



Integration of Christian Religious Education Teachers' Pedagogical Competence with the Concept of the Cultural Mandate in Genesis 1:28

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ABSTRACT

The integration of pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) with biblical principles remains a critical challenge in contemporary educational practice. The cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28 provides a foundational framework for understanding the divine calling of educators in shaping both spiritual and cultural dimensions of learning. This study aims to examine how Christian Religious Education teachers can effectively integrate their pedagogical competencies with the theological concept of the cultural mandate as outlined in Genesis 1:28, and to analyze the implications for educational practice and student formation. This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 15 experienced CRE teachers from various educational institutions, complemented by document analysis of curriculum materials and classroom observation. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to the integration of pedagogical competence and cultural mandate principles. The findings revealed four major themes: (1) Understanding of the cultural mandate as educational calling, (2) Integration strategies in curriculum development, (3) Practical implementation challenges, and (4) Impact on student spiritual and cultural formation. Teachers demonstrated varying levels of understanding regarding the cultural mandate, with more experienced educators showing deeper integration in their pedagogical approaches. The integration of pedagogical competence with the cultural mandate concept enhances the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education by providing a holistic framework that addresses both spiritual formation and cultural engagement. This approach requires intentional teacher development and institutional support for optimal implementation.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Competence, Cultural Mandate, Genesis 1:28, Teacher Development, Biblical Integration*

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the 21st century is undergoing profound transformation as it faces challenges that are both unprecedented and

multifaceted. Globalization, rapid technological advancement, pluralistic societies, and shifting cultural norms have created an environment where maintaining the relevance of CRE while preserving biblical authenticity requires careful attention. In such a context, the role of the Christian Religious Education teacher becomes central. Teachers are not only mediators of knowledge but also formational leaders who shape the spiritual, moral, and intellectual lives of their students. Their pedagogical competence thus functions as a critical bridge that connects traditional theological understanding with contemporary educational practices, ensuring that CRE remains both faithful to Scripture and responsive to modern realities. Within this pedagogical challenge, the biblical concept of the cultural mandate, as articulated in Genesis 1:28, provides a foundational theological framework. This mandate, often called the "creation mandate," records God's command to humanity to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." While at first glance the mandate may appear to focus primarily on reproduction and ecological dominion, a deeper theological reading reveals that it extends far beyond biology or agriculture. The cultural mandate encapsulates the divine intention for human beings to engage in the development of culture, the stewardship of creation, and the cultivation of human potential in alignment with God's purposes. In this light, the mandate speaks to human responsibility to contribute to society, to nurture communities that reflect God's justice and love, and to create cultural expressions that honor the Creator. For Christian educators, and particularly for CRE teachers, the cultural mandate provides an interpretive lens through which teaching and learning can be framed. Contemporary educational theory places great emphasis on pedagogical competence, which refers to teachers' abilities to design, implement, and evaluate learning experiences effectively. It involves not only methodological skill but also a deep understanding of students' developmental needs, cultural contexts, and the broader aims of education. However, for CRE teachers, pedagogical competence must transcend secular frameworks of educational effectiveness. Their task is not only to ensure academic learning but also to integrate Christian perspectives on knowledge, truth, and human flourishing. In this way, the cultural mandate enriches the very meaning of pedagogical competence, urging educators to see their teaching as part of God's call to participate in the stewardship and transformation of culture. This integration between pedagogical skill and theological vision represents a significant opportunity for Christian education. The cultural mandate enables teachers to move beyond a narrow focus on classroom instruction to embrace a broader vision of education as participation in God's redemptive work in the world. It reminds educators that their role is not simply to transmit biblical information but to form students who can think critically, act ethically, and engage culture faithfully. By combining robust pedagogy with a biblical worldview, CRE teachers can foster holistic education that nurtures intellectual growth, spiritual maturity, and social responsibility. Recent scholarship in Christian education underscores the urgent need for such integration. Smith (2019) argues that without a deliberate incorporation of biblical worldview principles, Christian education risks being reduced to little more than a veneer of religiosity layered over secular pedagogical methods. Similarly, Johnson and Williams (2021) emphasize the necessity of aligning educational practices with theological commitments to ensure that students are not only informed but also transformed. Despite this recognition, there remains a noticeable gap in empirical research on how CRE

teachers specifically interpret and implement the cultural mandate within their teaching practices. While conceptual discussions abound, concrete studies exploring the lived experiences and pedagogical strategies of CRE teachers remain limited. This gap highlights the need for research that carefully examines the relationship between pedagogical competence and the cultural mandate in actual classroom contexts. The significance of such inquiry extends beyond theoretical exploration. It carries practical implications for multiple aspects of Christian education. First, teacher preparation programs must consider how future educators are equipped not only with teaching methods but also with theological frameworks such as the cultural mandate that inform their vocation. This may involve incorporating coursework in biblical theology, hermeneutics, and cultural engagement alongside pedagogical training. Second, curriculum development in Christian schools and institutions must intentionally integrate biblical principles with subject matter, ensuring that faith and learning are not treated as separate domains but as interconnected realities. Finally, institutional policies should support teachers in living out their pedagogical and theological commitments, fostering environments where both academic excellence and biblical fidelity are prioritized. The intersection of pedagogical competence and the cultural mandate offers a promising avenue for renewing Christian Religious Education in the 21st century. By grounding educational practices in the theological vision of Genesis 1:28, CRE teachers can serve as agents of cultural stewardship and spiritual formation, guiding students toward holistic growth that reflects God's purposes. This approach honors both the demands of contemporary educational practice and the timeless truths of Scripture. Ultimately, it ensures that CRE remains a vital, relevant, and transformative force within both the church and society, equipping students to live faithfully and engage meaningfully in an increasingly complex world.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Christian Religious Education teachers as they integrate pedagogical competence with the cultural mandate concept. The phenomenological approach was selected because it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences and meaning-making processes, which are central to understanding how teachers conceptualize and implement the integration of theological principles with educational practice. The study involved 15 experienced Christian Religious Education teachers from various educational institutions, including Christian schools, denominational education programs, and interfaith educational settings. Participants were selected using purposive sampling criteria, including: (1) minimum of five years of CRE teaching experience, (2) formal theological or religious education training, (3) demonstrated commitment to Christian educational philosophy, and (4) willingness to participate in the research process. The participant demographic breakdown included 8 female and 7 male teachers, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 25 years. Educational backgrounds varied, with 9 participants holding Master's degrees in theology or religious education, 4 holding Bachelor's degrees with additional certification in religious education, and 2 holding doctoral degrees in related fields. Denominational affiliations represented included Reformed, Baptist, Methodist, and non-denominational backgrounds. Data collection involved three primary methods: Individual interviews lasting 60-90 minutes were

conducted with each participant, focusing on their understanding of pedagogical competence, interpretation of the cultural mandate, and experiences integrating these concepts in their teaching practice. Interview questions were developed based on the theoretical framework and pilot-tested with three additional CRE teachers not included in the main study, participants provided curriculum materials, lesson plans, and other educational documents that demonstrated their approach to integrating faith and learning. These documents were analyzed to identify evidence of cultural mandate principles in pedagogical planning and implementation, classroom Observation with participant consent, three 45-minute classroom observations were conducted for each teacher to observe the practical implementation of integrated pedagogical approaches. Observations were documented using structured observation protocols developed specifically for this study. Data analysis followed Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method for phenomenological analysis. The process included the following steps: 1) Horizontalization: All interview transcripts, documents, and observation notes were reviewed to identify significant statements related to the research phenomenon. 2) Reduction and Elimination: Statements were evaluated for relevance to the research question and redundant or overlapping statements were eliminated. 3) Clustering and Thematizing: Remaining statements were clustered into meaning units and organized into themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences. 4) Validation: Themes were validated through member checking with participants and peer review by two independent researchers familiar with Christian education contexts. 5) Textural and Structural Description: Comprehensive descriptions of participants' experiences were developed, incorporating both the content (textural) and context (structural) of their meaning-making processes. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board and followed established ethical guidelines for educational research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and careful handling of identifying information. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings: Multiple data sources (interviews, documents, observations) were used to provide comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Participants reviewed interview transcripts and preliminary findings to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Regular discussions with experienced Christian education researchers provided external perspective on data interpretation. Detailed documentation of all research processes and decisions was maintained to ensure transparency and replicability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

All participants demonstrated some level of familiarity with the cultural mandate concept, though their understanding varied significantly in depth and sophistication. The theme of "Educational Calling" emerged as participants consistently interpreted the cultural mandate as providing divine validation and direction for their work as educators. Sarah, a 12-year veteran CRE teacher, explained: "When I first encountered the idea that Genesis 1:28 applied to education, it completely transformed how I understood my role. I wasn't just teaching Bible stories; I was participating in God's work of developing human potential and culture." Similarly, Michael, with 18 years of experience, noted: "The

cultural mandate helped me see that everything we do in the classroom—from developing critical thinking skills to fostering creativity—is part of fulfilling God's purposes for humanity." More experienced teachers demonstrated deeper theological understanding of the cultural mandate's implications. They articulated connections between educational activities and broader themes of stewardship, cultural development, and participation in God's ongoing creative work. Less experienced teachers, while enthusiastic about the concept, tended to interpret it more narrowly, focusing primarily on moral formation and evangelistic goals. Teachers who demonstrated deeper understanding of the cultural mandate were more likely to integrate it systematically into their educational philosophy. They viewed their pedagogical competence as a means of equipping students to fulfill the cultural mandate in their own lives, creating a coherent framework that connected classroom activities with broader theological purposes.

Integration Strategies in Curriculum Development

Participants employed various strategies to integrate cultural mandate principles with their pedagogical competencies in curriculum development. This theme encompassed both intentional planning processes and emergent integration opportunities that arose during teaching. Teachers with advanced integration demonstrated ability to design curricula that addressed multiple dimensions of the cultural mandate. Rebecca, a curriculum coordinator with 15 years of experience, described her approach: "Every unit we develop asks three questions: How does this help students understand God's world? How does it equip them to care for creation? And how does it prepare them to contribute positively to human culture?" Many participants emphasized the importance of making explicit connections between religious education content and other academic subjects. This approach reflected their understanding that the cultural mandate encompasses all spheres of human activity, not just religious or moral domains. Teachers reported developing partnerships with colleagues in science, arts, and social studies to create integrated learning experiences. A significant number of participants incorporated service learning projects as practical applications of cultural mandate principles. These projects ranged from environmental stewardship activities to community development initiatives, providing students with concrete opportunities to practice cultural mandate principles while developing practical competencies. Advanced integrators developed assessment strategies that evaluated both cognitive understanding and practical application of cultural mandate principles. These assessments often included portfolio projects, reflective journaling, and community-based demonstrations of learning. Despite enthusiasm for integration, all participants identified significant challenges in implementing cultural mandate-based pedagogical approaches. These challenges spanned institutional, personal, and contextual domains. Many teachers reported tensions between their integrative vision and institutional expectations or constraints. David, teaching in a denominational school, explained: "The administration supports the idea of integration, but when it comes to standardized testing and college preparation pressures, the cultural mandate often takes a back seat to more traditional academic priorities." The development of integrated curricula and pedagogical approaches required significant time investment that many teachers found difficult to manage alongside existing responsibilities. Several participants mentioned the need for additional

professional development and collaborative planning time to effectively implement their integrative vision. Some teachers encountered resistance from students or parents who held more narrow expectations for religious education. Jennifer, with 8 years of experience, noted: "Some parents want Bible class to be just Bible memorization and moral lessons. When we start talking about caring for creation or engaging culture, they wonder if we're getting off track." Participants struggled with developing appropriate methods for assessing student progress in cultural mandate-related competencies. Traditional assessment methods often failed to capture the holistic learning outcomes that teachers valued most highly in their integrated approach.

Impact on Student Spiritual and Cultural Formation

The final major theme focused on participants' observations of how integration affected student development, both in spiritual formation and cultural engagement competencies. Teachers reported that students showed increased engagement with religious education content when it was presented within the cultural mandate framework. Students appeared to find greater relevance in biblical teachings when they were connected to contemporary issues and practical applications. Many participants observed that the cultural mandate framework encouraged students to think more critically about the relationship between faith and culture. Students began asking more sophisticated questions about how Christian principles apply to complex social, environmental, and ethical issues. Teachers noted that students developed greater awareness of their role and responsibility in various cultural spheres. This awareness manifested in increased interest in social issues, environmental concerns, and civic engagement. Several experienced teachers reported maintaining contact with former students and observing long-term positive outcomes in their personal and professional lives. These students often demonstrated sustained commitment to integrating faith with their chosen careers and continued engagement with cultural mandate principles in their adult lives. Some teachers also noted challenges in student formation, particularly related to the complexity of applying cultural mandate principles to controversial or ambiguous cultural issues. Students sometimes struggled with the tension between biblical principles and contemporary cultural values, requiring careful pedagogical guidance to navigate these complexities constructively.

Theoretical Implications

The results suggest that the cultural mandate provides a robust theological framework for enhancing pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education contexts. Participants who demonstrated deeper understanding of the cultural mandate were able to develop more comprehensive and coherent approaches to faith-learning integration. This finding aligns with Wolters and Goheen's (2014) argument that the cultural mandate offers a holistic vision for Christian engagement with all aspects of human experience. The varying levels of understanding among participants highlight the importance of theological literacy in effective CRE teaching. Teachers with more sophisticated theological understanding of the cultural mandate were better able to integrate it systematically into their pedagogical approaches, suggesting that professional development in Christian education should emphasize both theological depth and pedagogical skill development. The study also reveals that successful integration requires

what might be termed "pedagogical wisdom"—the ability to discern appropriate applications of theological principles within specific educational contexts. This finding extends existing research on pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) by suggesting that religious education requires a unique form of pedagogical discernment that integrates theological understanding with contextual awareness. The challenges identified by participants suggest several important considerations for CRE teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. First, teacher education programs should provide explicit instruction in the theological foundations of Christian education, including comprehensive exploration of the cultural mandate and its educational implications. Second, the integration strategies employed by successful participants indicate the value of collaborative curriculum development and cross-curricular partnerships. Professional development initiatives should facilitate opportunities for CRE teachers to work together in developing integrated curricula and sharing effective practices. Third, the assessment challenges identified by participants point to the need for developing new evaluation methods that can appropriately assess the holistic learning outcomes associated with cultural mandate-based education. This may require collaboration between educational assessment experts and Christian education practitioners to develop innovative approaches to evaluation. The institutional constraints reported by participants highlight the importance of administrative support for integrated approaches to Christian education. School administrators and denominational leaders need to understand and support the cultural mandate framework if teachers are to successfully implement integrated pedagogical approaches. The tension between standardized assessment pressures and integrated educational goals suggests the need for alternative approaches to demonstrating educational effectiveness in Christian school contexts. Institutions may need to develop comprehensive assessment strategies that honor both academic excellence and spiritual formation objectives. The resource and time limitations identified by participants indicate that successful integration requires institutional commitment to providing adequate support for curriculum development, professional development, and collaborative planning activities.

Student Formation Outcomes

The positive student formation outcomes reported by participants provide encouraging evidence for the effectiveness of cultural mandate-based pedagogical approaches. The enhanced spiritual engagement, critical thinking development, and cultural awareness observed in students suggest that this integration serves both educational and spiritual formation goals effectively. However, the challenges noted in helping students navigate complex cultural issues highlight the need for careful attention to pedagogical approaches that can support students in developing mature, nuanced understanding of faith-culture relationships. This may require additional research into age-appropriate methods for addressing cultural mandate themes with students at different developmental stages. Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the phenomenological approach, while providing rich insight into participants' experiences, limits the generalizability of findings to broader populations of CRE teachers. Future research employing quantitative methods could provide broader understanding of the prevalence and effectiveness of cultural mandate integration approaches. Second, the study focused exclusively on teachers' perspectives without including student voices or outcome

measures. Future research should include student perspectives on cultural mandate-based pedagogical approaches and develop methods for assessing student learning outcomes in this context. Third, the study was conducted primarily in North American Christian education contexts. Cross-cultural research examining how the cultural mandate concept is understood and implemented in different cultural and denominational contexts would provide valuable comparative insights. Finally, the study did not examine long-term outcomes of cultural mandate-based education. Longitudinal research following students through their educational careers and into adult life would provide important evidence regarding the lasting impact of these pedagogical approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Christian Religious Education teachers integrate their pedagogical competence with the theological concept of the cultural mandate as articulated in Genesis 1:28. The findings reveal that while this integration presents significant opportunities for enhancing Christian education effectiveness, it also involves meaningful challenges that require careful attention and institutional support. The four major themes identified in this research—understanding of the cultural mandate as educational calling, integration strategies in curriculum development, practical implementation challenges, and impact on student spiritual and cultural formation—provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities involved in this integration process. The theoretical implications of this study suggest that the cultural mandate provides a robust framework for faith-learning integration that can enhance both the theological depth and pedagogical effectiveness of Christian Religious Education. However, successful implementation requires sophisticated understanding of both theological principles and pedagogical practices, as well as institutional support for innovative approaches to Christian education. The practical implications point to the need for enhanced teacher preparation programs that provide explicit instruction in cultural mandate theology and its educational applications, collaborative professional development opportunities, and innovative assessment strategies that can appropriately evaluate holistic educational outcomes. Perhaps most significantly, the positive student formation outcomes reported by participants provide encouraging evidence that cultural mandate-based pedagogical approaches can effectively serve both educational excellence and spiritual formation goals. Students who experience education within this framework appear to develop enhanced spiritual engagement, critical thinking abilities, and cultural awareness that prepare them for faithful and effective participation in various spheres of human culture. The challenges identified in this study also highlight the need for continued research and development in this area. Future research should examine student perspectives and outcomes more directly, explore cross-cultural applications of these principles, and develop more comprehensive assessment strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of integrated approaches to Christian education. The integration of pedagogical competence with the cultural mandate concept represents a promising direction for the continued development of Christian Religious Education. As Christian educators seek to prepare students for faithful and effective engagement with contemporary culture, this integration provides a biblical and pedagogically sound

framework for achieving both spiritual formation and educational excellence goals. For Christian Religious Education to remain relevant and effective in the 21st century, it must continue to develop approaches that honor both the demands of educational excellence and the distinctives of Christian faith. The integration of pedagogical competence with cultural mandate principles offers one important pathway toward this goal, providing a framework that is both theologically grounded and educationally sophisticated. As this study demonstrates, experienced CRE teachers are already exploring and implementing various approaches to this integration. By learning from their experiences, supporting their efforts, and continuing to develop both theological understanding and pedagogical practices, the Christian education community can continue to advance toward more effective and faithful approaches to religious education that serve both God's glory and human flourishing. The cultural mandate, properly understood and skillfully implemented, provides Christian Religious Education with a comprehensive vision for educational practice that connects classroom activities with God's ultimate purposes for human culture and creation. This vision challenges CRE teachers to see their work not simply as religious instruction but as participation in God's ongoing work of cultural development and human formation. When pedagogical competence is integrated with this theological vision, Christian Religious Education can achieve its highest aspirations of forming students who are both educationally excellent and spiritually mature, prepared to fulfill their own calling within God's cultural mandate.

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