learn to care, to forgive, and to collaborate as members of one body. Thus, social competence in Christian education is not merely a professional attribute-it is a spiritual disposition grounded in the imitation of Christ's relational ministry. In the specific context of SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol, located within the culturally rich and predominantly Batak Christian community of North Tapanuli, the expression of social competence holds unique relevance. The school serves children from diverse social and economic backgrounds, reflecting both traditional Batak communal values and modern influences shaped by digitalization and individualism. Teachers in this setting encounter the tension between maintaining community-oriented values (*dalihan na tolu*) and addressing the growing tendency toward self-centeredness among younger generations (Simanjuntak, 2020). The PAK teacher, therefore, carries a strategic mission-not only to instruct in religious doctrine but also to model Christian love and care in daily interactions. Their role is to help students internalize *rasa peduli*-a caring attitude that grows out of faith and is demonstrated through acts of kindness, empathy, and service to others. Empirical studies affirm that students' socio-emotional growth is

significantly influenced by teachers' relational behaviors. According to Noddings (2013), caring relationships in education serve as the moral foundation for character formation. When teachers genuinely care for students, they awaken the students' capacity to care for others, creating a cycle of moral reciprocity. Similarly, Lickona (1991) emphasizes that moral and social virtues are best learned through lived experience within a caring community, where teachers act as exemplars of empathy and justice. This perspective resonates deeply with the Pauline exhortation in Colossians 3, where peace and love are not abstract ideals but lived realities that bind the community in unity. In examining the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol, this study seeks to understand how their relational attitudes, communication styles, and classroom practices foster the growth of students' caring character. It aims to reveal the integration between educational professionalism and theological virtue-between human interaction and divine calling. Teaching, in this light, is not merely a skill to be mastered but a ministry of reconciliation and compassion. When teachers embody the love and peace of Christ, they cultivate classrooms that become microcosms of God's kingdom-communities of care where every child is valued, every difference respected, and every act of kindness seen as a reflection of divine grace.

## **METHODS**

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design to explore how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers contributes to the development of caring attitudes among students at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a holistic and contextual exploration of social behavior, communication patterns, and relational values that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative inquiry seeks to interpret meanings from lived experiences and reveal the complex interplay between human relationships and cultural contexts. The research was conducted in SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol, a public elementary school situated in a Batak Christian community that upholds strong cultural and spiritual traditions. The participants comprised one PAK teacher, two classroom teachers, and ten students representing Grades IV-VI. They were selected using purposive sampling, guided by criteria of active engagement in school and religious activities as well as observable relational interaction. This selection ensured that participants could provide rich, reflective data relevant to the study's focus on social and moral formation within Christian education. Data collection employed multiple techniques to obtain a comprehensive and credible understanding of the phenomenon. Classroom and extracurricular observations were conducted to document authentic teacher-student interactions and social dynamics in both academic and informal settings. Field notes were taken to capture gestures, language use, emotional tone, and moments of moral instruction or acts of care. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers and students to elicit personal experiences and perspectives regarding empathy, cooperation, and the modeling of Christian love. Interviews were guided by open-ended questions that encouraged reflection on how PAK lessons and teacher behavior influenced students' capacity to care. Document analysis included reviewing lesson plans, teaching reflections, and school activity records to identify social objectives embedded in instructional design and teacher practice. Data

analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). During data reduction, relevant statements, actions, and patterns were coded thematically-such as “teacher empathy,” “peer cooperation,” and “Christian caring values.” The data were then organized into narrative matrices to facilitate comparison between teacher and student perspectives. The process of conclusion drawing and verification involved synthesizing patterns into thematic interpretations that describe how teachers’ social competence fosters students’ moral and emotional growth.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings from SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol reveal a rich interconnection between the teacher’s social competence, Christian pedagogical principles, and the moral-emotional growth of students. This section presents an interpretive discussion organized around four core themes that emerged from the data: (1) teachers’ understanding of social competence in PAK, (2) the practice of social competence in classroom and school life, (3) the growth of caring attitudes among students, and (4) theological reflection on love and peace as pedagogical foundations. Together, these findings illustrate that social competence in Christian Religious Education (PAK) is both a professional and spiritual vocation rooted in the imitation of Christ’s relational ministry. The PAK teacher at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol articulated a comprehensive understanding of social competence as the ability to “build fellowship” (*koinōnia*) and “share love” within the learning community. This definition reflects an awareness that Christian teaching transcends the boundaries of academic instruction-it is a ministry of presence, empathy, and moral example. The teacher emphasized that education, especially in the context of PAK, must foster not only intellectual growth but also social harmony and compassion, echoing Jesus’ commandment in John 13:34-35: “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” This verse embodies the essence of Christian pedagogy, where love (*agapē*) is the guiding force that unites both teacher and learner in mutual respect and care. Interviews with two general classroom teachers revealed a narrower understanding of social competence. They tended to equate it with interpersonal friendliness, good communication, and classroom management rather than with theological or spiritual dimensions. For example, one teacher noted that “being socially competent means getting along with everyone,” a definition that, while not incorrect, remains limited to the sociopsychological domain. This indicates that while secular conceptions of social competence-such as communication skills and adaptability-are acknowledged, their integration with biblical love and peace is less developed among non-PAK teachers. This gap highlights the importance of reinforcing theological foundations in teacher formation, especially for Christian educators working in pluralistic environments like Lumban Pinggol. As Estep, Anthony, and Allison (2008) argue, effective Christian teaching must integrate faith with practice, grounding pedagogical competence in the doctrines of love, grace, and service. Without this integration, social competence risks becoming a superficial behavior rather than a transformative virtue. The findings, therefore, point to a need for professional development programs that blend psychological, educational, and theological insights to nurture holistic teacher competence-what Knight (2006) calls the educator as servant of reconciliation.

Field observations of classroom and extracurricular activities revealed that the PAK teacher consistently modeled inclusive and relational pedagogy. His approach was characterized by a warm communication style, active listening, and equitable attention to all students, regardless of ability or social background. Lessons began with communal prayer and short reflections on love, gratitude, or service, setting a tone of spiritual mindfulness. This daily rhythm encouraged students to see learning as part of their worship and social engagement as an extension of faith. One of the most significant initiatives observed was the "Caring Friday" (*Jumat Peduli*) program, in which students contributed small offerings—money, food, or stationery—for classmates in need. The teacher used this practice not merely as charity but as an opportunity to teach *agapē* love, connecting it to Colossians 3:14: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Through short discussions and storytelling, he helped students recognize that giving is an expression of gratitude and solidarity, not superiority. This form of embodied teaching resonates with Lickona's (1991) theory of moral education, which emphasizes that character formation begins not through moral instruction alone but through moral modeling and emotionally warm relationships. The classroom climate was notably cooperative and empathetic. When conflicts arose—such as disagreements during group tasks or playful teasing—the teacher mediated calmly, inviting students to express their feelings and guiding them toward forgiveness. His approach reflected what Noddings (2005) describes as an ethic of care, where moral reasoning emerges from empathy and relational responsibility rather than rule enforcement. Students often described their teacher as "kind, understanding, and fair," suggesting that his relational presence served as a living curriculum of Christian values. The teacher's interactions extended beyond the classroom. He regularly visited students' homes during family events or difficulties, reinforcing the sense of community and belonging. This relational practice echoes the Christian notion of incarnational teaching—the idea that effective pedagogy mirrors Christ's incarnation, where love is expressed through proximity, empathy, and presence. The PAK teacher's embodiment of social competence thus transcended institutional expectations; it became an act of pastoral ministry embedded in educational practice.

### ***Growth of Caring Attitudes among Students***

The influence of the teacher's social competence was most evident in the transformation of students' social behaviors. Data gathered from student interviews and reflective journals revealed an observable increase in cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect. Students reported feeling "closer" to one another and more inclined to help peers during group activities. They described new habits, such as comforting classmates who were upset, sharing materials voluntarily, and expressing gratitude during collective prayers. One striking example occurred during a classroom project on "Caring for Creation," in which students worked together to clean the schoolyard. Initially, some were reluctant, viewing the task as tedious. However, as the PAK teacher reframed the activity within a theological narrative—caring for God's creation as an act of stewardship—the students began to take pride in their work. This shift demonstrates that moral motivation can be cultivated when actions are connected to faith-based meanings. The experience aligns with Lickona's (1991) view that character education involves both moral reasoning and

emotional engagement, and with Noddings' (2005) perspective that care ethics must be personally and contextually grounded. Further reflection in students' journals showed that they began internalizing empathy as a value rather than as an external rule. Many wrote statements such as, "I feel happy when I help my friends," or "God wants us to share with others." This emotional and spiritual awareness signifies the emergence of Christlike compassion—a deep moral sentiment that mirrors the peace described in Colossians 3:15: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." The teacher's social competence thus served as a conduit for transmitting biblical values into daily practice. By fostering a peaceful and caring classroom, he created what Vygotsky (1978) would call a zone of moral development, where students learned ethical behavior through guided social interaction. This finding supports the growing body of Christian educational research (e.g., Knight, 2006; Estep et al., 2008) emphasizing that moral and spiritual growth in students is catalyzed not by doctrine alone, but by relationships imbued with authenticity, empathy, and love.

### ***Theological Reflection: Love and Peace as Pedagogical Core***

The theological reflection drawn from these findings affirms that social competence in Christian education is fundamentally spiritual rather than merely social. While secular education views social competence as a set of interpersonal skills for effective collaboration, the Christian framework situates it within the transformative power of *agapē* and *eirēnē*—love and peace—as articulated in Colossians 3:14-15. These virtues are not abstract ideals; they are pedagogical imperatives that define the ethos of Christian teaching. In this light, the PAK teacher functions as a servant-leader (Mark 10:45), embodying humility and compassion in daily interactions. His teaching practice models Christ's relational ministry, where truth and grace coexist. This theological orientation reframes the classroom as a spiritual community—a microcosm of the Body of Christ—where each member learns to love, forgive, and serve one another. As students experience this environment, they do not merely acquire social skills; they participate in what Bonhoeffer (1954) calls life together in Christ, where peace governs relationships and love becomes the unifying bond. The cultivation of empathy and care within the students' lives reflects a process of sanctification through education. Learning, in this perspective, becomes a redemptive act—an opportunity to restore the divine image within human relationships. When the teacher teaches with compassion, he mirrors the Creator's relational nature, thus enabling students to encounter God's love through pedagogical experiences. The peace of Christ, therefore, is not only an emotional state but an educational condition under which transformation occurs.

From a practical standpoint, this theological foundation challenges modern educational paradigms that overemphasize cognitive achievement at the expense of moral and relational growth. The results from SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol demonstrate that when social competence is infused with spiritual intentionality, learning becomes holistic. Students develop empathy not as a behavioral expectation but as a spiritual disposition. They learn to see others as fellow image-bearers of God rather than competitors. In turn, teachers reclaim their vocation as co-laborers with God in the moral and spiritual formation of young lives. This integrative understanding aligns with Knight's (2006) philosophy of Christian education, which holds that teaching must harmonize truth, faith,

and character. Likewise, Lickona (1991) underscores that the moral atmosphere of a classroom-shaped by the teacher's relational integrity-is crucial for fostering virtues like compassion and justice. When these insights are read alongside Colossians 3:14-15, a profound synthesis emerges: love is the pedagogical bond that perfects learning, and peace is the climate that allows growth. The teacher's social competence operates on three interconnected levels: interpersonal, moral, and spiritual. Interpersonally, it involves effective communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. Morally, it entails modeling fairness, patience, and service. Spiritually, it manifests as the teacher's participation in Christ's ministry of reconciliation, turning every interaction into an opportunity for grace. These dimensions reinforce the notion that Christian education is inherently relational and communal-a sacred fellowship where love governs both pedagogy and practice. The PAK teacher's consistent embodiment of these principles transformed the school into a living testimony of Colossians 3:14-15. As students learned to "put on love" and let "the peace of Christ rule in their hearts," they experienced the Gospel not as an abstract doctrine but as a lived reality. The teacher's gentle guidance, compassionate correction, and joyful service became tangible expressions of the Kingdom of God within the classroom. Consequently, education at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol transcended its institutional function; it became a form of spiritual formation in community.

The synthesis of these findings indicates that teacher social competence, when grounded in biblical love and peace, plays a transformative role in nurturing students' caring attitudes. The PAK teacher's holistic understanding of his role-as both educator and servant-leader-enabled him to create an atmosphere of trust and compassion that directly influenced students' moral development. His practice confirmed that faith-informed relational pedagogy produces observable moral fruits: cooperation, empathy, gratitude, and peace. The theological integration in this study highlights an important educational implication: the spiritual dimension of teacher competence must be intentionally developed in both pre-service and in-service training. While professional regulations like *Permendiknas No. 16/2007* define social competence in general terms, Christian educators must interpret and apply it through the lens of *agapē* and *eirēnē*. Institutions that prepare teachers for faith-based contexts should thus provide spaces for reflection on Scripture, community engagement, and spiritual mentoring. The results of this study affirm that social competence in PAK teaching is more than interpersonal proficiency-it is a vocation of love that shapes both hearts and minds. As the teacher at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol demonstrated, when social relationships are guided by Christ's love and peace, education becomes a ministry of reconciliation. The students' growth in care and empathy is therefore not coincidental but sacramental-it reveals God's image being restored in community through the faithful labor of a caring teacher.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers serves as a decisive and transformative factor in nurturing students' caring attitudes and social-moral growth within the classroom community. The findings from SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol reveal that the teacher's relational presence, empathy, and

faith-centered communication significantly influenced students' development of compassion, cooperation, and a sense of shared responsibility. Social competence in this context transcends the conventional understanding of interpersonal skills-it becomes a spiritual vocation grounded in love (*agapē*) and peace (*eirēnē*), as proclaimed in Colossians 3:14-15. Through the embodiment of these virtues, the PAK teacher not only teaches about Christ but manifests the character of Christ, creating a classroom climate where peace governs relationships and love unites the community. The teacher's ability to translate biblical values into relational actions-through patience, fairness, active listening, and inclusion-proved instrumental in cultivating a caring ethos among students. The "Caring Friday" program, classroom reflections, and cooperative learning activities functioned as practical extensions of the Gospel message. Students were not merely recipients of moral instruction but participants in a lived experience of Christian fellowship. Their gradual transformation-from self-interest toward empathy and communal responsibility-demonstrates the power of relational pedagogy rooted in faith. Moral character is best formed through authentic relationships, and moral understanding grows from genuine human connection. Theologically, this study reinforces the conviction that teaching in Christian education is a ministry of reconciliation. The PAK teacher embodies the servant-leadership model exemplified by Christ in Mark 10:45, where teaching is not about authority but about service, humility, and compassion. The peace of Christ functions as the educational atmosphere that allows love to flourish, transforming learning into a redemptive act. Education, in this perspective, becomes a form of discipleship-a process through which both teacher and student are shaped into the likeness of Christ. The research highlights the need for Christian teacher education programs to intentionally cultivate the spiritual dimension of social competence. While the national regulation (*Permendiknas No. 16/2007*) provides a structural framework for teacher competencies, Christian educators must interpret these through the lens of Scripture, integrating theological reflection with pedagogical practice. Training programs should emphasize emotional intelligence, empathetic communication, and biblical understanding as integral to professional growth. This study affirms that social competence rooted in biblical love and peace is not optional-it is essential to the mission of Christian education. The PAK teacher at SD Negeri 5 Lumban Pinggol exemplified how faith, when embodied through social relationships, becomes pedagogically transformative. When teachers teach with *agapē* and live in *eirēnē*, the classroom becomes a community of grace-a space where every learner is known, valued, and nurtured as an image-bearer of God. Such an educational model redefines success not merely as academic achievement but as the flourishing of Christlike character in both teacher and student-a living testimony that "love binds everything together in perfect unity" (Colossians 3:14).

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